Writing Egypt

Writing Egypt

History, Literature, and Culture

Edited by
Aleya Serour

Publisher's Preface by
Mark Linz

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Publisher's Preface

Introduction

> "The American University in Cairo Press is the Arab world's top foreign-language publishing house. It has transformed itself into one of the leading players in the dialog between East and West, and has produced a canon of Arabic literature in translation unmatched in depth and quality by any publishing house in the world." — Egypt Today

In 1960, a small academic press was born in Cairo, producing a select handful of books in its first years of life. Today, the American University in Cairo Press is the leading English-language publishing house in the Middle East. It publishes some one hundred new titles every year and maintains a backlist of more than one thousand scholarly, literary, and general interest publications on Egypt and the Middle East. It stands at the crossroads of the world's cultures, making vital contributions to the cultural life of the region as well as to the global body of knowledge. This volume is a celebration of fifty years of publishing excellence.

Since those early years, those first monumental publications—K.A.C. Creswell's *A Bibliography of the Architecture, Arts and Crafts of Islam,* Otto F.A. Meinardus's *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Desert,* and George Scanlon's *A Muslim Manual of War*—the AUC Press has gone from strength to strength. Offerings now range from leading academic research that has advanced its discipline, to superbly produced, lavishly illustrated volumes to

be enjoyed by all. The publishing program has grown to include the fields of Arabic Literature in Translation; Archaeology and Ancient Egypt; Architecture and the Arts; History and Biography; Language Studies; Politics, Economics, and Social Issues; Religious Studies; and Travel Literature and Guidebooks. It has released new and previously unpublished material by some of the world's greatest thinkers and writers, from Edward William Lane to Noam Chomsky, as well as by Egypt-born luminaries such as Nobel laureate Ahmed Zuweil and former first lady Jehan Sadat.

But if we were to pinpoint the single most significant moment in the history of the Press, it may well have been the translation and publication, in 1978, of Naguib Mahfouz's *Miramar*, and the agency agreement that followed, in 1985, between Mahfouz and AUC Press director Mark Linz. This was the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship which was a major contributing factor to Mahfouz winning the 1988 Nobel prize for literature. It also started one of the AUC Press's major programs: the translation, distribution, and promotion of the best in modern Arabic literature. As the late Mahfouz himself once said, "I am certain that contemporary Arabic literature will gain much broader dissemination and recognition throughout the world." The AUC Press has done, and continues to do, just that: There are now 145 Arabic Literature titles in print by more than 65 authors from 12 countries, with dozens more in the works.

This volume showcases a selection of the AUC Press's finest publishing achievements. It is divided into three sections, to reflect the broad range and diversity in style and subject-matter.

The first section, Egypt Past and Present, includes a wide array of texts that range from ancient to modern Egypt, from social and political studies to biography and gender issues. We begin with five very different pieces on ancient Egypt. Famed Egyptologists Kent Weeks and Zahi Hawass discuss, respectively, the magnificence of Thebes and the often overlooked topic of the status of women in ancient Egyptian society. Aidan Dodson and Salima Ikram meditate on the nature of the tomb, while Regine Schulz examines the evolution of temples to the gods. Lastly, Lise Manniche leads us gently into a rarely seen place: the ancient Egyptian garden.

We are then thrown into the thick of modern Cairo with the *mulid* and its disappearing customs and traditions, in a passage from Max Rodenbeck's spirited *Cairo: The City Victorious*, which was an instant bestseller upon publication. André Raymond and Jason Thompson introduce us to the Fatimids and the Mamluks; Lesley Lababidi to Mohammad Ali and his modernization mission. The great nineteenth-century scholar E.W. Lane takes us through the once-elegant neighborhood of Bulaq, and Prince Hassan Hassan gives us a personal look at life inside the royal palace at Marg. We leave Cairo altogether for a moment and travel west to Siwa to explore, through the sharp eyes of renowned Egyptologist Ahmed Fakhry, its vibrant and distinctive culture.

Next, we examine the role of women in modern Egypt, beginning with Qasim Amin, one of the founders of the Egyptian national movement and a passionate advocate for the emancipation of women; Cynthia Nelson's narration of Egyptian feminist Doria Shafik's "carefully constructed and successfully executed plan" to storm the Egyptian parliament in 1951 to demand universal suffrage; and finally, a first-hand account of the trials in the life of a working-class Egyptian woman, extracted from Nayra Atiya's bestselling *Khul-Khaal: Five Egyptian Women Tell Their Stories.*

We round off this section with passages from three very special publications, of which the AUC Press is particularly proud. The first is the autobiography of Nobel prize-winning scientist Ahmed Zuweil. The second is a manifesto for Middle East peace and understanding by former first lady Jehan Sadat. And finally comes a slice of the bestselling *Whatever Happened to the Egyptians?*, economist Galal Amin's insightful and heartfelt exploration of changes in Egyptian society over the past fifty years.

The second section in this volume presents extracts from AUC Press titles on Architecture and the Arts. Bernard O'Kane begins with an overview of Fatimid and Early Mamluk architecture in the Egyptian capital, and Cynthia Myntti tells us about the Paris-preoccupied builders of modern Cairo. Michael Haag explores a once-cosmopolitan Alexandria and looks at how its diverse communities all contributed to weaving together the fabric of the city.

Egypt's actors and filmmakers, too, were once an ethnically diverse community. Viola Shafik recounts the process whereby the Egyptian film industry was "nationalized" and "purified" following the nationality law of 1929. The great scholar Edward Said follows with a vivid and personal piece on meeting an enigmatic Egyptian cultural icon, dancer Tahia Carioca. Next is an evocative letter about the inspiring colors and rhythms of Nubia from one of Egypt's best-known and best-loved artists, Margo Veillon. The last extract in this section is taken from world-renowned jewelry designer Azza Fahmy's *Enchanted Jewelry of Egypt*.

The third section in this collection proudly presents the work of some of the most outstanding authors and translators of modern Arabic literature. We begin with just a sampling of the rich oeuvre of that distinguished band of writers who, in the middle of the last century, launched the literary renaissance in Egypt. We get a taste of Taha Hussein, one of modern Egypt's greatest writers and thinkers, the "Dean of Arabic Letters"; of the legendary Naguib Mahfouz and of Tawfiq al-Hakim, who did for the Arabic theater what Mahfouz did for the novel; and of Yahya Hakki and Yusuf Idris, who were masters, in particular, of the short story form.

In the heart of this section are three non-fiction pieces. The first is a session from *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, in which Naguib Mahfouz shares jokes, intimate thoughts, and remembrances with his close friends and confidants, among them respected Egyptian writer and intellectual Gamal al-Ghitani. Scholars of Arabic literature Ferial Ghazoul and Samia Mehrez discuss, respectively, the *Arabian Nights* and the relationship of the writer—specifically Mahfouz—to the state.

We move next to the leading figures on the contemporary literary stage. Hala El-Badry takes us back to a period of upheaval in Egyptian history, the turbulent events of 1948 and the final years of the British presence in Egypt—Salwa Bakr even further back, to a medieval peasant revolt—in order to shed light on current discontents. We dive into the grimy underbelly of Egyptian society with Khairy Shalaby. Hamdi Abu Golayyel stretches the boundaries of language to express the plight of characters on the margins of society, the displaced and dispossessed, the unmapped, the urban Bedouin.

Rounding off this final section are two recent works whose release caused a sensation in the literary scene. The first is the debut novel that took the Arab world by storm and went on to become an international bestseller—in fact, the biggest-selling Arabic-language novel in history: Alaa Al-Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building*. We end with the jittery, jagged, trail-blazing text of Ahmed Alaidy's *Being Abbas El Abd*, hailed by *Al-Ahram Weekly* as "The millennial generation's most celebrated literary achievement."

Choosing extracts for *Writing Egypt* from the AUC Press's vast range of offerings has been a challenging task indeed. But I hope that this volume succeeds in highlighting just some of the Press's achievements, its lasting impact on the publishing landscape, and its considerable contributions to the cultural and literary heritage of Egypt, the Middle East, and the world at large. First and foremost, this volume is a tribute to the people who have made it all happen: authors, editors, translators; photographers, painters, illustrators; dedicated directors and staff. With initiatives such as the establishment of the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature—awarded every year to the best contemporary novel published in Arabic that has not yet been translated into English—the AUC Press continues, in the words of H.E. Farouk Hosny, Minister of Culture, to "light up new beacons of Arabic literature every year by discovering and presenting its masterpieces to the international community."

Remarking on the achievements of the AUC Press, H.E. Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, the First Lady of Egypt, has said: "The AUC Press has managed to grow into the leading English-language publisher in the Middle East. Congratulations on the great success of AUC's publishing enterprise. I look forward to more of its enlightening publications."

Fifty years of publishing excellence. Here's to many more to come.

Egypt
Past and Present

Kent R. Weeks

Thebes: A Model for Every City

from

The Treasures of the Valley of the Kings

2001

Thebes is one of the largest, richest, and best-known archaeological sites in the world. It lies about 900 kilometers (560 miles) south of Cairo on the banks of the River Nile. On the East Bank, beneath the modern city of Luxor, lie the remains of an ancient town that from about 1500 to 1000 BC was one of the most spectacular in Egypt, with a population of perhaps 50,000. Even in the Middle Kingdom, four centuries earlier, Thebes had earned a reputation as one of the ancient world's greatest cities. Within it the Egyptians had built the huge temple complexes of Karnak and Luxor, two of the largest religious structures ever constructed and the homes of priesthoods of great wealth and power. On the West Bank lay the Theban Necropolis—covering about 10 square kilometers (4 square miles)—in which archaeologists have found thousands of tombs, scores of temples, and a multitude of houses, villages, shrines, monasteries, and work stations.

Thebes has been inhabited continuously for the last 250,000 years; the first evidence of the Palaeolithic in Africa was found here. But the most important period in the history of Thebes was the five-century-long New Kingdom, when what the ancient Egyptians called this "model for every city"

achieved unrivalled religious, political, and architectural stature. Every New Kingdom pharaoh—there were thirty-two of them—and many before and after that date added to the site's huge architectural inventory. The monuments erected during dynasties 18, 19, and 20 have ensured that even today, thirty centuries later, Thebes is one of the world's foremost archaeological sites. Not surprisingly, Thebes was one of the first sites listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site (in 1979).

The name "Thebes" was given to the town by early Greek travelers. Some historians believe the Greeks misheard the local name for an area around Medinet Habu, *Djeme*; others believe that it came from *Tapé,* or *tp,* meaning "head" in ancient Egyptian. In the Bible, Thebes was called "No," from the ancient Egyptian word *niwt,* meaning "city." The Egyptians also called it *waset,* the name of the nome (administrative district) in which it lay, or *niwt 'Imn,* "city of Amen," which the Greeks translated literally as *Diospolis*, "city of Zeus," (the god with whom Greeks equated Amen). The Egyptians had many epithets for Thebes: "City Victorious," "The Mysterious City," "City of the Lord of Eternity," "Mistress of Temples," "Mistress of Might," and others. The more recent name for Thebes, "Luxor," derives from the Arabic *Al Uqsur,* which in turn may derive from the Latin word *castra,* meaning a military garrison.

The Theban West Bank extends from el-Tarif in the north to Deir el-Chelwit in the south, a distance of about eight kilometers (five miles). Its archaeological zone lies adjacent to a three-kilometer (two-mile) wide floodplain that in turn lies on the Nile. This zone, extending the length of the Theban West Bank, varies in width from a few hundred meters to several kilometers. We shall deal with each of these areas in turn.

Between the river and the desert edge the floodplain consists of a thick layer of nutrient-rich Nile silt deposited by millennia of annual Nile floods. Today, perennial irrigation waters fields of sugar cane, clover, wheat, and vegetables, and produces two, even three crops annually. Before the completion of the Aswan Dam in the 1960s, which ended the annual Nile flood, the river rose every year in June and then for the following four months covered the floodplain with 30–50 cm (12–20 inches) of water. The water filled shallow, natural 'basins' that were a product of uneven silt deposition across the floodplain. About six such basins lay on the Theban West Bank,

each covering several square kilometers. After the floodwater receded, these now water-saturated basins were planted and their crops harvested in late autumn and winter. In dynastic times, farmers grew wheat, barley, sorghum, pulses, onions, garlic, and melons. These were vegetables of such quantity and quality, grown with such ease, that European visitors constantly remarked about wondrous Egyptian agriculture. Some Greek travelers believed that life generated spontaneously in this rich Nile mud and that simply drinking Nile water would cause a woman to become pregnant. The valley's richness became for Europeans proof of the special place Egypt occupied in the hearts of the gods. Nowhere but in Egypt were the silts so rich, the crops so ripe, the fields so easily tended. Even today, the Theban area has a great reputation for agricultural excellence, and tourists who come to admire its monuments often leave equally impressed by its landscape. Azure skies, green fields, dark blue river, golden hills, crimson sunsets, and florescent afterglow give Thebes the appearance of an over-imagined painting. Europeans were certain that here was the landscape in which God had created the Garden of Eden. The ancient Egyptians, too, waxed eloquent about its attributes:

> "What do they say every day in their hearts,
> Those who are far from Thebes?
> They who spend their day blinking at its name,
> If only we had it, they say—
> The bread there is tastier than cakes made of goose fat
> Its water is sweeter than honey,
> One drinks of it till one gets drunk
> Oh! That is how one lives at Thebes."

In dynastic times, several man-made canals were dug across the West Bank floodplain. One extended westward from the Nile across from Luxor Temple to Medinet Habu; another ran from Karnak Temple to the Temple of Seti I. At the edge of the desert these joined a north-south canal connecting small harbors dug in front of temples built in the New Kingdom. Each year, these canals played a role in "The Beautiful Festival of the Valley." This

ceremony, one of the most important in the New Kingdom Egyptian calendar, was held annually in the second month of summer. Statues of gods and the pharaoh were taken in a procession of boats from cult temples on the East Bank to each of the memorial temples lining the west. The temples were places where priests and royalty celebrated the union of the living pharaoh with his ancestors, around which peasants celebrated their ancestors' arrival in the Netherworld. Because of their role in this festival, to call the temples on the West Bank "mortuary temples" does an injustice to the important part they played in the royal cult. Many Egyptologists therefore prefer to call them "memorial temples." The ancient Egyptians called them "temples of millions of years."

The Beautiful Festival of the Valley was a joyous one. Texts relate that these were days of music and dancing, when people, rich and poor, visited their ancestors in local cemeteries, drinking and feasting and singing. It was a festival celebrating the continuum of existence that joined this life with the next, this generation with its ancestors.

Most of the nearly thirty memorial temples lay on low-lying desert at the edge of the cultivation and, for the first time in dynastic Egypt, were separate—often by several kilometers—from the royal tombs to which they were ceremonially and theologically connected. The Beautiful Festival of the Valley explains why this was so: the temples had to lie adjacent to the floodplain for the procession of boats to reach them and the requisite religious ceremonies to the performed. The tombs lay in desert wadis to take advantage of limestone bedrock and a dry, preservative environment. The first to be built along the cultivation was the 18th Dynasty temple of Amenhotep I and Ahmose-Nefertari; the last were erected in the 20th Dynasty. The Middle Kingdom temple of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II and the 18th Dynasty temples of Thutmosis III and Hatshepsut were built farther to the west, at the base of a sheer cliff, still in the low desert but nearly a kilometer from the floodplain. Some temples, like that of Rameses III at Medinet Habu, are extraordinarily well-preserved; some, like the Ramesseum of Rameses II, have become among the best-known monuments in ancient Egypt. One, the memorial temple of Amenhotep III, is arguably one of the largest religious structures ever built: it covered

over 350,000 square meters (3,800,000 square feet). But all of them are being threatened today by rising ground water.

This is the downside to the agricultural richness of Thebes. In recent years, the growing of sugar cane, a crop that demands huge quantities of water, has raised the water table on the West Bank to the point that most memorial temples have become embarrassing ruins, buried in waterlogged silts and mounds of rubbish. Many of them simply will not survive even a few decades more. Parts of many temples have already been destroyed by agriculture that had illegally expanded into the archaeological zone. The resulting rise in ground water levels has seriously weakened temple foundations and turned mud brick walls to mud. Hundreds of low-lying shaft tombs have been flooded, their decorated walls destroyed. Several small hamlets today lie between and upon the remains of these memorial temples, and there was also a thriving community here three thousand years ago. Papyrus British Museum 10068 includes a census of buildings on the edge of the Theban cultivation taken in the 20th Dynasty. It covers the area from the Temple of Seti I to that of Rameses III at Medinet Habu, and lists the houses that lay here and the names of their owners. The houses varied from substantial residences of priests and prophets to smaller mud structures of stablemen, beekeepers, and brewers. Geophysical surveys of this area one day may reveal the extent of the ancient buildings and locate temple-related structures now buried beneath agricultural land. Perhaps we will be able to reconstruct, on paper, what the area looked like three millennia ago. Unfortunately, we probably will not be able physically to save these important and fascinating structures.

Beyond the low-lying desert plain a series of hills and wadis extends as much as four kilometers (two miles) westward from the edge of the cultivation. This terrain was formed twenty million years ago when a pre-Mediterranean sea called Tethys receded, exposing the limestone seabed that would become North Africa. For several million years, torrential rains eroded this landscape, gradually cutting an intricate drainage system that included the Nile Valley and hundreds of tributary wadis. In dynastic times, the resulting web of limestone hills and wadis gave Egyptians the ideal medium into which Theban officials, courtiers, priests, and pharaohs could cut their tombs.

From the Old Kingdom onward, but especially during the five centuries of the New Kingdom, these hills and wadis became Egypt's foremost cemetery. The size and quality of the tombs and the large quantity of grave goods they contained have made the Theban Necropolis one of the richest archaeological sites in the world.

Immediately west of the memorial temples, a series of low hills comprise an area sometimes called the "Tombs of the Nobles." In fact, there are five zones here. Farthest north is el-Tarif, where huge, uniquely Theban s*aff* (meaning "row") tombs were cut in the late Second Intermediate Period and early Middle Kingdom. South of el-Tarif lies Dra Abu el-Naga, a rough hillside with about 80 numbered tombs, many belonging to priests and officials of dynasties 17–20 and to the rulers of the 17th Dynasty. El-Assasif lies in the area in front of Deir el-Bahari and contains 40 numbered tombs, most of the New Kingdom and later. El-Khokha is a small hill with five Old Kingdom tombs and 53 numbered tombs of dynasties 18 and 19. Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, named for a mythical Muslim sheikh, has 146 numbered tombs, most of the 18th Dynasty, including some of the most beautiful and frequently-visited of all West Bank private tombs. The southernmost nobles' tombs lie in Gurnet Murrai: 17 numbered tombs, most of them of Ramesside date. In all, there are about 800 tombs in the Theban Necropolis to which Egyptologists have assigned numbers, but in fact there are probably thousands more lying undug in these hillsides.

Looming over the necropolis stands a mountain, the highest peak in the long chain of Theban hills, called the "Qurn," an Arabic word meaning "horn" or "forehead." At the northern base of the Qurn, from where the mountain bears a striking resemblance to a pyramid, lies the Valley of the Kings, "the Great Place." In rock-cut tombs that the Greeks called *syringes*, long corridor-like chambers lead deep into the hillside to elaborately decorated chambers in which the Egyptians buried their New Kingdom rulers. Sixty-two tombs have been found in the valley (plus a number of unfinished "commencements"), about half of which were cut for pharaohs.

South of the Valley of the Kings lies the Valley of the Queens where about eighty smaller rock-cut tombs were used for the burials of royal family members (male and female) and high officials. Nearby, the village of Deir

el-Medina was home to the craftsmen and artists responsible for cutting and decorating royal tombs and many other Theban monuments. Evidence from this village has provided detailed glimpses of the lives of these workmen, their families, and their work.

About a kilometer south of the village lies Malkata, "the place for picking things up." Amenhotep III built a huge complex of palace buildings here to serve as his residence. It may also have been the residence of many of his successors. To its east, now buried beneath the floodplain, Birket Habu, a huge lake or harbor was dug for use in Amenhotep III's *Heb-Sed* (jubilee) festivals.

The close proximity of limestone cliffs and the richness and extent of adjacent agricultural land helped maintain the wealth and prestige of ancient Thebes. But the reasons that it grew from a sleepy Old Kingdom hamlet to a substantial Middle Kingdom town and a formidable New Kingdom city were political and religious. The reunification of Egypt after the defeat of the Herakleopolitans at the end of the First Intermediate Period was largely the work of Theban rulers and they appointed Theban officials to high government positions, thus assuming control of the entire country. During the Second Intermediate Period, Theban rulers again achieved prominence; with the expulsion of the Hyksos in the 17th Dynasty, they again governed the Two Lands.

Thebes was inconveniently located too far south to rule a country increasingly tied economically and politically to western Asia. The town of Pi-Ramesse was built in the Nile Delta to ease problems of international communications, and it assumed importance as Egypt's diplomatic and military center. Memphis, at the apex of the Nile Delta, served as the headquarters of Egypt's internal bureaucracy. But inconvenient location notwithstanding, Thebes prospered and was revered. In part, this was due to the religious, political, and economic power wielded by Amen, the principal god of Thebes. Credited with having freed Egypt from its enemies, making it the wealthiest and most powerful country in the ancient world, establishing Thebes as "the queen of cities," Amen, joined with the Heliopolitan solar deity as Amen-Ra, became "king of the gods," the leader of the Egyptian pantheon. The Theban temples of Amen, their huge landholdings, and the

large cadres of priests that managed them, ensured that Thebes was Egypt's pre-eminent religious center. It remained the perceived capital city of Egypt long after actual bureaucratic authority had moved away. This state of affairs continued into the Late Period. But, as Egypt's wealth and power declined, so invariably did that of Thebes. There are Late Period, Greek, and Roman references to Thebes, and a large number of Christian monasteries, churches, and hermitages on the West Bank. But from about the 11th century AD until its "rediscovery" by European travelers in the late 18th century, Thebes virtually disappeared from history. With the coming of European visitors, however, Thebes, now Luxor, resumed its place as one of the most famous cities in the world.

Tourism at Thebes can be traced back to Late Dynastic times, but it remained a relatively minor activity until late in the 20th century AD. Since the 1990s, it has become a major component of Egypt's economy and the largest employer of the citizens of Luxor. In the 1950s, no more than one or two hundred tourists visited Luxor each day; in 2000 there were about 5,000 daily. The Ministry of Tourism is working to increase that number and hopes to have 25,000 tourists in Thebes daily by the year 2015. This will pose great problems. Only in the last few years have Egyptologists and bureaucrats come to accept that the monuments of Thebes are a fragile and finite resource that must be actively protected if they are to survive. But only now are plans being made to record, manage, and preserve them. For some monuments, it is certain that these plans come too late.

Many Egyptologists believe that a significant percentage of Theban monuments will disappear within the next fifty years, victims of rising water tables, uncontrolled urban growth, tourism, and improper maintenance. Others believe that they will last only one or two decades. Let us hope that these dire predictions are wrong and that major conservation projects will be undertaken on an urgent basis. No archaeological site on earth is more admired than Thebes. None has so captured our interest or spurred our imagination. None has offered us more information about the lives of our distant ancestors. For the treasures of Thebes to be lost to future generations would be a cultural and human tragedy.

Zahi Hawass

Women in Society

from

Silent Images

2008

Despite the segregated nature of ancient Egyptian society, women seem to have enjoyed considerable legal rights. Before the law, they were regarded as the equals of men. They could own property and land, administer it themselves and dispose of it as they wished. This gave women the possibility of economic independence, if not real power, and was a key element in their social position. They could initiate a court case themselves, act as a witnesses, and be punished for a crime. In short, they were treated, at least in theory, as responsible and respected members of society.

Their Greek and Roman 'sisters,' by contrast, led a life much more restricted by custom and legal status. Considered legally incompetent, these women lived their lives in the shadows of their male 'protectors'—fathers, husbands or brothers—who kept and disposed of them and their property as they wished. Until the emancipation movement at the beginning of this century, the women of ancient Egypt had considerably more economic independence and legal rights than European women.

No codified law texts have survived from ancient Egypt. In tomb depictions of judgement scenes, a number of papyrus scrolls are usually shown next to the judge. These may have been codified texts which have not survived, or, more likely, legal cases which were used as precedents for a judgement. The basis of this 'common law' was accepted social and religious custom which was seen to originate ultimately in the king. He was the earthly source of *maat*, the divine order, and so he promulgated the laws and was the supreme judge. Serious cases which drew capital punishment had to be heard by him or his viziers. He also had the right to pardon.

Lesser offences were heard in local courts in the administrative centers presided over by the local chief or mayor. These were mostly civil cases involving property rights and disputes. Records of cases were filed in the archives and could be consulted and successfully challenged by women as well as by men. The bench of judges was composed of local dignitaries appointed by the vizier of the pharaoh. Village courts were made up of officials and trusted members of the community. Only one example is known where women are mentioned as members of the court and cannot be taken as an indication that women were regularly included among the judges. Legal documents, such as wills, property transfers contracts and the like, which had to be witnessed occasionally include women's signatures but they do not appear as frequently as those of men. This may be due to low literacy among women, rather than absence of legal status as witnesses.

It is easy to paint too rosy a picture of order and justice, especially as applied to women. Ancient Egyptian society was totally hierarchical. The tiny percentage of the elite section of society who administered justice would take good care of their peers, but records show that they were not impervious to persuasion and bribery. For people lower down on the economic scale, justice may have been more elusive. A poor man or woman would probably not expect much success in trying to redress an injury or offence committed by a superior. Their only hope was to rally the support of their extended families or close village communities to take concerted action. In particular, widows and divorcees, especially those with young children to support, must have been particularly vulnerable.

Many of the legal texts which have survived were important cases which came before the high courts presided over by the king or his viziers. But documents of lesser cases, many of which came from the Deir al-Madina archive, also exist. It is these more mundane cases—wills, property contracts, family disputes, and court hearings—which provide us with much of our information about the range and application of women's legal rights.

Women's Titles

The main political role of the princesses throughout the history of ancient Egypt was to transfer the rule from one king to another. This kept political change within Egypt at bay, since there was always an heir to the throne.

The kings of ancient Egypt used to marry the daughters of kings, the heir to the throne choosing his chief wife from among those princesses with pure royal blood, thereby insuring that his child—particularly his son—came from pure royal blood. In this way, succession to the throne was not only regularized, but was also in accordance with the myth of Isis and Osiris.

An example of this peaceful change of power from one dynasty to another is that from Dynasty 3 to 4 through Princess Hetepheres I, the daughter of Huni by his chief wife. However, Sneferu, the first king of Dynasty 4, was Huni's son by a secondary wife. Therefore, Sneferu married his half-sister, thus giving himself the legitimate right to the throne and also to supervise the burial of his father Huni.

Another king who married a princess of the preceding dynasty was Teti, the first king of Dynasty 6, who married both Iput I, the daughter of King Unas, the last king of Dynasty 5, an Khuit, the daughter of King Isisi of Dynasty 5.

By these two marriages, Teti took the throne easily; indeed, the high officials of Unas also served Teti—another example of the stability that was maintained in the changeover from one dynasty to another.

Menkaure, son of Khafre of Dynasy 4 initiated a new marriage custom by having the children of his officials educated alongside his sons, thereby securing the loyalty of their fathers and also according the children the same position as their fathers. Menkaure's son Shepseskaf carried on this practice, and as a consequence of this his reign saw the first marriage of a

princess from the royal court to an official, his eldest daughter Khamaat marrying the vizier Shepsesptah, who was raised in the palace and fell in love with the princess.

This story shows us the extent to which the king wanted the complete loyalty of his officials and also one of the ways in which the political situation was made stable. On the other hand, however, one cannot help wondering to what extent the king planned this: it seems likely that the princess fell in love with the official and the king had no choice.

During Dynasties 5 and 6 it was common for princesses to marry outside the royal court. Pepi I married non-royal women, and this weakened the idea of the divine kingship known in Dynasty 4.

The royal title Satnesut, literally 'daughter of the king,' was simply one that connected the princesses with the royal court, and did not have an official function. However, the title Iwat, meaning 'elder heir' or 'great heir,' appeared in Dynasty 3 and was held by princess Hetep Mernpty, the daughter of Djoser of Dynasty 3. This title disappeared after this dynasty, but began to appear again in Dynasty 18 of the New Kingdom. It is believed that the title meant that the princess should be the legal heir to the throne.

It seems that the title could not give the princess the real power to come to the throne, but was simply an honorific title or one which gave her more privilege than the other princesses. On the tomb of Queen Mersyankh III, names given to her through her grandfather Khufu and transferred to her through her mother Hetepheres II can be seen.

In Dynasty 2, princesses were given the title Satnesut, and other epithets were later added to it, as follows:

Satnesut meretef: the king's daughter, who he loves
Satnesut net ghetef: the king's daughter of his body
Satnesut net ghetef meretef: the king's daughter of his body, who he loves
Satnesut bity: the daughter of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt
Satnesut semset weret: the king's eldest great daughter
Satnesut weret meretef: the king's great daughter who he loves

Satnesut net ghetef semset weret: the king's great eldest daughter of his body

Satnesut semset weret meretef net ghetef: the king's eldest great daughter who he loves of his body

The epithets added to the title Satnesut were meant to show that the princess was dear to her father, and also placed her in the royal court as the eldest daughter of the king.

The princesses upon who the above titles were bestowed did not have any specific function within the court. However, functional titles were given to princesses during the Old Kingdom, and in Dynasty 4 the daughter of the king bore the functional title hemet-neter ('wife of the god').

Kherep Seshmet Imat: The Director of Harem Affairs

This title appeared in Dynasty 4, and was held by both Queen Hetepheres II and her daughter Queen Mersyankh III. It is difficult to know what exactly the role of these women was, and we also do not know if a woman held this title before or after she became the king's wife.

It is believed that this title could have a religious function connected with the harem. It is known that there was a place inside the royal palace known as Ipet nesut, which means the place where the queen stays. The harem was also the place where the royal children were taught and the secondary wives of the king lived.

Ghekret Nesut: Ornament of the King

Princesses held this title from the beginning of Dynasty 4. One such princess was Ny-seger-ka, Khufu's daughter. Opinion is, however, divided as to the function of this title. Some scholars believe the title reads 'ornament of the king,' connecting this title to the king's mistress and also those women the king liked to see all the time. Others assert that the title means 'adorned of the king,' denoting those women who were in charge of dressing the king and preparing what was necessary when he left the palace. Yet another theory is that this title is connected with the cult of Hathor and those women who were priestesses of Hathor. This title may also have been for secondary wives.

Women also bore the title Neferut which means 'beauty' and may have been given to women who played music or danced to please the king. A reference to these women is made in the Westcar papyrus, which tells how King Sneferu had forty women row and sing for him in the palace lake.

Property Ownership

There seems to have been no restriction on what or how much property a woman could own. It could be property inherited from a parent or husband, or acquired through purchase. Women could accumulate capital through bartering agricultural produce and home-made items such as textiles and clothing. With this, they could purchase land or houses, or, as we know from one case, slaves. Unmarried women were not at all restricted in acquiring their own property as we know from a Dynasty 27 papyrus which records the purchase of a piece of land by an unmarried woman called Ruru.

Documents show that loans were frequently taken. For example, in the second century BC, a woman called Renpet-Nefret borrowed ten deben from a certain Andronikos. The loan had to be paid within a year and a piece of land was held in security on the repayment.

At the workers' community of Deir al-Madina, women are often recorded buying and selling houses and storerooms. It seems that the main village houses were the property of the government and were given to the workmen with their jobs. A widowed or divorced woman might therefore find herself without a roof over her head, and acquiring a private dwelling was probably quite high on the list of priorities. Some of the transfers of these private houses have survived. One such house changed hands several times; it was acquired from a woman by the mother of one Padikhonsu, who inherited it on her death. When Padikhonsu died, his wife mortgaged the house and all her property. Failing to meet her debts, the house became the property of her creditor, Pamreh, and was later sold to a woman called Taynetjeruy.

Inheritance

A married woman automatically inherited a third of her husband's property on his death. This was also payable if she was the innocent party in a divorce, but if she was repudiated for adultery or some other offence, she received

nothing. If the husband so wished, he could leave her all his property, and wills expressing this intention and signed by witnesses have survived. Such a will was made in the Middle Kingdom by a man called Wah, who having inherited property from his brother, bequeathed everything to his wife, Teti. It appears that he and his wife had not yet had any children because the text goes on: 'She shall bequeath it as she pleases to (any) one of the children that she will bear to me.' He also left her three Asiatic slaves and his house and stipulated that she was to be buried in his tomb.

As indicated by the will of Wah, a woman was able to dispose of an inheritance as she wished. The earliest sign of this is the Dynasty 3 official named Methen who recorded that he inherited about 30 feddans of land from his mother.

From the Rameside period, a famous will has survived of a woman called Naunakht who inherited property from her father and her first husband. She remarried and had eight children by her second husband. In this will, she distinguishes between her own property and that belonging to her second husband. A third of his property would go to her as his wife. The remaining two-thirds would automatically be shared between all the children. In naming her heirs, however, Naunakht complained that some of her children had not cared for her in her old age. These she cut out of her will, bequeathing all her own property to the four who had looked after her. This will was witnessed by all her children before the local council. The care that was taken in compiling it and making it legal may indicate that its contents were rather unusual.

Property Disputes

One of the most common complaints brought to court were disputes about property. A tomb of the Rameside period records one of the most famous and long-running legal contests that we know of. It concerned a piece of land which a certain Neshi had received as a reward for military service in the reign of Ahmose. The land had been bequeathed to his children, both sons and daughters inheriting equal shares. As frequently happened, they chose to administer the inheritance jointly, rather than splitting it up, and one of the heirs was chosen to manage it. All went well for the first three hundred years

or so until, in the reign of Horemheb, the guardianship of the land was disputed. A woman named Wernero, a descendant of Neshi, won a court case to become the legal manager on behalf of five other heirs. Her position was soon contested by her sister, Takhero, who initially won her case, but soon found that the decision had been overturned in favor of Wernero and her son Huy.

For a while, all went smoothly until Huy died, leaving a wife and small son, Mose, as his heirs. A certain Khay, perhaps another relative, now stepped in and contested the right of Huy's wife, Nubnefret, to administer the estate. Yet again, the dispute was taken to court. Nubnefret attempted to back up her claim by asking for the official registers to be consulted. But Khay had forged official documents and letters which convinced the court that Huy's family had no right to the land. Khay was given the guardianship of the estate and expelled Nubnefret and Mose.

It was not until Mose had grown up that the fifth, and presumably final, court case was brought before the council. Mose claimed that he was a true descendant of Neshi and accused Khay of falsifying the records. In the end, Mose appealed to the people of his community, who, one by one, swore an oath that Mose's father Huy was the son of Wernero who had legally cultivated these lands, and that Wernero in turn was a descendant of Neshi. Various documents were brought in to substantiate the claim, and in the end, the court decided in his favor. Mose celebrated the final triumph of this dispute which had been rumbling on for over a century by recording it in great detail in his tomb chapel at Saqqara. This case is important in understanding many facets of the workings of Egyptian law. It is clear that registers of land property went back for several hundred years, and were available for consultation and, unfortunately, for falsification also. Women were able to administer estates on behalf of other members of the family, including men. They were also able to initiate court cases themselves.

Court Cases

There is also evidence from other documents that women could bring legal disputes to court. The accusation could be made against another woman or a man. A Dynasty 13 papyrus records a claim made by a woman, Tahenwet, that her father had illegally bestowed some of her property on his second

wife. She contested that her father had given to his wife fifteen slaves which actually belonged to her and had been given to her by her husband. The outcome of this case is not known, but its importance lies in the clear statement that a woman could take her father to court.

A later document from Deir al-Madina records a case between two women. In the early years of the reign of Rameses II, the wife of a local official, Irynefret, decided to purchase a slave girl worth 4 deben 1 kite, and paid for her in a variety of commodities. But almost before she had had time to appreciate her new purchase, her neighbor; Bakmut, claimed that some of her property had been used to complete the purchase, and she therefore had a claim on the unfortunate slave girl. Eventually, she took her claim to court, and both women produced witnesses to back up their different stories. Irynefret had to swear an oath: 'If witnesses establish against me that any property of the lady Bakmut was included in the silver I paid for this slave-girl, and I have concealed the fact, then I shall be liable for 100 strokes, having also forfeited her (the girl).'

Our records break off while Bakmut's witnesses substantiate her claim and the outcome is not known. If Irynefret did lose her case, her punishment would have been severe indeed. Other court cases indicate that women no less than men could be subjected to harsh penalties.

Careers and Occupations

The right to own and dispose of property themselves gave women the possibilities of economic independence and authority, within the restrictions imposed by obligations to the family and to the state. But for women of the elite class, however wealthy, there were few 'career' opportunities open to them.

The highly centralized government bureaucracy worked through a network of educated scribes, all of them men. Educated at schools from which girls were normally excluded, these scribes usually inherited their office from their fathers or a close relative. They considered themselves an elite group, and many of them acquired rank and fortune. Their funerary monuments give details of their careers and titles, the source of much of our information about the state bureaucracy. Sometimes all we have are lists of titles; occasionally details of the responsibilities connected with each office

are included. As administrative documents have only rarely survived, the full structure of government is not well documented and titles often provide the only clue to how it functioned.

In the Middle Kingdom, there are fewer examples of administrative titles held by women. Most of these pertain to the running of the household, and include titles like 'chief steward,' 'keeper of the chamber,' 'overseer of the kitchen,' and 'butler.' These are all offices usually held by men and, when applied to women, they probably signify that they were in the service of other women. Another title that gave its holder authority and was occasionally borne by women is that of 'sealer.' In the absence of locks gave its holder authority and was occasionally borne by women is that of 'sealer.' In the absence of locks on storerooms and boxes, doors and lids were closed with cords over which a lump of wet mud was placed. Into the mud a seal, often on a ring, was pushed leaving an impression, making it impossible for an unauthorised person to get in without breaking the seal. The holder of the seal was thus responsible for the security of possessions and supplies.

Occasionally in the Middle Kingdom, the title of 'female scribe' is encountered. The whole question of female literacy in ancient Egypt is a vexed one. It has been suggested that the reason why women were excluded from the official and ubiquitous state bureaucracy was because they were illiterate, at least in theory. The occurrence, even rarely, of this title of 'female scribe' is an indication that some women could read and write, but we have no certain means of assessing what proportion of the female population was literate. There are no depictions of working women scribes and the title becomes even more rare in subsequent periods. Although letters to women and by women have been found, we have no idea if they penned and read these themselves, or if they made use of the local scribe. The scribal schools that turned out candidates for government service were all for boys. Royal ladies and women from educated families may have been taught by private tutors or even by their parents, but they were clearly in the minority as shown by the scarcity of female signatures on documents. This apparent scarcity of education and the fact that their chief and most prestigious role was as child-bearer contrived to exclude most women from government office.

Women Outside the Home

If the home were the domain of women, they were by no means confined to it. There is ample evidence of comings and goings between houses of neighbors, temples, and tombs of relatives. Fields, workshops, and markets were frequented by the lower income groups.

Agricultural work in the fields seems to have been mostly done by men, if the depictions on tomb walls are accurate. Women and children are only seen helping at busy times, particularly with the harvest, when wives are shown bringing refreshments to the reapers, gleaning the fallen ears of wheat or barely and winnowing the grain after it had been threshed. However, administrative documents do mention occasionally that women cultivated land themselves and they also record women acting as beaters to raise birds for hunters. One of the New Kingdom love song cycles is entitled: 'Beginning of the delightful, beautiful songs of your beloved sister as she comes from the fields.' In one of the songs, she talks about trapping wild birds. No male helper is mentioned and the birds are destined for her mother and home consumption, not for an employer.

> '. . . I shall retrieve my nets,
> But what do I tell my mother,
> To whom I go daily,
> Laden with bird catch?
> I have spread no snares today,
> I am caught in my love of you!'

So, it seems that women and girls did work in the fields and marshes in actuality although tomb depictions very rarely show this. From what we know, there was plenty to occupy a housewife in the home. Probably it was only when the husband was infirm or had died that women would have to undertake the cultivation of the fields as well as running the house.

Aidan Dodson and Salima Ikram

Egyptian Mortuary Beliefs

from

The Tomb in Ancient Egypt

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Providing for the Body and the Soul

> 'I am strong therein; I am glorious there; I eat there . . . ;
> I plough and reap there; I drink and eat there; I make love there.'
>
> Book of the Dead, Spell 110, New Kingdom

The Egyptians believed that the individual was made up of several parts, some physical, others metaphysical. These parts were: *khet,* the body; *ren,* the name; *shuyet,* the shadow; *ka,* the double of life-force; *ba,* the personality or soul; and *akh,* the spirit. A considerable portion of Egyptian funerary religion was dedicated to ensuring the survival not only of the body by mummification, but of all these components.

The tomb was a house for eternity, the repository of all parts of the personality, but most importantly of the body and the name. The former was mummified, wrapped in bandages and then protected both physically and magically by being placed in coffins and a sarcophagus. It was finally interred in the burial chamber, cut deep into the rock and secured against intruders.

Magical texts, inscribed both on the exterior and the interior of the tomb, made the person live forever, especially when the name was spoken or read aloud: the articulation of the name magically charged the life-force of the deceased so that he or she could flourish in the afterworld.

The ancient Egyptians believed in the magic and power of both written and spoken words. One of their creation myths refers to how the great god Atum had a thought or conception and then, by voicing it, it came into being. The Egyptians believed that once a word was written down, it was inherently magical and could make whatever was written true, especially when spoken aloud, an act which breathed life into the words. Thus, the representations on the walls could come alive and make real what they depicted and had to be chosen with care lest some dangerous being came into existence in a tomb. This is why sometimes one finds hieroglyphs of potentially harmful animals being disarmed in some way: snakes are shown with a cut in their body, lions are shown without legs and so on, lest these dangerous beasts come to life and damage the tomb-owner. These precautions were especially common in the Middle Kingdom.

Many tombs contained texts that are called 'Appeals to the Living,' which ask the living visitors to say a prayer of even just the name of the deceased so that he or she can thrive in the afterworld. The name was what gave people their identity and its protection and promulgation was therefore crucial to their eternal survival. If one wanted to punish an enemy, the worst thing to do would be to remove his name from his tomb as this one most severe act would render him nameless and beingless in the Fields of Iaru. This *damnatio memoriae* has been carried out in some tombs (e.g. the Vizier Rawer at Saqqara, KV10 and WV23 [both in the Valley of the Kings] and Theban Tombs 39, 42, 48 and 71, to name but a few).

The shadow, appearing in funerary texts, was a reflection of the body through the sun, itself the quintessential symbol of resurrection and rebirth. An image created by the sun, the shadow would vanish and reappear with the help of the sun. Thus, during life it was a constant reminder the reassurance of rebirth and in death would also be granted the protection it needed to continue and emphasize its role as an agent of resurrection.

The *ka*, *ba* and *akh*, all aspects of the soul and personality, are as difficult to understand as our concept of soul. The *ka* was depicted with a pair of upraised arms on top of the head, while the *ba* was shown as a human-headed bird, sometimes with a pair of arms. The *akh* was rarely depicted, although it was written using the hieroglyphic sign of the Hermit or Bald Ibis, *Geronticus eremita*. The *ka* and the body were created simultaneously by Khnum, the creator-god, on his potter's wheel. Both continued through life and into death, rather like doppelgängers or twins. The *ka* was the animating force for the individual and, according to texts dating from the Old Kingdom onwards, it outlasted the body, while needing the same sustenance as the body had needed during life. Thus, the offerings depicted on tomb walls, or placed in the tomb, were for the sustenance of the *ka*, which absorbed the potential sustenance that the offerings provided and was therefore 'charged' so that it could be active in the afterlife. After the death of an individual, the *ka* resided in the mummified body of the deceased, as well as in the burial chamber and tomb-chapel and any representations of the deceased that they contained.

The bird-bodied *ba* was a more active part of the spirit, being able to move through the tomb, into the cemetery and beyond. According to some texts, in life the *ba* could be released from a sleeping body to travel. Like the *ka* it had all the characteristics enjoyed by a human: an ability to eat, drink, speak, move and, unlike the *ka*, a capacity for travel. Despite this facility, the *ba* was tied to the physical body to ensure the survival of the deceased in the afterlife. The reunion of the *ba* and the mummy was the subject of many portions of the well-known funerary text, the Book of the Dead. The *ba* increased in importance in funerary texts from the Middle Kingdom onwards, although depictions of it were not common until the New Kingdom. The New Kingdom *rishi* or feathered coffin appears to evoke the *ba* with its human head and feather decoration.

The *akh* is the most complicated portion of the individual to understand. It seems to be the result of a union between the *ba* and the *ka*. This *akh* was the manifestation of the transformation of the deceased from a living creature into an eternal and unchanging being made of light who was associated with the stars and the gods. To become *akh* was the ultimate means of securing a

successful afterlife. Thus, individuals who had lived lives not in keeping with the rules of *maat* would not achieve the state of being *akh* and would be consumed by Ammit.

It should be remembered that kings, who were divine beings, had a different afterlife and as a consequence different tombs and cultic practices in which to achieve it, from non-royal individuals. The divinity of the king meant that after death he joined with the gods and journeyed with the sun god as part of his entourage.

The *ba* and the *ka* both had human characteristics and human needs, regardless of whether they were royal or not. The tomb was where these needs could be met. Sustenance for the soul was provided in the form of provisions left in the burial chamber, as well as by the images adorning the tomb-chapel's walls that would be magically made real. However, fresh goods were preferable; thus there was a requirement for a place where such offerings could pass between the worlds. In its simplest form, a slab of stone, or stela, placed above ground, could from this interface. Frequently, this stela took the form of a door—the so-called 'false-door'—through which the spirit could emerge, partake of its offerings and then return whence it came. Indeed, in some tombs the false-door actually has a three-dimensional image of the deceased, apparently frozen in its passage between the two worlds. The false-door was arguably the most potent place in the tomb as it was the point where the worlds of the dead and the living came together and, as such, the focus of the cult celebration of the deceased.

Related to such false-doors are the statues that were placed in *serdabs* (Arabic for 'cellar'), closed rooms connected to the main chapel, if at all, by a narrow hole or slit in the partition wall. This allowed the statues to 'see' out and for incense and prayers to reach them, while remaining safe and hidden in the mysterious darkness.

Access to the Netherworld

Just as this life was not the same for royalty and commoners, divisions existed in the afterlife as well. At the very beginning of Egyptian history the king was himself a divine being; his posthumous fate was thus to re-join his fellow deities in voyaging the heavens. Ultimately the king was linked most closely

to the sun god, with his resurrection manifested as the continual voyage of the sun through the sky during the day and the netherworld, or 'mirror-Egypt,' during the night. This solar trek is an important aspect of the decoration of the royal tombs of the New Kingdom and later, but is hardly seen in other contexts as the private individual had a different journey to make, in this case to reach the Fields of Iaru, that even more perfect eternal Egypt.

This was not a straightforward journey; in order to achieve the goal a series of tests had to be passed and gates traversed until the deceased arrived successfully in the Hall of Osiris to be judged. There, the heart, as the organ that indentified an individual's 'essence' or individuality, was weighed on a scale against the feather symbolizing *maat*. If the heart and the feather were balanced, it meant that the person had led a good and just life and could enter the realm of Osiris as one who was 'true of voice.' If the heart were heavier, then the person would forfeit the afterlife and his heart would be consumed by Ammit, the female Devourer of the Dead, depicted as a terrifying amalgam of crocodile, lion, and hippopotamus.

Aids to this spiritual journey appeared in tombs in the form of a series of texts containing all the necessary information and spells that would bring the spirit to its final destination. These were essentially crib notes that would help the deceased pass the tests that barred his access to 'the West,' or the afterlife. The most famous of these is the Book of the Dead, or more accurately called the 'Book of Coming Forth by Day,' and usually found in the form of a papyrus roll placed in the tomb or with the mummy. In addition to guiding the dead successfully, the Book of the Dead was also able to predict a successful outcome for the journey. The fact that the papyrus depicted and/or described the dead person's successful passage through the judgment meant that he or she actually had been successful.

The Book of the Dead is, however, by no means the earliest of these 'guides' to the hereafter, incorporating as it does many elements from more ancient sources. The oldest substantial works are contained in the Pyramid Texts, inscribed inside the burial chambers of royal tombs of the late 5th and 6th Dynasties, followed by the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts and related works. The New Kingdom and later periods saw the development of a wide range of funerary 'books.' Although they employed certain parts of the Book

of the Dead, royal burials were provided with a separate set of funerary books that were but rarely found in commoners' sepulchers during the New Kingdom. Unlike that of commoners, the rebirth of kings ensured the continuation not just of their lives, but the continuation of the very cosmos, hence its importance. Once texts such as the Pyramid Texts, initially composed for royal use, are found in non-royal tombs, one is almost always guaranteed that a new composition will appear in royal funerary contexts. Curiously, during the Third Intermediate Period, the Book of the Dead became used much more extensively in royal tombs, reversing the previous emphasis and now including the judgment hall scene, in which the pharaoh is shown being judged like a mortal.

Funerals and Interment

The chapel was the focus for the funeral ceremonies, the last point at which the earthly body of the deceased could be viewed and bidden adieu by friends and relations before the soul went to the netherworld. A stela in TT110, belonging to the Royal Herald, Djehuty, of the middle of the 18th Dynasty, provides a vivid account of an Egyptian funeral:

> A goodly burial arrives in peace, your 70 days having been fulfilled in your place of embalming. You are placed on the bier . . . and are drawn by bulls without blemish, the road being sprinkled with milk, until your reach the door of your tomb. The children of your children, united of one accord, weep with loving hearts. Your mouth is opened by the lector-priest and your purification is performed by the Sem-priest. Horus adjusts for you your mouth and opens for you your eyes and ears, your flesh and your bones being perfect in all that appertains to you. Spells and glorifications are recited for you. There is made for you a 'Royal Offering Formula,' your own heart being with you, your heart of your earthly existence. You come in your former shape, as on the day on which you were born. There is brought to you the Son-whom-you-love, the courtiers making obeisance. You enter into the land given by the king, into the sepulcher of the west.

Egyptian funerary ceremonies were long and complicated. The prepared mummy would be retrieved from the embalmers, encoffined and, being placed on a sled pulled, ideally, by oxen, taken in procession with the tomb goods to the cemetery. The procession included the mourning family and friends of the deceased, priests, grave goods and, if the deceased were wealthy, a host of professional mourners who would rend their clothes, beat their breasts and pour ash upon their heads, ululating all the while. Such hired mourners remain a feature of Egyptian funerals. A peculiar object that forms part of the procession from the Middle Kingdom on is the *tekenu*. In the Middle Kingdom it appears as a wrapped figure that is crouching or is in the foetal position, with only the head emerging. In the New Kingdom it is shown as an entirely wrapped bundle, or with the head and sometimes an arm showing. Its role in the funerary ritual is enigmatic.

Special sacred dances, the most famous of these performed by the *muu* dancers, also played a part in the funerary ritual. The ceremonies of burial culminated in the Opening-of-the-Mouth ceremony, in which the dead body was reanimated. Each of the five senses was restored to the deceased in this ritual, which involved the use of implements that on one hand recalled those used in the carving of statuary, in particular the adze. This may have been linked with the fact that artificial images could also be animated through the same ritual. The other tools recalled those used at birth, a key item being the *pesesh-kef* knife, which consisted of a flint blade that broadened to a fork at the end. The knife was probably a model of one used to cut the umbilical cord of the baby and as such was necessary for the soul's rebirth in the netherworld and its ability to eat and drink again, just as severing the umbilical cord means that the child must use its own mouth to eat and therefore live.

The foreleg of on ox was also used in the ritual, coming from a sacrificial animal that no doubt provided a main part of the funeral meal. Once the mummy was reanimated it joined the mourners for one last time in a funerary feast. No doubt many of the fresh-food offerings of the deceased were consumed during the course of this meal, with a share being set aside for the delectation of the deceased. All of these activities took place in front of the tomb's offering place.

Once the deceased had feasted, the corpse was placed in the tomb with accompanying pomp and ritual, with garlands and flowers often being placed on the corpse, as well as on the coffin(s) and sarcophagus. Meanwhile the spiritual aspect of the deceased had set out on its journey to eternity.

Interaction Between the Living and the Dead

It was not enough to build a tomb if one wanted to live eternally. A mortuary cult/foundation had to be established to provide for the upkeep of the tomb and the celebration of the cult through prayer and food offerings. These cults were endowed by dedicating some land and its revenues to the cult, in order to pay the priest who took care of the tomb. In essence, the offerings derived from these lands would be consecrated for the deceased and then given as payment to the priest in charge of the cult. Passing visitors—ideally for centuries into the future—were also encouraged to enter the chapel to admire it and to recite a prayer, preferably the *hetep-di-nesu*, a traditional incantation that gave the deceased's name and titles as well as the basic offerings, thereby magically empowering the deceased.

Family members would visit the tomb, especially on festivals associated with the dead, such as the New Kingdom Festival of the Valley, which involved visiting the tomb, making offerings of food and incense to the deceased and feasting in the presence of their deceased ancestors. New Kingdom tombs show a scene that takes place in the chapel's courtyard, the festival of the god Sokar, who was also associated with Osiris. A feature of these regeneration festivals involved a grain mummy, a small mummiform figure filled with grain, symbolizing the regenerative powers of Osiris. In modern Egypt visits to the tomb are also a feature of life, with elaborately woven palm-leaves or 'grain-dollies' being left on the tomb.

Once the deceased was safely in the netherworld, the living could approach the dead and ask for supernatural intervention in their affairs, be it for advice, an increase in prosperity, or to help heal the sick. The most popular way of doing this was in letter form. Such 'Letters to the Dead' were inscribed on papyrus, or, more often, on pottery bowls. The bowls contained food that would entice the *ka* out of the tomb and provide 'payment' for it to speed along the desired intervention.

Regine Schulz

Temples in the Middle Kingdom

from

Egypt: The World of the Pharaohs

2000

In ancient Egypt, temples were meeting places for humans and gods, the living and the dead. They symbolized and guaranteed the existence and permanence of creation. This guarantee was secured on the one hand through the daily practice of the cult and observance of the festivals, and on the other through the magical power evoked by the concept of the shrine with its architectural layout and program of texts and images. The different levels of this systems stem from a common notion, but were only effective as a whole. In its content, the cult rituals performed in the temples is to be understood as communication between a human and a deity whereby the initiative is taken by the human, and the god functions as the beneficiary of the cult ritual.

Temples were considered part of heavenly and earthly reality. Inside them on a heavenly plane, the gods were provided for and given satisfaction by the king; in the exterior region on the earthly level, humans were heard by the gods. Mediators between these levels were the king and his attending priesthood. The king possessed a double function, however, as he performed not only the cult of the gods but was himself also the beneficiary of a cult. The concept

and practice of the cult in Old and Middle Kingdom temples to the gods can only be reconstructed to a very limited extent, however, due to the buildings' poor state of preservation. Texts that could give clues about them exist only as fragments or do not tell us much of value.

From the Cultic Hut to the Temple of the Gods

Cults of kings and gods characterized life in Egypt from prehistoric times. The first cult image or fetish huts consisted of a wooden framework and woven mats. Their exterior form varied and was independent of the object of the cult, its function, or its location. In early dynastic times, mud brick structures began to replace these more transitory constructions, and by the beginning of the Old Kingdom at the latest, stone was also used for door frames, supports, and shrines. The spatial articulation of these complexes began to be every more differentiated, and evidence suggests that, next to the chamber holding the cult image, there were also visitation rooms and offering table rooms. The image and text program, that is the decoration of these buildings, can no longer be reconstructed. It is certain, however, that besides the cult images in the sanctuary, there were also figures in the temple or the exterior area, which facilitated the meeting of the humans and the gods.

The Gods and the Omnipotence of the King

This picture changes at about the time of the pyramid age. Whereas for earthly and heavenly sites in this world, that is for residential buildings, palaces, and temples to the gods, mud brick continued to be used as building material, for the deceased king huge stone complexes for the funerary cult were created. Temples constructed exclusively of stone, such as the Sphinx Temple at Giza or the obelisk-like solar shrines built with masonry, must be seen as exceptions for they stood in direct relationship to the royal pyramid complexes. Accordingly, their function lay not only in the joining of heaven and earth, but also in the joining of this life with the next. For the pharaoh was believed to be the divine Horus and son of the sun god, and was thus the guarantor for all aspects of creation. Creation was not thought to be a completed act, and needed continual confirmation as well as individual and constant renewal through every newly enthroned king.

The Gods and the King—A Powerful Partnership

The steady waning of royal domestic political power during the Sixth Dynasty led to the collapse of the Old Kingdom, to the internal division of the land, and to a deep-seated religious crisis. The trust in pharaoh's omnipotence was destroyed, and the presence of the gods on earth was endangered. Now humans were responsible for life on earth while the hereafter was the responsibility of the mythical god-king Osiris, who was independent of the actual circumstances of this world.

It took over 150 years before Mentuhotep II (Eleventh Dynasty) managed to reunite the country and inspire new trust in the religious principle of the cult as a guarantee of creation. The fundamental belief was that the gods chose the ruler and imbued him with the necessary legitimacy so that he in turn could see to the preservation of world order, ward off chaos, and provide for both humans and gods. The cult of the king thus became a permanent element in the cult of the gods, and chapels for royal statues were integrated into divine temples. In the pictorial program of these chapels, motifs such as the designation, provision, and coronation of the king by the gods as well as the conquest of enemies by the ruler (as in Gebelein or Dendara) were of primary importance.

A type of mixed architecture in brick and stone was characteristic of many sacred buildings of this period. Some complexes were conceived as analogies for the rooms of secular dwellings, which underlined the connection to life on this earth. On the other hand, the relationship of these temples to the hereafter was reflected by other elements. Mummiform pillar statues of the king exemplify this concept expressing the connection between the material ruler and Osiris. Among the oldest examples of this type are those erected for Mentuhotep II in the temple of Montu at Armant, near Thebes.

Temples for Eternity

Countless building projects were undertaken during the forty-five-year reign of Sesostris I. This king built temples of stone at almost all the country's important cult sites; these replaced the older brick constructions. Monuments were consecrated not only to gods, but also to deified ancestors such as Snefru and to patron deities such as Heqaib in Elphantine. The variety of the

decorated shrines corresponded to the many forms of divine presence for the enhancement of royal power. Along with the rise of the god Amun in the Middle Kingdom came the importance of his cult site of Karnak. Sesostris I had the older building completely replaced.

The front of the complex consisted of an open garden surrounded by columns and a group of Osiride pillars in front of the façade; the rear consisted of a succession of three central cult and auxiliary rooms. A cult image shrine of Amun made of granodiorite, which was found south of the seventh pylon, must also have belonged to the main temple.

Another building of Sesostris I in Karnak ranks among the most beautiful of the Middle Kingdom. The so-called "White Chapel," a way station erected on the occasion of the king's first festival of renewal (*sed*), was torn down during the New Kingdom and its materials rebuilt into the foundation of the pylon of Amenophis III. The structure, which today has been almost completely reconstructed from the original blocks, has sixteen pillars and two access ramps opposite one another. A pedestal stands in the middle that might have held a double figure of the King with Amun-Re-Kamutef; today only the foot slab remains. In conjunction with his renewal festival, Sesostris I also created new complexes in Heliopolis and erected two tall obelisks in front of the Atum temple.

The kings of the late Twelfth Dynasty spread their cult and building programs far beyond the border of Egypt. They commissioned temples in Amara and Semna in Nubia, and also in Serabit el-Khadim in Sinai. In Egypt proper, numerous statues and stelae were consecrated, and teples extended or rebuilt. Amenemhat III paid special attention to the Faiyum and constructed numerous complexes there.

One of these is the cult site of Biyahmu with two 18-m-high colossal statues (now destroyed) of the deified king. In Medinet Madi he consecrated a small temple to the crocodile god Sobek and the goddess Renenutet, and in old Shedit, modern Medinet el-Faiyum, he remodeled the Sobek temple. A series of statues showing the king in extremely unusual vestments or as a sphinx with an enormous lion's mane surely also came from there.

Certainly, the few Middle Kingdom temples that still exist show heterogeneous basic structures, but included in almost every case are a sanctuary tract with cult image chambers, an offering table hall, and a visitation hall along with a court area. Each of these temples must be understood as an independent, powerfully evocative complex. Landscape and architecture, surface images and inscriptions, statues and obelisks form a conceptual whole in which gods and kings play their parts.

Living Images—The Statue Programs of the Temples

A divine sculptural image in the round worshipped by the cult was an essential part of every temple in ancient Egypt. These cult images have almost all been lost since they were completely or partially made of precious metals and were therefore stolen and melted down. Two-dimensional images on temple walls show that for the most part the statues must have been standing or enthroned figures. They were permitted to approach them. Outside the sanctuary too were figures of gods fashioned primarily of stone and approachable by initiated individuals such as priests and leading administrators. Only the barque with the processional statue was on display for the entire population during large festivals.

The Multifunctional Nature of Royal Sculpture

Statues of kings were indispensable components of every temple to the gods; they were also believed to be alive. Since their exact provenance can be reconstructed in only a very few cases, we must surmise their function on the basis of their appearance. The statue type plays an important role here, suggesting various functional levels. Royal statues can take on an active as well as a passive role. As supreme lords of the cult, they move before the gods, for example, in the form of offerings or praying figures who kneel or stride forward. As embodiments of divine and royal power, they demonstrate the guarantee of creation through the king, such as in the form of sphinxes. They are worshipped and provided for by humans as the cult focus, shown as either standing or enthroned figures. They enjoy the protection and acknowledgment of the gods as chosen individuals. We find them in statue groups, for example, in which king and god touch each other. Iconographic elements identify the

depicted individual as well and emphasize is function, such as the unusual attire of the so-called priest figure of Amenemhat III or the ankh symbols held by the pillar statues of Sesostris I. As a third and definitive element, the body and facial features play a central role in determining the expressive effect of the figure. Analagous to the king's titulary, each and every ruler established his own formal criteria that still allowed for functional and stylistic variations. If we observe the development in royal portraits of the Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties, significant differences become apparent: concentrated mass and powerful weight for Mentuhotep II, formulaic symmetry for Sesostris I, taut intensity for Amenenhat II, great concentration and force of will for Sesostris III, and energetic severity for Amenemhat III.

In principle the appearance thus leads from great formalism and a "hieroglyphic" composition of details over a balanced aesthetic to psychologizing naturalism.

Private Temple Sculpture—The Chosen Observer

While both divine and royal sculpture was directly involved in the magical safeguarding of the cult, the statues of other persons bore a completely different significance. During the Old Kingdom, statues of private individuals who were neither kings nor gods were most likely placed along the paths of cults and processions. Since the Middle Kingdom at the latest, such figures could also be seen in the temples themselves. They represent individuals who did not actively partake in the cult but who enjoyed the privilege of being present and "observing" the rituals. They were thus involved in the temple's redistributive system. The inscriptions on the figures also suggest their association as participants in cult ritual, since they contain for the most part formulas invoking participation in the provision of offerings for the divinity. Many of these statues show a squatting position with the legs folded under the body, or the knees held up and pressed close to the body. Such a squatting pose suggests a passive position of repose and is suitable for neither the gods nor the king. In order to guarantee the permanence of this participation in the cult and the resulting provision in an enduring manner, both in this life and the next, a new iconographic element is added: a cloak wrapped tightly around the body. Combined with the crossed arms and

partially covered hands, it suggests the aspect of Osiris. During the late Middle Kingdom, standing figures were also added. Their arms hang close to the body and their hands are either at their sides or extended in the front along the kilt.

The individuals represented are high-ranking priests or officials who also in reality were directly involved in the cult. With this development the Egyptian temple during the Middle Kingdom opened itself to non-royal persons in two phases. As "observers," they were granted access to the temple and later, as worshippers, were even allowed to participate in the rituals of the cult.

Lise Manniche

The Egyptian Garden

from

An Ancient Egyptian Herbal

2006

Few things are more enjoyable in a warm climate than to sit in the shade of a tree and contemplate one's garden, catching the fragrance of the flowers and listening to the sounds of the birds and insects. The ancient Egyptians were as proud of their gardens as their modern descendants, and the larger gardens, such as those belonging to the temples, must have been truly spectacular. The gardens of private individuals were occasionally depicted on the walls of their tomb chapels, and we are thus able to see with our own eyes how the Egyptians planted their trees, herbs, and flowers.

There is no reason to believe that the artist's rendering of his motif differed substantially from reality: a formal garden was the aim, with trees in neat rows and flowers in square beds or straight borders. The town-dweller had little room at his disposal, but he could choose to build his residence around an existing tree, which would then be left standing in the courtyard of the house. Nebamun, a police captain of King Tuthmosis IV (c. 1405 BC), opted for this solution in his Theban residence. A painting in his tomb shows two palm trees towering over a house built of mud-brick washed with pink.

The owner of a town house, avid for greenery, would plant additional trees and shrubs in pots and other containers and place these along the façade of his house, and probably in the inside courtyard as well.

When more space was available a fishpond became the centre-piece in even a very small garden. Meketre, chancellor to King Mentuhotpe II, had models of the houses and workshops on his estate buried in a secret chamber under the floor of his tomb chapel when he died around 2000 BC. These little dolls' houses included two models of his villa and garden—in fact, the garden predominates, for the house itself is reduced to a portico. In the model the walled garden includes a fishpond surrounded by sycamore trees, delicately sculpted in wood and painted a bright green.

Among representations of private ornamental gardens one from the tomb of a scribe of the granary called Nebamun stands out (c. 1380 BC). In the fishpond lotus flowers float on the surface of the water, and the black fertile mud on its banks has been planted with a mixed herbaceous border. Among the trees bordering the pond is an unusually prolific mandrake. The trees include *carica* figs and sycamore figs; date-palm and *dôm*-palm; and, in the lower left-hand corner, an unsupported vine. We can only speculate about the identity of three fruitless trees. The top right-hand corner of the scene is a reminder that however idyllic and realistic the painting may seem, it does come from a tomb and is part of a larger funerary context: a female figure emerges from the tree, bearing provisions. She is Hathor or Nut, the sycamore goddess, who was included to provide for the tomb-owner in the Hereafter.

Some hundred years before Nebamun watched the efforts of his chosen tomb artist to depict his ideal garden, a builder called Ineni carried out plans on a grander scale. Ineni was in charge of the building activities of King Tuthmosis I (1528–1510 BC), and of those his successors, but he also provided a residence for himself whose main attraction was a magnificent garden. A view of the house and the garden behind, with its fishpond, is depicted in Ineni's tomb, but the painter was unable to do it full justice. As he could only fit in a selection of the trees, arranged in neat rows, Ineni made sure that a complete inventory of the trees he planted in his orchard was included: 73 sycamore trees; 31 persea trees; 170 date-palms; 120

dôm-palms; fig trees; 2 moringa trees; 12 vines; 5 pomegranate trees; 16 carob trees; Christ thorn; 1 *argûn*-palm; 8 willow trees; 10 tamarisk trees; 5 *twn*-trees (a kind of acacia?); 2 myrtle(?) (*ht-ds*); and 5 unidentified kinds of tree.

The main task of a gardener would have been to keep the plants and trees well watered. To this end he made use of a *shadûf*, a contraption still used in the Egyptian countryside, consisting of a long pole balanced over a stand. To one end is fixed a bucket or jar, to the other a counterpoise of mud. With this implement the field laborer or gardener can scoop up water from the river or canal to the field above without having to lift the heavy pot. In ancient times the beds for utility plants and flowers were divided into squares by grooves so that the water could be poured in at one end and run freely to the far end of the flower bed. The gardeners carried water in jars on a yoke from the main water supply to the flower beds further afield. Thanks to these continuous efforts the Egyptian official would enjoy a colorful spectacle of flowers at different seasons.

It is interesting to observe the choice of flowers in the garden, insofar as these can be identified. It is hardly surprising to find the beautiful scented lotus floating in the ponds. But the herbaceous border was composed chiefly of flowers which we would expect to find growing in the field: the poppy and the cornflower. A third conventional plant, of similar outline and proportion, is the mandrake, which must have appealed to artist and gardener alike for its decorative yellow fruits which contrast so well with the red and blue of the poppy and cornflower. All three were used together, with lotus and papyrus, in formal bouquets. The Egyptians knew of several other plants which could have been chosen for their ornamental qualities, such as iris, lily, chrysanthemum, and delphinium, but these flowers, so essential to a well-stocked English garden, do not feature in the garden scenes as depicted by the artists.

Exotic plants and trees were much appreciated by the Egyptians, and some imported species did well on Egyptian soil. The pomegranate is a good example of an ornamental garden tree, whose fruits were also put to good use. The olive may have taken longer to become established. An ancient love poem speaks of a fig-tree having been brought from the land of Kharu

(Syria) as a trophy of love to be planted in an Egyptian garden. Queen Hatshepsut attempted to transplant incense trees from Punt to the garden of her temple at Deir el-Bahari, but it is doubtful whether the experiment was successful. Tuthmosis III, her successor, showed similar horticultural interests during his exploits into Asia Minor. In order to leave a more permanent record than the plants themselves, which may not even have survived the journey home, he commissioned his artists to draw them and had the pictures carved in relief on the walls of a small room in the temple of Amun at Karnak, now known as 'the Botanical Garden.' This is probably the oldest herbal in the world, but regrettably without an explanatory text to accompany the illustrations.

We are left to speculate about the gardens of the royal palaces, for they were not depicted in the tombs of members of the royal family. But we do have two pictures showing Tutankhamun and his wife in a garden setting. The scenes were carved on the ivory panels of a casket found in the king's tomb. The lid shows the royal couple standing in front of a shelter provided mith large cusions and decorated with flowers. The queen hands the king two splendid bouquets, made up of papyrus, lotus and poppy. The scene is framed by a border of poppy, cornflower, and mandrake; another scene below shows two more members of the family picking poppy and mandrake. On the front of the casket the king is seated next to the fishpond, aiming at either the fishes or the birds with his bow and arrow. The queen is at his feet, and the scene is idyllic, the garden being densely planted with the by now familiar species.

The oldest temple garden of which we have exact information is one planted in the reign of Mentuhotpe at his mortuary temple beneath the cliffs at Deir el-Bahari (c. 1975 BC). We are in the unique position of having not only the remains of the tree pits themselves, but also part of the plan drawn up by the landscape architect in charge, sketched on one of the floor slabs of the temple. Three rows of seven sycamore and tamarisk trees were planted on either side of the entrance ramp leading to the temple. Under each tree was positioned a statue of the king. Remains of the trees, including large cuttings of sycamore, were found in the pits, which, when the light is favourable, can easily be distinguished as depressions in the sand.

There is evidence of trees having been planted in pits near other royal funerary monuments, such as for example at the pyramid of Sesostris II at Illahûn. But it is not until we come to the New Kingdom that we get a more accurate picture of temple gardens. Sennufer, the mayor of Thebes in the reign of Amenophis II (c. 1425 BC) had a picture painted in his tomb chapel showing the garden of the temple of Amun as it looked in his day. The garden was conveniently laid out next to the river or a canal. A neat plan shows the walled garden with its four ponds, with the trees, plants and buildings drawn in elevation, following the Egyptian convention. To the right is the main gate, erected by Amenophis II and inscribed with his names. To the left there is a chapel with three juxtaposed shrines, represented one above the other. Next to two of the ponds a pavilion is depicted. The garden itself is divided into sections by walls and gates, so that the general effect would have been one of intimacy rather than of splendour. The central part is taken up by the god's vineyard, with the vines trained on railings and supports. The garden contained date-palms and *dôm*-palms, and the clumps of papyrus are easy to make out. Among the remaining trees are figs and sycamore. A closer examination of the tomb wall itself might provide more clues to the identity of the other trees, but the tomb is not easily accessible, and the painting itself has deteriorated and is difficult to photograph. The scene was copied in color by early travelers to Egypt in the second and third decades of the 19th century.

Among the gods of the Egyptian pantheon none was in a better position to enjoy the efforts of the temple gardeners than Aten, the sun disk who cast his rays over all gardens. In the city built by Akhenaten and Nefertiti on virgin soil at el-Amarna (c. 1367–1350 BC) a garden was an integral part of the temple complex. The Amarna artists were unusually clever at depicting architecture and surroundings, the otherwise weak point of Egyptian draughtsmanship. A large representation on the wall of the tomb of Meryre, high priest of the Aten, demonstrates in excellent fashion the lay-out of the garden of the sun-god. Inside the large enclosure wall and adjacent to the main temple were a number of buildings interspersed with trees in tubs. The largest of the buildings consisted of numerous storerooms built on either side of a rectangular court with trees. Each half was divided into two by

another courtyard onto which the storerooms opened. Their doors were sheltered by a portico with papyrus-shaped columns, and in front of each was a tree. The remaining buildings had similar arrangements of rooms, courts and trees in tubs, but trees were also planted among the houses. Two small and one large pond provided water and variety. Among the trees can be seen flowering pomegranates, dates, *dôm*-palms and vines. It was at the time that this garden was planted that almonds and olives first appeared in Egypt, but not necessarily in the form of actual trees.

Gardens such as these were created to delight the god, and were undoubtedly enjoyed by the staff of the temple as well. The vast quantity of herbs and flowers used for a variety of purposes in the daily cult would probably have been collected from adjacent fields. An enormous number of bouquets were required for the offering tables and a well-organized industry was essential to supply them. One of the men in charge during the reign of Amenophis III (c. 1375 BC) was Nakht, 'gardener of the divine offering of Amun,' that is to say chief florist of the temple. His tomb in the Theban necropolis appropriately depicts the most splendid bouquets made in Egypt. But like many officials Nakht desired to be depicted 'in office,' and he is shown strolling in the nurseries of the god, inspecting the flower beds and watching the gardeners struggling with their yokes and heavy water pots. Although utility gardens had been depicted in tombs since the Old Kingdom, this temple nursery scene is unique. Like the painting of the temple garden of Amenophis II, this one was copied by an early traveler in the 1820s. The scene belongs on the lower part of a wall, and the fragile layer of painted plaster has been rubbed off by visitors over the past 160 years so that little now remains.

Information about a herb garden of a slightly later date comes from a totally different yet equally fragile source. The evidence is contained in three samples of icc each of tissue taken from the mummy of King Ramesses II (died 1224 BC). It would seem that during the course of the process of mummification the embalmers of the king used a certain plant of the genus *Compositae*. The plant may have been employed to scent the oil used for anointing the corpse rather than having been applied in its natural state, in which case recognizable fragments would have survived. While the plant was

still growing it had attracted samples of pollen from other plants brought either by the wind or by insects. By analyzing the samples the pollen could be identified, thus providing clues about the habitat of the plant and the kind of herbs which grew in its vicinity.

It has been suggested that the plant in question could be a camomile, and that the body of Ramesses II had been anointed with 'camomile oil' (this was a commodity used more than a thousand years later by the Copts). Its identity may not have been established beyond question, but there is less doubt about the origin of the pollen it attracted. The plant grew near a field of emmer or wheat, but at some distance from the river or a canal, for no pollen of plants growing in water was found. Nor was there a palm tree in the neighborhood. Shade in the area was provided by lime *(Tilia tormentosa)*, plane *(Platanus orientalis)*, Christ thorn and a fair number of *Phillyrea* bushes. Surprisingly, the garden contained a cotton plant *(Gossypium)*, otherwise only known much later in Egypt. Among the plants known from other gardens was hemp, cornflower, wormwood, chicory, convolvulus, nettles and umbelliferous plants. Plantain and sage, not known from other pharaonic sources, were also present. The evidence seems to point to either a garden planted with medicinal herbs, or, alternatively, a 'camomile' field full of weeds! Considering the Egyptians' highly developed pharmacopoeia they must have had 'physics gardens,' most likely in connection with a temple, for it was among the priests that knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants was concentrated. During excavations in the sacred animal necropolis at Saqqâra an ancient rubbish dump revealed the presence of a variety of medicinal herbs, among others basil, myrtle, henbane, chrysanthemum, acacia, Egyptian plum, pomegranate, apricot, olive, flax, and *Withania somnifera*. It would seem that at some stage these herbs had simply been dumped, perhaps to be replaced by fresh supplies. The remains of this interesting discovery are now in the museum at Kew Gardens.

The man in charge of the medicinal plants used by the embalmers of Ramesses II may just possibly be known to us, although strictly speaking the oil could have come from any location in Egypt. The Delta was rich in gardens, but the pollen told us that the 'camomile' grew at some distance from the water. The mortuary temple of Ramesses II is some three kilometers

from the river at Thebes, although there were a number of canals in antiquity as now to conduct the water inland. The inspector of gardens of this particular temple was a certain Nezemger, who had his tomb cut and decorated in the plain nearby. The paintings have not survived well, but on one wall we can make out Nezemger standing in his office in the garden. The entrance pylon to the temple was shown to the far left. To the rear (right) in the garden was a duck pond, *shadûf*, palms and other trees. Each would have been planted in a pocket of soil, since we are at the edge of the desert.

The funerary ceremonies of private individuals included episodes set in a garden—at least this was the ideal situation as represented on the tomb walls. In his tomb at Thebes a granary official, Minnakht (c. 1450 BC), shows his coffin being placed on a boat and sailing across a pond to a garden chapel where it is met by men carrying papyrus stems. Booths placed among the trees contain jars of provisions, while loaves are stacked up in the open, waiting for the priests to consecrate them.

The Egyptians were able to create gardens in the most unlikely places. All they needed was to be able to bring the life-giving Nile water to the chosen location. Irrigation of the desert being undertaken today demonstrates how successful the results can be. The garden of Akhenaten and Nefertiti has now merged with the surrounding desert, but only through lack of water and attention. Even in the remote southern part of the Egyptian empire the temples did not lack gardens. A location called Kawa, near modern Dongola, once boasted the best vineyard in Egypt: its wine was even better than that from the Oasis of Bahriya which was otherwise known to produce wine of quality. The walled garden was planted by Taharqa, a Nubian king of Egypt in the eighth century BC. The famous vines were tended by gardeners from the tribe of the Mentiu in Asia. So we should imagine the length of Egypt planted with beautiful gardens, parks, and vineyards. But like the modern Egyptians the ancient inhabitants of the Nile Valley kept their gardens hidden and secluded behind high brick walls.

Max Rodenbeck

Cities of the Dead

from

Cairo: The City Victorious

1998

Following a long career as a leading jurist of his age, Imam al-Shafi'i died at Misr al-Fustat in AD 820. During his lifetime scholars had worked to fix a legal code for Islam based on the Koran and the sayings and acts of the Prophet. The ulema—the men of 'ilm or science, which is to say Islamic learning—had reached consensus on some matters of law but differed on others. Al-Shafi'i gained fame by seeking compromises. He argued that, while the school of Malik ibn Anas (a jurist who lived at Medina in AD 716–95) stuck too rigidly to the letter of sacred texts, the rival school of Abu Hanifa (who taught at Kufa in Iraq and died in AD 767) was excessively free in its interpretation. Shafi'i proposed instead an amalgam of the two, and this middle path soon developed into a separate school of law. He also systematized the science of jurisprudence. Shafi'i's methodology, if not his interpretations, were accepted by all the schools of Islamic law.

Although in modern times the domain of religious law has been limited—in Egypt, at least—to areas like inheritance and marriage, the moderate Shafi'ite school still predominates in the city. (Which is one reason why there

is no hand-chopping, flogging or lapidation here, as imposed by the Saudis, who are avid followers of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, the founder of the last, and sternest, accepted school of Sunni law, who died at Baghdad in AD 855.) More about legalities later. The point is that Imam al-Shafi'i is an important figure in the Islamic civilization of Cairo, a man whose credentials for a kind of sainthood are sound. This is more than can be said for many of the 300-odd other Muslim holy men and women whose tomb shrines pepper the traditional quarters of the city.

Take the most popular saint of all, the Prophet's grandson al-Husayn. The noble provenance, piety and notable death of al-Husayn are beyond dispute—indeed his murder, at the order of Shi'ite Islam.[1] But it is a well-known fact that the martyr's body was buried in Iraq. All Cairo can lay claim to is the poor fellow's severed head, and even that claim is tenuous. The grisly relic was said to have travelled first to Damascus, then to Ascalon in Palestine. Not until 1153 was it whisked to Cairo, to save it from advancing Christian crusaders. But then at least one medieval source declares that this was not al-Husayn's head at all, but his grandson's.

Regardless of doubts, the funerary mosque of al-Husayn remains Cairo's most venerated shrine. It is where politicians have themselves shown praying on TV and where, once a year and every night for a full week, a million-strong crowd gathers to celebrate al-Husayn's martyrdom. It may be that the Shi'ites of Iran mark the saint's death by public weeping and self-flagellation, but Cairo's *mawlid* devotees, joined by the thousands of country folk who pour into the city to snooze and brew tea in the medieval alleyways surrounding the shrine, come for fun as much as for devotion. The revelry begins after dusk, gaining momentum far into the early hours. Fair-goers jive and joke and test their skill in shooting galleries and trials of strength. Some, drawn by the rhythm of drums and the whine of reed flutes, join ritual dances in the dozens of marquees set up by different Sufi brotherhoods. Others press into the shrine itself to gain the saint's *baraka* or blessing, while Breughel-faced beggars and weasel-featured pickpockets work the throngs outside.

One night, while squeezing through the crowds some distance from the saint's tomb, I felt a clutching at my sleeve. I looked, and found the blind eyes

of a stooped old man beseeching me. In a thick country accent he begged me to lead him to al-Husayn, and as I piloted him through the noise and confusion he kept repeating, 'Ya Husayn! Praise be to God!' When we merged in the fervent crush at the door of the shrine I felt him tremble with anticipation. His hand slipped down to mine, which he kissed and raised to his forehead. 'Many the Lord preserve your sight, my son,' he cried before vanishing over the threshold like a bird released from a cage.

But why is it that Cairo, whose Muslim faith is solidly of the orthodox Sunni kind, should venerate this Shi'ite martyr? And, for that matter, how is it that some Muslims have also come to sanctify the tombs of the Prophet's friends and relations, not to mention sundry jurists and sheikhs and fakirs? The answers lie in the matrix of tensions which have always characterized Islam—between literal and allegorical readings of Scripture, between pristine ideals and less tidy facts, between the demands of the faith and the will of rulers; in short, between the Word of God and the needs of man.

Edward Lane, an English Orientalist and student of this city, reported 170 years ago that even as Cairo's Muslims, Christians and Jews abhorred one another's doctrines, they happily shared each others' superstitions.[2] Like the earlier creeds, Islam had to grapple with enduring pagan instincts, including a common yearning for physical closeness to the deity. Jews found this, perhaps, in the covenants that God is said to have given them as his Chosen People. Christian belief adapted to pre-existing faiths wherever it went, then channeled pagan idol worship into a reverence for icons of its own elaborate cast of martyrs and saints. Abjuring both exclusivism and graven images, Islam sought more personal intervention.

This is what the *mawlids* are, in essence, about. They revolve around the tomb of a person who, by some sign or other, appeared to his contemporaries to be a *wali*—one close to God. To be near one so blessed, even after his death, is therefore to approach the divine. There is a whiff of something very ancient here, as the Egyptologist Sir Gardner Wilkinson noted over a century ago: 'The remark of Herodotus, that the Egyptians could not live without a king, may find a parallel in their impossibility of living without a pantheon of saints. And, notwithstanding the positive commands of Islam

to allow no one to share any of the honours due to the deity alone, no ancient or modern religion could produce a larger number of divine claimants.'

Yet some *mawlids* embrace an element of Bacchanalian excess that seems completely at odds with their declared purpose—let alone what the textbooks of monotheism have to say. To cite an obscure but diverting clue, back in 450 BC Herodotus witnessed a festival of Dionysus just north of Memphis. A procession of ladies marched down a village street, each toting an effigy of the god that was fitted with outsized genitals on a hinge. The simple mechanism allowed the ladies to wag the penises provocatively by tugging on a string. Now, earlier in the twentieth century Joseph McPherson, an officer in the Cairo police, came across a parade in a village just outside the capital. It was the festival of a local *wali*, he discovered, and on this day the villagers chose their handsomest lad to lead a parade. Carried stark naked through the streets on a sort of throne, the youth had a cord tied to his penis which an accomplice would jiggle to keep his virile member erect.

Such goings-on have long brought on to *mawlids* the opprobrium of the orthodox—as well as the skepticism of the educated classes. This is why they have grown increasingly rare. Yet the *mawlid* of Sayyida Zaynab, the sister of the martyred al-Husayn, and Cairo's second most popular saint, still maintains a reputation for lewdness. On the Big Night hundreds of thousands of youths in high spirits cram the wide square in front of her shrine, not far from the city centre.

There were too many for comfort on a recent visit, so I looked for diversion in the alleys and side streets. Peasant families huddle here around gas lamps and charcoal braziers, inviting all and sundry to join them for tea or a meal or just a chat. Wider spaces were filled by color-patterned marquees put up for the occasion by varied orders and lodges among the seventy-odd Sufi brotherhoods registered in Egypt. Every tent housed its own band and singer of *dhikr*—odes in love of God. The overall noise may have been a clashing, amplified chaos that could be heard for miles around, but inside each tent the dervishes concentrated solely on their own guide and rhythm and music. A few wore city clothes—some suits and ties even—but most, having travelled here from all across Egypt, wore country *galabiyyas*. Eyes squeezed tight in trance, the dancers hurled their shoulders this way and then that, back and

forth in time with the beat, some swaying, some thrashing, some hopping as if on coals, their ecstasy mounting higher and higher as the tempo quickened.

Sellers of popcorn and party hats plied the pushing crowds gathered outside, and around the shooting galleries and boat-shaped swings that whooping daredevils rocked into continuous, dizzy whirls. A magic show occupied a trailer that was camouflaged under lurid hoardings showing lightning bursting from a dwarf's fingertip, a turbaned impresario with voodoo eyes and a scantily dressed dame reclining voluptuously in minaret-high levitation. The barker, a languid youth in a Ronald Reagan T-shirt, paced up and down with a mike, packing in kids with a seamless harangue promising sights never seen before and Susu the talking head.

The next marquee was a mystery. There was no sign of what the show might be, but the raptest jamboree of adolescent boys I have ever seen thronged the narrow entrance like a swarm of hornets, craning and shoving to get in and get close. An enthralled, musk-laden urgency seemed to charge their faces. The squirming then stopped abruptly, and the boys stood still as a tenor wail wafted through the flimsy canvas walls. The voice moaned and undulated, heaved and panted, sighing through pitch after pitch in a spectacular and apparently endless crescendo of oohs and ahs. As the spine-tingling caterwaul went on and on it slowly dawned on me that the entertainment these youths had paid a *rial* for was a kind of aural pornography. What held them in such utter and unaccustomed reverence was nothing less than an impersonation of the wildest cries of female arousal.

The *mawlid* of Sayyida Zaynab is, through no fault of the lady herself, known for rowdiness. Most of the several score others that Cairo celebrates are far tamer, offering fun of the innocent, family kind alongside religious worship. Whatever form they take, *mawlids* clearly exist to fulfil irrepressible needs. This explains why they have survived the scorn of officials and clerics for centuries. But *mawlids* endure only as long as the memory of their *wali*. Although new ones have continued to crop up even in the twentieth century, many have passed from the calendar of the city. These days, sadly, they are under renewed pressure. Commercialization has combined with a loss of neighborhood feeling to take the spirit out of many of the smaller *mawlids*.

More portentously, a puritan movement has increasingly taken hold of Islamic discourse. In contrast to the *mawlid* crowds, its disciples tend to express primordial urges with less joy and more anger.

It would be misleading to imply that *mawlids* are simply a relic of pagan forms of worship.

Although Cairenes had venerated Muslim holy men from the earliest age of Islam, the big boost for sainthood did not come until 350 years after the Arab conquest. Until then Egypt had been a province of the Abbasid Empire whose seat was in distant Baghdad. Cairo—or Misr al-Fustat as it was still known—was merely a provincial capital, an industrial town lacking the splendor of a court.

In AD 969 a new and radically different dynasty swept in from Tunisia and wrested Egypt from Abbasid control. In contrast to the caliphs of Baghdad—Sunni Muslims whose legitimacy sprang from their descent from the Prophet's uncle Abbas—the upstart dynasty claimed a purer provenance, direct from the Prophet's daughter Fatima. The so-called Fatimids were Shi'ite, and so believed that one man in each generation of a certain line of descent from the Prophet held a semi-divine authority to interpret the will of God. Conveniently, this infallible imam was none other than the reigning Fatimid caliph.

Thinking to seclude their court from their subjects, the Fatimids founded a royal precinct a few miles north of Misr al-Fustat. The walled, one-and-a-half-mile-square city was to be an exclusive zone of palaces and parade grounds and private gardens—a sort of precursor to the Kremlin or to the Forbidden City of Beijing. Heeding the advice of astrologers, they called the place al-Qahira after the planet Mars the Triumphant. (Italian traders, with that inability to pronounce that has so often recurred here, soon garbled the name into Cairo.[3]) This was the beginning of the city's golden age. Fustat still prospered, but over time it became a mere satellite of ever-expanding Cairo. For 500 years, under the Fatimids and their successors, Cairo would be the capital of an empire that embraced the holy cities of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem—an empire whose ever-changing borders nudged at one time

or another the Taurus Mountains in the north, the Tigris River in the east, the Yemeni Highlands in the south, and the coasts of Sicily in the west.

Yet the Fatimids faced an immediate problem. The people they ruled—those who were not Christian or Jewish, that is—were overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims. Moreover the Fatimids' purported descent from the Prophet was widely disbelieved. When the conqueror al-Mu'izz li Din Allah—the name means Glorifier of the Faith of Allah—entered Misr al-Fustat on horseback, it was said, an upright citizen had challenged his claim to the title of caliph. Al-Mu'izz thereupon drew his sword. 'Here is my lineage,' he declared. Then, scattering gold coins from his purse, he continued, 'And here is my proof.'

The Fatimids harboured no illusion of winning wholesale conversions to Shi'ism. In any case their version of the creed, influenced by later Greek philosophy, taught that true religion was beyond the understanding of the simple-minded masses. So, rather than antagonize their subjects, the Fatimids set out to dilute their faith with folk belief. Several acknowledged members of the Prophet's family were already buried and venerated at Cairo. These, and the remains of other ancestors which al-Mu'izz purposefully carried with him to his new capital, were now furnished with fancy shrines. Ostentatious alms-giving encouraged devotional visits to these family tombs. Soon the habit of the few became the custom of the many. Tomb visiting became so popular, in fact, that the sixth Fatimid caliph, al-Hakim, was reportedly only narrowly dissuaded from bringing the body of the Prophet himself to Cairo from Medina.

After 200 splendid years—years in which Cairo emerged as the greatest city in Islam—the Fatimid regime declined into decadence and intrigue. Christian crusaders, installed now in Palestine, threatened the Abode of Islam. Seeking allies against the invaders—even Shi'ite heretics—in 1168 a Sunni general by the name of Saladin (or, more properly, Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi) arrived from Syria to enlist support from the foundering Fatimids. To his surprise, Saladin found it easier to shunt Cairo's rulers aside and take command of their empire himself.

Saladin had no genealogical pretensions—he was in any case of Kurdish, not Arab, origin. Instead, he claimed legitimacy from his upholding of Sunni

orthodoxy. Pledging allegiance to the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad, he took for himself the lesser title of Sultan. Saladin stamped our Shi'ite practices by locking up or executing the entire Fatimid court. Reintroducing the old schools of law, he built new colleges and imported Sunni professors from the East to staff them. He opened the imperial precinct of Cairo to the public, requisitioned its palaces for his officers, and ordered the construction of a new and more secure royal residence. This was to be the Citadel, whose turrets and minarets still grace Cairo's skyline.

Just as the Ptolemies had accommodated Memphite beliefs, Saladin's successors saw the wisdom of respecting popular custom. Cairenes continued to revere the illustrious dead—excepting, of course, the later descendants of the Fatimids.[4] The new rulers encouraged them by restoring the Imam al-Shafi'i's shrine, which had fallen into decay along with those of other early Sunni jurists and scholars. They paid officials to oversee Friday tours of Sunni-sanctioned tombs, and even instituted a police force to prevent immoral behavior in the cemetery, which was apparently common. Saladin's nephew al-Kamil al-Ayyubi (1218–38), a statesmanlike sultan who infuriated both Christian and Muslim extremists by agreeing to share control of Jerusalem with the crusaders, occasionally took part in tomb tours himself. He may have been assisted by the publication of guidebooks such as one by a certain Muwaffa al-Din ibn Uthman which advised pilgrims not to kiss the holy men's tombs because this was 'a Christian habit.'

The Ayyubids also encouraged Sufism, the Islamic mysticism that was taking the thirteenth century by storm. Named after the rough *suf* or wool garments its early adherents wore, this new religious approach softened the edges of dry orthodoxy by incorporating esoteric beliefs. Among them was the idea that certain sheikhs became *walis*. (The proper Arabic plural is actually *awliya*.) Like the pharaohs and like the Shi'ite imams, perhaps, these masters grew so close to God that they became vessels for the divine. They could intercede with the Almighty or simply—by touch or speech or thought—dispense his *baraka*. Not surprisingly, these powers were believed by some to follow their sheikhs into the grave. And so yet another constellation of holy tombs began to sprout.

Again, some were the tombs of sheikhs who had well-earned reputations for miracles, or especial kindness or learning. But popular demand for folk heroes led to the elevation of some very suspect characters. For instance, the eighteenth-century historian Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti described a contemporary of his called Sheikh Ali al-Bakri, who earned a reputation for holiness by wandering about the city naked and babbling. Seeing the potential, Sheikh Ali's brother set himself up as a manager and collected pious donations. Sheikh Ali grew enormously fat, wrote al-Jabarti:

> Men and women, and particularly the wives of the grandees, flocked to him with presents and votive offerings which enriched the coffers of his brother. The honours which he received ended not with his death. His funeral was attended by multitudes from every quarter. His brother buried him in the mosque of al-Sharaibee . . . and frequently repaired thither with readers of the Koran, *munshids* to sing odes in his honour, flag-bearers, and other persons who wailed and screamed, rubbed their faces against the bars of the window before his grave, and caught the air of the place in their hands to thrust it into their bosoms and pockets.

Forty years later, Edward Lane remarked that whenever he passed the tomb of Sheikh Ali his servant would touch the bars of its window with his right hand, then kiss his fingers to obtain a blessing.

Lane and al-Jabarti were not alone in scorning such excess. One eighteenth-century governor of the city, when told that a mosque keeper had attracted a following by claiming his goat was an incarnated saint, had the animal roasted and served to its owner. At the end of the nineteenth century the government banned the *dawsa,* a Sufi practice whereby the sheikhs of some orders tested the faith of disciples by riding over their prostrate bodies on horseback. But Cairo's rulers usually preferred to accommodate popular fervor. Early in the eighteenth century angry mobs had forced the authorities to banish a preacher who dared to attack saint worship. Long before—in the fourteenth century—the killjoy cleric Ibn Taymiyya spaked a protest march of 500 Sufis with his railings against 'innovation' in the practice

of Islam. Famed for his severity—he once kicked over a backgammon board in a Cairo street because he disapproved of games, and argued that not just women but pretty adolescent boys too should be veiled from public view—Ibn Taymiyya was eventually locked up in the Citadel. Ironically, on his death he himself was revered for a time as a saint. His tomb in Damascus became a place of pilgrimage.

Nowadays Ibn Taymiyya has stopped turning in his grave. Islam's new fundamentalists have revived his puritan ethics.

Notes

1 The word Shi'ite comes from the *shi'at Ali*, or partisans of al-Husayn's father Ali, who was Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. Shi'ites believe in the divine right of Ali's family to rule—a right contested by the majority of Sunnis.

2 The London *Jewish Chronicle* of 20 July 1906 carries a letter from one Heman Loewe describing the Jewish *mawlid* of Ben Ezra in Old Cairo. Local Muslims and Copts enthusiastically joined the celebrations, he says. The rowdy, drunken crowd inside the synagogue 'went mad' when the Ark bearing sacred scrolls was opened. The fervent mob knocked the author to the ground in the rush to 'snatch and carry away' a sacred scroll. 'I crept out of the synagogue, bruised, gasping and dazed,' he continues. 'Outside, the feasting was going on as before, but it had now developed into an orgy, and there were some very unpleasant features connected with it…'

3 The English word garble, incidentally, is Arabic in origin. *Gharbala*, meaning to sift, passed by way of Cairene spice merchants into the Italian *garbellare*, which meant to sort or select.

4 Later—in the fourteenth century—a property speculator had the Fatimid family tomb by the shrine of al-Husayn demolished. The bodies were exhumed and dumped in the dung heaps outside the city walls. The site of the tombs became the Khan al-Khalili, which to this day is Cairo's chief bazaar for jewellery, hanicrafts and tourist knick-knacks.

André Raymond

Cairo: The Fatimid City

from

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Designed on the model of the caliphal residences of Mahdiyya and Qayrawan in Ifriqiyya as an imperial city, the seat of political power, and the base for Fatimid efforts to encourage the spread of Ismailism, Qahira was never intended to become a true city. Next to it was Fustat, where the masses lived and where the economic activities were pursued that supplied the financial means to maintain the ruling elite. The functional difference between Qahira and Fustat was not fated to persist. Even before the end of the Fatimid dynasty and the accession of the Ayyubids, whose policies and work would signally affect the history of the capital, Qahira started to change into a veritable city.

Jawhar had only sketched in the palaces that were to be at the center of his new city, following a plan that clearly emulated the one implemented by the Mahdi Ubayd Allah in Mahdiyya. The Eastern and Western Palaces lay on either side of the main thoroughfare, which was designed by Mu‘izz to run in an almost straight line from north to south between Bab al-Futuh and Bab Zuwayla. The avenue widened in the middle to form a square known as Bayn al-Qasrayn.

The palaces were not compact structures, as at Versailles. Rather, they consisted of a scattered complex of buildings. The space designated by Paul Ravaisse as belonging to the Great Eastern Palace covers approximately nine hectares. Begun in 970 by Jawhar, who built a mausoleum in the southwest corner to inhume the remains of the sovereigns he had carried with him from Ifriqiyya, it was completed by al-Aziz (975–996) with the construction of the Golden Palace (Qasr al-Dhahab) and the Great Iwan (open hall). But structures were added to it until the middle of the twelfth century: the vizir al Ma'mun al-Bata'ihi (1122–1125) built three pavilions (*manazir*) there. The palace comprised three rectangular buildings, while the northeast quadrant formed an esplanade, Festival Square (Rahbat al-Id), measuring 157 by 105 meters, where the caliph's retinue assembled before processions.

The palace had nine main gates: three to the west, one to the north, three to the east, and two to the south. The largest and finest of these was the Golden Gate (Bab al-Dhahab), which opened in the middle of the western façade and whose uprights were made of the gold millstones brought by Jawhar from Ifriqiyya. Through the archway, some 30 meters high, one gained access to several of the palace's main halls. The western façade (345 meters long) apparently ran along a line some 25 meters back from the present course of Mu'izz li-din Allah Street, which occupies what was once Bayn al-Qasrayn. The north façade had only one gate, the Gate of the Wind (Bab al-Rih), which was used by the devout in coming to hear the chief propagandist *(da'i)*. This gate survived until 1408 and was seen by Maqrizi. The east façade is described by Maqrizi in less detail, probably because it fell into ruin soon after the palace was abandoned. The Emerald Gate (Bab al-Zumurrud) led into the Emerald Palace, the caliph's residence. On the south façade was the Daylam Gate, which opened onto a monument that was to become the shrine *(mashhad)* of al-Husayni. The head of Husayn (son of Ali, killed in 680 at the battle of Kerbela in Iraq) was deposited there after it was discovered at Askalon and treaty concluded with the Franks to allow its transfer to Cairo in 1153. The Gate of the al-Za'faran Tomb *(turbat)* led to a mausoleum intended as a burial-place for the Fatimids. When the Khan al-Khalili was later built on this site, the skeletons buried there were loaded into baskets and thrown onto the mounds of rubble east of the city. When

the man responsible for this desecration, Emir Jaharkas al-Khalili, died an ignoble death in Damascus in 1389, Maqrizi read it as a judgment from on high: "His body was left where it fell, naked, his genitals uncovered, his flesh swollen . . . . His corpse rotted in place. Such was the punishment God dealt him for having handled disrespectfully the bones of the imams and their descendants."

The Eastern Palace contained several buildings surrounded by gardens where the daily life and ritual of the court took place. Their loveliness and luxury have been described by William of Tyre, who walked through them at the time of his audience with the last Fatimid caliph, Adid, in 1167. After passing through a number of long, narrow vaulted alleys "where you could not see a thing," the Franks emerged into a vast open courtyard paved in various colors of marble set off with gold and surrounded by magnificent columned porticos.

> It was so beautiful, so pleasant to the eye, that the most preoccupied man would have stopped to look at it. There was a fountain in the center, fed on all sides by gold and silver channels carrying water of admirable clarity . . . Flitting here and there were an infinite variety of birds of the rarest colors . . . brought from different parts of the Orient, which no one saw without marveling.

In another and still more luxurious garden, the knights saw a menagerie of quadrupeds so strange "that whoever gave a description of them would be accused of lies." Of the buildings, the most remarkable was the caliph's residence. William describes the sumptuousness of the great audience hall, where a large "hanging composed of gold thread and silk of every color, inset with animals, birds, and people, sparkling with rubies, emeralds, and a thousand rich stuffs" was whisked away to reveal the caliph "seated on a gold throne studded with gems and precious stones."

In addition to the Golden Hall, the palace had many pavilions surrounded by gardens for members of the ruling family and the court, as well as areas devoted to catering to the needs of this court, whose number Nasir-i Khusraw estimated at 30,000. East of the palace was the Storehouse of Standards

(Khizanat al-Bunud), the arsenal where arms were manufactured. To the southwest were the kitchens, from which, writes Maqrizi, during the month of Ramadan, "one daily saw twelve hundred pots emerge laden with every kind of food for distribution among pensioners and the poor." The palace gate on that side was named "Bab Zuhuma . . . or Gate of the Kitchen Odors, because all the meats and other victuals passed through this gate" by means of an underground passage that joined the kitchens to the palace. The name remained in use into the modern era: the *Description de l'Egypte*, written six centuries after the fall of the Fatimids, mentions it in a scarcely altered form as "Bab el-Zoumeh." Awed by the court's magnificence, Nasir-i Khusraw records that fifty people worked full-time in the kitchens, and that fourteen camel loads of snow were delivered each day to the sultan's pantries. After visiting the banquet hall at the end of Ramadan 1049, the traveler added that 50,000 minas of sugar were used to decorate the sultan's table, on which he saw "a tree resembling an orange tree whose branches, leaves, and fruits were made of sugar; also decorating the table were a thousand statuettes and figurines equally made of sugar."

The small Western Palace, located on the other side of the Great Avenue (Shari al-Azam), consisted of a central structure with two wings at either end. This design allowed for the vast rectangular Between the Two Palaces esplanade, Bayn al-Qasrayn, measuring 105 by 255 meters and covering an area of 2.5 hectares. According to Nasir-i Khusraw, an underground passage allowed the sovereign to go from one palace to the other on horseback. Distinctly less expansive at 4.5 hectares, the Western Palace occupied land that had once formed the eastern end of Kafur's gardens. The caliph Aziz (975–996) built it for his daughter, Sitt al-Mulk, and it was completed in 1064 by al-Mustansir, who planned to install the caliph of Baghdad there. This palace is less well known to us than the Eastern Palace because its façade was replaced by a series of large religious edifices built between 1225 and 1384 by the Ayyubid and Mamluk sultans. Its southern portion was taken over by the large hospital *(maristan)* of sultan Qalawun (1284), which seems to have preserved a part of the original layout, a set of four open rooms arranged to form a cross around a pool.

This central complex was surrounded by ancillary buildings, some of which were later additions. The stables occupied two buildings: one, the Rotunda, lay to the southeast, just north of the Mosque of al-Azhar; the other, the Sycamore Stable, was south of the Western Palace. Each could hold 500 horses and had a large complement of stableboys, grooms, keepers, and equerries. The palace storehouses, which were south of the Eastern Palace, contained books, beverages, harnesses, tents, rugs, and clothing. The Hall of Knowledge (Dar al-Ilm) was established by al-Amir in 1116 on a site just outside the southwest corner of the palace so as to lessen the scandal caused by freely voiced controversies on problems of politics and religion. The Palace of the Vizirate (Dar al-Wizara), the official residence of the vizirs until the end of the Fatimid caliphate, was built after 1094 by al-Afdal, the son and successor to the vizir Badr al-Jamali. The ironwork grill *(shubbak)* that separated the vizir from those in the audience hall still existed in Maqrizi's time.

As the center of political and court life, the palace area and the Bayn al-Qasrayn at its heart were the setting for an elaborate ceremonial. Maqrizi observes that movement was strictly regulated in Cairo, particularly near the palace, where "fifty horsemen kept watch at night near the palace gate." After the last prayer, an emir known as the Sinan al-Dawla would come out on the threshold of the palace gates:

> He would order the band leader to let the drums and trumpets sound, which they did, accompanied by other instruments, playing beautiful music for about an hour. Then an officer . . . came out of the palace and announced: "The Emir of the Believers sends greetings to Sinan al-Dawla." He would flourish a spear and strike it into the ground before the gate, then remove it and pull the gate shut, afterward going around the palace seven times . . . . He posted the night watchmen and their pages . . . . A chain [*silsila*] was stretched across the narrowest section of the Bayn al-Qasrayn. From that moment on, traffic creased in the square until the sentry band [*nawcha*] announced the dawn. The chain was then removed and traffic could resume.

The large square itself served as a setting for ceremonies and resplendent parades, whether civil, religious, or military. Ten thousand armed men, cavalry and infantry, could gather there, Maqrizi assures us.

The general structure of the city was strictly organized by Jawhar from the start. The Shari al-Azam and the Qasaba (Boulevard) formed its north-south axis. Intersecting this broad, straight thoroughfare, secondary streets led to the areas where the various contingents of the Fatimid army were housed and that gradually developed into the city's "quarters," while the empty space between them gradually filled in as Qahira turned into a true city. East of the central artery was a parallel road, eventually to become the Jamaliyya, which ended at Bab al-Nasr. It was to play an important role in the caliph's official life, being used, for example, for processions beyond the city walls to the place of prayer at the *musalla*.

Qahira was first a city reserved for the caliph, his court, and his army corps. Writing around 1050, Nasir-i Khusraw notes that "no one may own a house or building [there] unless he has had it built himself." But the presence of a large population living at the court or in houses in the vacant areas between the quarters inevitably led to increased commercial activity on the part of artisans and shopkeepers, given Fustat's great distance. Nasir-i Khusraw notes the existence of some 20,000 shops in the caliphal city (an obvious exaggeration), "which are all the sultan's property" and were leased by the shopkeepers. The traveler reveals that he lodged in Qahira on one of the upper floors of a four-story house. Specialized markets began to appear very early on: the market of the roasters *(shawwa'in)* was established near Bab Zuwayla as early as 975.

Maqrizi mentions other markets as well: the market of the wax-makers *(shamma'in)* near the Mosque of Aqmar, and that of the moneychangers near Bab al-Zuhuma—both along the central artery of the Qasaba, which was destined for a great commercial future. He also mentions eight public baths founded during Fatimid times in different quarters of Qahira. Although most of the local economy remained grounded in Fustat, which impressed travelers for its vitality, some commercial activities began to take root in Qahira itself. Early concerns with city planning, as described by Maqrizi in a discussion of established usages on the Qasaba during the Fatimid period are telling.

A Byzatine ambassador arriving in Cairo, he notes, "would alight at Bab al-Futuh, where he kissed the ground, before continuing on foot toward the palace," suggesting the almost holy character of the royal city. Yet a few lines later, Maqrizi cites regulations that illustrate the direction in which the city was evolving: in 992 water carriers were ordered to cover their containers to avoid splashing passersby; in 993 the caliph Aziz ordered that a large jar full of water be placed in from of every shop as a precaution against fire; in 1001 Hakim ordered inhabitants to light the city by placing lanterns in front of shops and house entrances; in 1005 people were forbidden to enter Qahira riding an animal led by a mule-driver, and no passage was allowed along the palace wall between Bab Zuhuma and Bab al-Zumurrud. All these edict indicate that the avenue and the city quickly showed a secular character, which became more pronounced with time.

As Qahira became "citified" it began to extend beyond the limits fixed by Jawhar. Even at its foundation, or at least very soon afterward, certain parts of the army were quartered beyond the walls for lack of space: black troops, for instance, were quartered outside Bab Zuwayla; and Husayniyya, which became a suburb of Cairo, owes its name to a tribal contingent quartered there. Aziz, and al-Hakim after him, built the great Mosque of al-Hakim outside Mu'izz's north wall. A certain amount of development occurred in this area with the construction of belvederes around the *musalla* and the subsequent establishment of cemeteries. To the west, where parks and gardens extended to the Khalij, pavilions were built, and the area became a popular place for walks. To the south, probably because of the road leading toward Fustat, a few quarters developed. To the east, on the other hand, mounds of rubble thrown against the far side of the walls to protect the city from the water coming down the mountain effectively stopped the city's spread and fixed its limits. But Qahira's expansion during its first century was limited. When, between 1087 and 1092, the great vizir Badr al-Jamali decided to build a second wall around Qahira, he enclosed only a small amount of new territory, including the Mosque of al-Hakim in the north and an extra 200 meters in the south, for a total increase of 24 hectares. This brought Qahira's area to 160 hectares, which would remain constant for this part of Cairo until 1798. If this

enlargement reflects the total progress of urban development in slightly more than a century, its modesty is apparent.

Badr's public works were nonetheless of considerable importance in the history of Cairo. Jawhar's ramparts had consisted of nothing more than a very inadequate earthen wall that quickly disappeared. It was probably the establishment of the Seljuks in Syria that prompted the vizir's decision to install a wall of real military value around the capital. The new enclosure wall, as we have noted, was built outside Jawhar's original one, which explains why there are quarters to the east and west known as Between the Two Walls (Bayn al-Surayn), but the enclosed area was enlarged mainly to the north and south. Portions of this wall with its square or rectangular salients have survived in the northeast quadrant, its monumental stone gates in particular. The Bab al-Futuh (built in 1087) and Bab al-Nasr (1087) on the north wall, and the Bab Zuwayla (1092) on the south wall offer remarkable examples of Middle Eastern military art. They were the work of Armenian architects brought in from Edessa, in eastern Turkey, which explains their Byzantine-Syrian style. The two northern gates have offset entries, and all are protected by blanking towers, square ones in the case of Bab al-Nasr, rounded in the others. In terms of their size (8 meters in height), strength, and severity of decoration, they are among the grandest of Cairo's monuments and lasting models for Muslim architects.

The Fatimids constructed their great religious edifices inside the royal city—the only exceptions being the mausoleums *(mashahid)* built to the south of Qahira particularly and the Mosque of al-Juyushi on top of the Muqattam Hills. The Fatimid predilection for this kind of building, dedicated to a member of the family of the Prophet or Ali, obviously reflects a political intent (to bolster the dynasty's prestige) or a religious one (to popularize Shiite concepts). The most remarkable products of Fatimis architecture and decoration, the palaces, are known to us only from descriptions and fragmentary elements. It is therefore from the few surviving mosques that we can understand the originality of Fatimid art and its persistent influence.

The art that developed in Egypt under the Fatimids was truly a national art. Originally from North Africa but linked by their religion to Persia, the Fatimids encouraged an art that brought together highly diverse influences

and was characteristic for its freedom and its realism in representing animate beings. The Fatimid mosques retained the hypostyle plan, with arcades supported on columns around a courtyard. The facades were aligned with the street, a trait that would persist in Cairene architecture, and were highly ornamented (as in the Mosques of Aqmar and Tala'i). The prayer niche was enhanced architecturally, either by a dome, a transept, or a widening of the aisle. The minarets took the *mabkhara*, or incense burner form, with an octagonal section supporting a ribbed helmet that would remain characteristic of Cairo's minarets for the next two centuries. The Fatimid period introduced such decorative elements as the keel-arched niche with a fluked radiating hood, a reworking of a theme widely used in Coptic art.

Except for the Mosque of al-Azhar, built on the edge of the city center next to the Great Palace, the main mosques in Qahira were built along the major axis of the Qasaba. The first two, al-Azhar (970) and al-Hakim (990–1003), which are also the largest, seem strongly influenced by the Mosque of Ibn Tulun: a central courtyard, surrounded by porticoes, with aisles parallel to the wall of the *qibla*. But there is also a marked resemblance to the mosque of Mahdiyya, with a stressing of the axis of the *mihrab* (domes and central transept) and, in the case of the Mosque of al-Hakim, a projecting entry.

To Mosque of al-Azhar, which has been thoroughly expanded and rebuilt (the last time at the end of the eighteenth century by Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda), formed a rectangle measuring 88 by 70 meters, with a large central court surrounded by three arcades (keel arches supported on pre-Islamic columns) and a sanctuary 85 by 25 meters with five aisles. The original minaret has disappeared. Most of the additions to the façade and the minarets date to the Mamluk period. The decorative elements reflect the influence of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun but derive from different periods of Fatimid art, as work continued on the mosque until the reign of Hafiz (1129–1149). The decoration includes stucco work with realistic designs (palm tree).

The Mosque of al-Hakim, situated outside Mu'izz's north gates, was begun under the caliph Aziz in 990 and completed in 1003. This enormous monument (123 by 115 meters) has features of the Mosques of Ibn Tulun (pointed arches resting on rectangular brick piers) and al-Azahr, but the façade, with its monumental portal and projecting minaret bases, shows the

influence of the mosque in Mahdiyya. The two minarets on the façade are very original in shape and decoration: in 1010, for reasons unknown, the caliph Hakim decided to hide them partially in a kind of pyramidal stone casing. The tops that emerge from the stone casing were restored during the Mamluk period. The courtyard is lined on four sides by porticoes. The sanctuary, like those of Ibn Tulun and al-Azhar, has five aisles.

Built much later, the Mosques of Aqmar (1125) and Salih Tala'i (1160) are on a more modest scale, being the work of to vizirs, Ma'mun al-Bata'ihi (Caliph Amir) and Tala'i ibn Ruzzik (Caliphs Fa'iz and Adid). The inside dimensions of the Mosque of Aqmar are 28 by 18 meters. Yet the architecture and decoration of these two structures are not without innovation. The façade of the Mosque of Aqmar, just north of the two palaces, is aligned with the street although the building itself is oriented toward Mecca—a formula that would often be repeated. The façade is heavily ornamented, and its elements—the keel arch, radiating shell motif, and stalactites (the first to appear on a Cairene façade)—would have a strong influence in Cairo. The Mosque of Salih Tala'i, south of Bab Zuwayla just on the way out of Qahira, was intended as a sanctuary for the head of Husayn (which would ultimately be housed in a shrine inside the city on the site of today's Husayni Mosque). It, too, is a strikingly original monument: the façade incorporates a columned portico, unique among Cairo's monuments, and arched recesses with grilled windows that would be used in most later mosques in Cairo.

Both mosques were "suspended," or built above a row of street-level shops. Because of the subsequent rising of the street level, the shops are now more than 2 meters below it. One of the characteristics of Cairene architecture of the twelfth century is the plethora of influences at work: Byzantine (and, in its provincial from, Coptic) in the decorative elements (shell pattern in the niches, capitals): Syrian (stone construction of the minarets and gates); Persian (arches, cupolas); Mesopotamian (recesses in the walls); North African (architectural elements). Drawing on so many traditions, Fatimid art began to offer a synthesis and an art that was truly Egyptian. The role played by Christian architects (the gates in Badr al-Jamali's wall are attributed to three Armenian brothers from Edessa who were probably Christian) is another example of the relative ecumenism of the Fatimids.

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The Mamluks

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When al-Salih Ayyub died, his widow, a resolute Turkish woman named Shajar al-Durr, took control of the situation. Working with a powerful Mamluk named Fakhr al-Din, she concealed the news of her husband's death and forged his signature to decrees. The army, government, and people were compelled to swear loyalty to al-Salih Ayyub and his heir al-Muazzan Turan-Shah. That bought time for Turan-Shah to come from his remote principality in upper Mesopotamia. Meanwhile, she appointed Fakhr al-Din commander-in-chief and entrusted him with administrative control of the country. According to the historian Ibn Wasil, "The Sultan's decrees were to be issued at her command and in her name, and marked with her royal stamp." Ibn Wasil is explicit about Shajar al-Durr's status: "From that time she became titular head of the whole state; a royal stamp was issued in her name . . . and the *khutba*[1] was pronounced in her name as Sultana of Cairo and all Egypt. This was an event without precedent throughout the Muslim world."[2]

The Franks attacked Mansura in February 1250. The fighting was intense; Fakhr al-Din was killed, but his Mamluk soldiers performed valiantly,

and the Crusader assault failed. The new sultan Turan-Shah arrived, and the Crusaders' position before Mansura became untenable. Their retreat to Damietta deteriorated into disaster; Louis IX was taken prisoner. His queen had to negotiate the surrender of Damietta and the release of her husband for an enormous sum, literally a king's ransom. The Crusaders evacuated Egypt in May 1250, but Turan-Shah had no opportunity to enjoy the triumph, for he was murdered by a conspiracy within the Bahri Mamluks who were offended by promotion of his Mamluks over them. They also resented his ill treatment of Shajar al-Durr, who was a fellow Turk and who was probably part of the conspiracy to kill him. His murder marked the end of the Ayyubid dynasty and the beginning of centuries of Mamluk rule in Egypt.

Because she was a woman, Shajar al-Durr could not take personal command of the army, and some outlying dominions refused to acknowledge her rule, so she married a Bahri Mamluk named Aybeg al-Turkumani. But the power continued to lie with Shajar al-Durr, who controlled Aybeg. When Aybeg attempted to consolidate his position by promoting his Mamluks and making a significant marriage alliance by taking another wife, Shajar al-Durr had him killed in his bath in April 1257. A faction formed around his young son, however, and Shajar al-Durr was herself killed a few days later.

Using Aybeg's son as a shadow sultan, leading Mamluks maneuvered for power in a pattern that would be repeated throughout the Mamluk Period. For a time the ascendancy was with Kutuz, one of Aybeg's favored Mamluks, who already held key state positions. Another threat from outside immediately appeared. Since their unification under Ghengis Khan, the Mongols had swept out of their homeland, overrunning China, Central Asia, Russia, and much of Central Europe, driven by dreams of world conquest, dreams that often seemed horrifyingly possible. In 1255, under command of the Great Khan's brother Hülegü, they invaded Syria and Mesopotamia, capturing Baghdad in 1258, devastating the city and killing the caliph. Aleppo and Damascus fell the following year, with the Crusaders of Tripoli and Antioch lending aid to the Mongols. The conquest of Egypt was the Mongols' next objective. Hülegü dispatched envoys to Cairo with a terrifying ultimatum:

> Be warned by the fate of others and hand over your power to us before the veil is torn and you are sorry and your errors rebound upon you. For we do not pity those who weep, nor are we tender to those who complain. You have heard that we have conquered the lands and cleansed the earth of corruption and killed most of the people. . . . You have no deliverance from our swords, no escape from the terror of our arms. Our horses are swift in pursuit, our arrows piercing, our swords like thunderbolts, our hearts like rocks, our numbers like sand. Fortresses cannot withstand us; armies are of no avail in fighting us. . . . If you resist you will be destroyed.[3]

Nor were these empty words, as many had learned. No one had been able to withstand the Mongol onslaught.

But Kutuz, strongly supported by the Bahri Mamluk faction in Syria and its prominent member Baybars, chose to resist. He answered Hülegü's letter by cutting the envoys in two and putting their heads on display at Bab Zuweila. Not waiting to be attacked, Kutuz led his army north to Palestine, spurning an offer of support from the Latin kingdom, and found the Mongols at Ain Jalut near Mount Gilboa. The desperate battle, which came on 3 September 1260, resulted in complete victory for the Mamluks. Though coming close to defeat more than once, Kutuz rallied the Mamluks, who smashed the Mongol army, killing many. A Mamluk pursuing force under Baybars chased the survivors out of Syria. The Mongols, it might be noted, were weakened by the departure of their leader Hülegü after the death of his brother the Great Khan, and they were operating at extreme distance from their bases. Even so, the Mamluk victory was a great feat of arms; it was also decisive, winning northern Syria for the Mamluks and freeing Egypt from the threat of Mongol invasion.

When he distributed Syrian principalities to the Mamluk amirs, Kutuz passed over Baybars, who had distinguished himself at Ain Jalut, just as he had against the Crusaders at Damietta, even though he had been promised Aleppo. This reignited factional sensibilities among the Bahri Mamluks, who resented Kutuz and his rival faction. Kutuz was returning to Egypt when

Baybars and some accomplices killed him on a hunting trip. Baybars thereupon claimed the sultanate. His reign is one of the outstanding chapters in Mamluk history and legend, for the *Life of Baybars* became immensely popular and was performed by professional reciters for centuries.

Before turning to the political history of the Mamluk Period, something should be said about the extraordinary organization of this military elite that dominated Egypt for the next several hundred years. Inductees were purchased as young boys in slave markets, often on the Black Sea, beyond the realm of Islam. Agents transported them to Egypt where they were repurchased by heads of the various Mamluk houses, or perhaps by the sultan, who was often a Mamluk himself and who headed the largest Mamluk house of all. The youth became part of a Mamluk household and was instructed in Islam and trained in the arts of war, especially horsemanship. At the conclusion of his education, when he attained manhood, he received his freedom and usually continued to serve in his former master's personal train of knights; later he might start a household of his own and become an amir, or commander, the measure of his power being how many Mamluks he could afford to buy.

Members of Mamluk households, whose heraldic emblems were proudly displayed and worn, developed strong loyalties to their own households and rivalries with others. The restored house of the amir Taz, near the Mosque of Ibn Tulun, provides a good example of a great Mamluk household. Taz was purchased as a boy by Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad. After gaining the favor of the sultan, who made him his saki, or cupbearer, Taz was given his freedom and rose rapidly, first becoming an amir of ten Mamluks and finally of a thousand, establishing himself as one of the six most important amirs in the land. Powerful Mamluks like Taz dominated the highest offices of state through this remarkable system that could enable a boy to rise from slavery to a level where he could make or break sultans, or even become the sultan. The expensive Mamluk lifestyle was supported by extensive grants called *iltizams*. These were essentially a process of tax farming that gave the people who were awarded them, called *multazims*, virtual control of the land and its produce. This of course imposed a heavy burden on the peasantry, whose position

became ever more wretched as increasing exactions were imposed on them. Most of the revenue from the land in Egypt went to the Mamluks.

A crucial aspect of this unique system is that it was not hereditary. Almost all its members were first generation. The sons of Mamluks might someday be given good government posts, but they were not Mamluks and could never be accepted into the Mamluk oligarchy. The only way to become a Mamluk was by being purchased as a slave and rising through one of the Mamluk military households. When a Mamluk died or otherwise vanished from the political scene, his estate was reassigned to other Mamluks. At its apogee, the Mamluk Empire was a formidable power. Much more coherent than the Ayyubid Empire, its outlying provinces were ruled by governors answerable to the sultan, not by autonomous princes with unclear loyalties and power relationships. Internal affairs were eased by a reformed legal system. A sophisticated diplomatic service maintained relations as far east as the Golden Horde and with the maritime kingdom and city states of Aragon, Genoa, and Venice in the west. Byzantium received careful diplomatic attention, and relations with the Crusader kingdoms required constant activity, since truces had to be renegotiated constantly. Through their control of important trade routes, the Mamluks grew wealthy from commerce. Expeditions into Nubia reestablished Egyptian control there and maintained the *baqt*, the annual levy of slaves that the Nubians were required to send north.

The Mamluks also enhanced their prestige through shrewd religious policy. In addition to restoring the caliphate, they asserted a special relationship with the holy cities Mecca and Medina. The Cairo Caravan was already one of the major components of the annual hajj; now the Mamluks obtained the coveted privilege of making and sending to Mecca the *kiswa*, the curtain that covered the Kaaba, the focus of the pilgrimage. The Mamluk sultans were awarded the title "Servitor of the Two August Sanctuaries." The Mamluk sultans also encouraged Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, and endowed many Sufi convents throughout their realms. Mamluk policies toward Christians and Jews, however, were harsher than those of the preceding regimes.

The rise of Sultan Baybars (1260–77) was a classic Mamluk success story, from his purchase as a boy slave through his training in a military household and his ascent to the pinnacles of social and political power. After defeating the Mongols at Ain Jalut and murdering Kutuz, he assumed the throne in Cairo on 25 November 1260. Relying on his firm base among the Bahri Mamluks, he maintained good relations with key Mamluk magnates who assumed posts of high administrative importance. In 1261 he restored the Abbasid caliphate in Cairo, installing an Abbasid prince who had fled the sack of Baghdad. The office no longer had significant political authority but retained considerable prestige, and it was useful for ratifying and processing legal matters. The caliph's presence bestowed additional legitimacy on the regime. Baybars' large mosque, built in 1266–67, is a prominent monument in northern Cairo.

Baybars was especially concerned with Syria, where the last of the Abbasid principalities, wrecked by the Mongols, had fallen into Mamluk control. Those areas had to be organized. The menace of the Mongols also remained just over the horizon, so he had to be prepared to meet them, but Baybars' major efforts were directed against the Crusader states. These were not nearly as strong as they had been, lacking capable leaders and divided by numerous jurisdictions; besides their governments, important crusading organizations like the Knights Templar jealously guarded their prerogatives. Above all, the Crusader states lacked a steady supply of fighting men from Europe, where support for the Crusades was intermittent. Displaying generalship that can be favorably compared to Salah al-Din's, Baybars campaigned against the Crusaders almost every season, achieving a stunning stream of successes. His raids reached the walls of Acre. In 1268 he captured Antioch; in 1271 he took Krak des Chevaliers, the strongest of all the Crusader castles.

During his final years Baybars devoted much of his energy to making the sultanate hereditary, but his careful plans for the succession lasted only a short time before his sons were shunted aside by an old Mamluk colleague, another Kipchak Turk named Qalawun, who took the title as well as the power of the sultanate for himself. Once he had consolidated his position—no easy task—Qalawun pursued a policy similar to that of Baybars. He was heavily involved in Syria, where he too had to keep a watchful eye out for a

resurgent Mongol threat. After removing that danger by defeating a second Mongol invasion of Syria at Hims in October 1281, he likewise turned to the remaining Crusader possessions, which were weaker than ever, riven by a disputed claim to the crown of the Latin kingdom and by other fissures that ran throughout the collapsing Crusader system. When Qalawun captured Tripoli in April 1289, the only major city remaining to the Crusaders was Acre. He had gathered his forces for an assault on that city when he died in November 1290.

Like Baybars, Qalawun wanted to establish the succession in his family, and he was somewhat more effective in doing so. His son al-Ashraf Khalil succeeded peacefully to the throne and completed his father's military initiatives by conquering Acre and mopping up the remaining Crusader coastal enclaves, expelling the Crusaders entirely from the mainland, but he fell victim to court animosity and Mamluk rivalry. His father had begun a practice, one that al-Ashraf Khalil expanded, of importing Circassian Mamluks. These became known as Burgi ('Tower') Mamluks because Qalawun quartered them in the towers of the Citadel. The Bahri Mamluks, primarily of Turkish origin, resented the Burgis' presence and the favors shown to them. When al-Ashraf Khalil was killed by a disgruntled Bahri magnate in December 1293, a violent confrontation ensued between the Bahris and Burgis that was resolved by installing the late sultan's child half-brother on the throne.

The ensuing reign of al-Malik al-Nasir Muhammad covered nearly half a century and was interrupted by two usurpations and restorations. During its first phase he was a shadow sultan; during the second, a genuine autocrat. The uncertainty surrounding his early years was demonstrated by his deposition in December 1294 after a rule of just one year and replacement by a Bahri Mamluk amir who was overthrown two years later in the ongoing struggles between the Mamluk factions. After that latest ruler was murdered at prayers in January 1299, the fourteen-year-old al-Nasir Muhammad was brought forth from the Citadel, where he had been carefully kept in reserve, and reinstalled as a stopgap sultan. The force behind the throne was an uneasy coalition of two Mamluk amirs, Salar and Baybars al-Jashnikir, one representing the Bahris, the other the Burgis.

Yet the state could still function effectively, as was shown by the defeat of the last great Mongol threat in 1303. The Mongols were approaching Damascus when the Mamluk army, headed by Salar, Baybars al-Jashnikir, and al-Nasir Muhammad met and destroyed them. Frustrated that his attempts to gain actual power were repeatedly thwarted by Salar and Baybars al-Jashnikir, al-Nasir Muhammad abdicated in 1309 and withdrew to a stronghold to work for an effective restoration. Baybars al-Jashnikir replaced him as sultan, but support for the amirs was crumbling amid continuing factionalism and general hardship caused by a series of low Niles and epidemic disease, enabling al-Nasir Muhammad, now aged twenty-five, to return as sultan for the second time in March 1310. Baybars al-Jashnikir was strangled in his presence the following month. Salar attempted to come to terms with the resurgent al-Nasir Muhammad, but he was arrested and executed in August. In a purge of the Mamluk establishment, al-Nasir Muhammad arrested twenty-two amirs and raised thirty-two of his own Mamluks to the amirate; two years later he promoted forty-six more.

Al-Nasir Muhammad's reign from his second restoration in 1310 until its end in 1341 was extraordinarily free of foreign problems, enabling him to devote much of his time and energy to internal matters, particularly fiscal reform. His restored rule was marred, however, by a serious wave of anti-Christian riots that swept Cairo in 1321. Many Christians were massacred and their churches looted and destroyed; Copts were expelled from government offices, and sumptuary laws such as prohibitions against Christians riding horses and requirements to wear distinctive clothing were enforced. Many Copts converted to Islam in the aftermath of the persecution.

As he had wished, al-Nasir Muhammad was succeeded by his descendents, preserving the Qalawunid line for several decades, but none of these sultans had any real power. The first reigned merely a few weeks before being deposed in favor of a younger brother, who was replaced by yet another brother, also deposed. Thus in little more than a year, three of al-Nasir Muhammad's sons were moved in and out of the sultanate (and eventually were all killed), and later yet more followed, but none lasted long. More than a score of sultans reigned in the century following Qalawun's death, and nearly as many in the next century. The power almost always lay with the

Mamluk magnates, who sometimes assumed the sultanate, but often ruled through shadow sultans.

One of al-Nasir Muhammad's successors who displayed some of his energy and objective was his son al-Nasir Hasan, who became sultan in 1347 at the age of eleven when his predecessor, his half-brother al-Muzaffar Hajji, was killed in an unsuccessful confrontation with Mamluk amirs. When Sultan Hasan attempted to assert himself in August 1351, he was deposed, to be restored three years later after making a compact with the amirs. This time, however, Sultan Hasan was determined to exercise real power. Using his household Mamluks to good effect, he battled dissident forces; he suppressed the mighty Mamluk who was the power behind the throne; and he appointed descendents of Mamluks to the highest military and administrative posts, an unprecedented move that he defended: "These people are reliable and under my flag. They go where I tell them, and when I want to remove them from office, I can do so easily. Also they treat my subjects kindly, and understand the regulations." Sultan Hasan anticipated the inevitable backlash from the Mamluk magnates; even so, his supporters were defeated in a fight, and he was killed in March 1361 by a Mamluk named Yalbogha who had been brought up in his household, ending an innovative experiment of adjustment and development of the Mamluk regime.

Sultan Hasan's first period of rule coincided with the cataclysmic Black Death that struck Egypt in fall of 1347. Al-Maqrizi recounted its appearance: "A ship arrived in Alexandria. Aboard it were thirty-two merchants and a total of three hundred people—among them traders and slaves. Nearly all of then had died. There was no one alive on the ship, save four of the traders, one slave, and about forty sailors. These survivors died in Alexandria."

This was the bubonic plague, a highly contagious, fast-killing disease from Central Asia, spread by a symbiosis of fleas and rodents. Within a year it had run throughout Egypt with appalling mortality. In Cairo, a thousand people a day were dying. The city was described as "an empty desert" through which one could walk from one end to the other without seeing another person. By the time the Black Death abated in Egypt in 1349, a third of the country's population had died of it. Visitations of bubonic plague became a recurring feature in Egypt, abruptly diminishing the population. In the fifteenth

century alone there were no less than nine severe outbreaks. The last great epidemic of plague in Egypt, deadly as ever, occurred in 1834–35.

The devastation of the disease had the paradoxical effect of enabling Sultan Hasan to construct one of the most remarkable buildings in the Islamic world, his enormous madrasa at the foot of the Citadel. Partly made of stone from the Pyramids of Giza, it is inlaid with other fine stone, all rendered with exquisite workmanship, although the decoration was never finished. It was built with astonishing speed considering the conditions of the time between 1356 and 1361—too quickly, perhaps, because an intended fourth minaret over the entrance toppled in 1361, killing several hundred people. One of the remaining three collapsed in 1659, and the dome fell in a year later. According to al-Maqrizi, the expense of the madrasa was colossal, but money was flooding into the treasury at an unprecedented rate from death duties and confiscation of estates without heirs.

Having disposed of Sultan Hasan, Yalbogha ruled behind shadow sultans. It was during the nominal reign of the second of these, a grandson of al-Nasir Muhammad named al-Ashraf Shaban (whose father, remarkably, was never sultan), that Egypt suffered its last blow from the Crusades in the form of an attack on Alexandria by Peter I of Lusignan, the Crusader king of Cyprus and titular king of Jerusalem, in October 1365. The death and destruction dealt by the Crusaders as they captured the city was vividly described by al-Maqrizi:

> The Franks took the people with the sword. They plundered everything they found, taking many prisoners and captives, and burning many places. The number of those who perished in the crush at the Rosetta Gate was beyond counting. . . . So they continued, killing, taking prisoners and captives, plundering and burning from the forenoon of Friday to the early morning of Sunday.[4]

But the objectives of this Crusade of Alexandria remain unclear, for after only eight days the Franks loaded their loot and a thousand captives into their

ships and sailed away before the relieving force from Cairo under Yalbogha arrived. Yalbogha was killed in yet another round of factional fighting in December of the following year.

The dynasty of Qalawun came to an end in November 1382, when the Circassian Mamluk amir Barquq deposed its last representative, al-Salih Hajji, and took the sultanate, initiating the era of Burgi Mamluk rule. His position was precarious at first as he was surrounded by powerful amirs, and in June 1389 he was deposed by some of them in favor of al-Salih Hajji. But their coalition soon dissolved, and Barquq returned as sultan at the beginning of the following year, permitting al-Salih Hajji to enjoy a comfortable retirement in the Citadel. This time Barquq took care to install amirs favorable to him and was able to die peacefully in 1399.

Like other Mamluk sultans, Barquq had also hoped to found a dynasty, but he and other like-minded Burgi sultans did not enjoy even the nominal successes in this regard that their Bahri predecessors had achieved. Despite solemn oaths that Barquq extracted from the principal amirs and the great officers of state to support his son, the boy sultan al-Nasir Faraj quickly became a pawn in the ongoing contest between Mamluk factions. When he was old enough to show signs of independence, al-Nasir Faraj was deposed in favor of his infant brother, who ruled under the title al-Malik al-Mansur. Al-Nasir Faraj later reclaimed the throne but could never control his unruly Mamluk magnates in Syria and eventually lost his life trying to bring them into line. His successor was another nonentity who was in turn replaced by the power behind the throne who decided to put himself on it. This latest usurper, a Mamluk called Sheykh, attempted to establish a dynastic succession, but fourteen months after his death in January 1421, Barsbay al-Zahiri, one of Barquq's Mamluks, took the sultanate.

Barsbay's reign has been called "the Indian summer of the Mamluk sultanate." Fortunately Egypt had been spared the hideous depredations that the Mongolian Turks led by Tamerlane inflicted as they ravaged much of Western Asia, leaving destruction and mountains of human heads in their wake for a quarter of a century between 1380 and 1405. The great cities of Central Asia, northern India, Persia, and Mesopotamia fell to Tamerlane's armies and were destroyed. During al-Nasir Faraj's reign he captured Aleppo

and Damascus, but instead of turning south toward Egypt he went west against the Ottomans and devastated the Turkish heartland before marching across Asia to attack China. Northern Syria suffered dreadfully from Tamerlane's incursion, but Mamluk administration was soon restored there.

Consequently, the Mamluks were little threatened from abroad during Barsbay's reign, and the country was relatively free of internal rebellion. Mamluk Egypt was still strong at sea, and the lucrative Red Sea–Indian Ocean trade was expanding, furthered by Barsbay's aggressive policies in the Red Sea, which also reinforced the Mamluks' prestigious traditional role as protectors of the Holy Cities. Barsbay dispatched several successful expeditions against the remaining Crusader outpost in Cyprus, from which pirates continued to menace Mamluk commerce. The Crusader king of Cyprus, Janus, was brought captive to Cairo, and the new Cypriot king swore fealty to Barsbay. Like other Burgi sultans, Barsbay attempted to found a dynasty, and like them he failed. After Barsbay's death on 7 June 1438, his son Yusuf lasted only three months on the throne before another Barquq veteran, Chakmak al-Zahiri, usurped it and reigned as al-Malik al-Zahir.

The Mamluk Period is one of the most glorious times in the history of Egyptian art. The most obvious manifestation of the Mamluks' artistic impulse is in architecture, for the Mamluk sultans constructed notable buildings from the beginning almost to the end of their era. Sultan Baybars was the greatest builder of medieval times in the Middle East; al-Nasir Muhammad was almost as prolific; and many great Mamluk amirs also used their substantial incomes to build testaments to their power and wealth, always vying to outdo each other. A splendid result of that competition is the Tomb and Khanqah of Qurqumas, a Mamluk amir who rose high under Sultan al-Ghuri, in Cairo's Eastern Cemetery. To walk along the axis of the Eastern Cemetery or down the old north–south main street of Cairo between Bab al-Futuh and Bab Zuweila is to see the monuments of the leading Mamluks, one after another. The Mamluk minaret became a standard Egyptian architectural feature, as did many other Mamluk innovations in building. The Mamluk Period is also notable for less imposing but equally brilliant accomplishments in other media such as miniature painting, metalwork, glassware, ceramics, and textiles.

The Mamluks were strong patrons of scholarship. Medieval Islam's greatest historian, Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), was a native of Tunisia, but he spent his later years in Cairo where Sultan Barquq made him a grand qadi. "What one can imagine always surpasses what one sees," Ibn Khaldun once wrote, "because of the scope of the imagination, except Cairo because it surpasses anything one can imagine." Ibn Khaldun had seen too much of the world to be easily impressed, but Cairo clearly took his breath away:

> Cairo, metropolis of the world, garden of the universe, meeting place of nations, human anthill, heart of Islam, seat of power. Here are palaces without number, and everywhere flourishing madrasas and khanqahs, while its scholars shine like dazzling stars. The city stretches over the banks of the Nile, river of paradise and receptacle of the rains of heaven, whose waters quench men's thirst and bring them abundance and wealth. I have walked its streets: they are thronged with crowds, and the markets are overflowing with every kind of merchandise.[5]

Living in the troubled fourteenth century, and having traveled as far west as Reconquista Spain and east to the court of Tamerlane, whom he met before the fall of Damascus, Ibn Khaldun was fascinated by the forces he saw at work and sought to explain them: "When the universe is being turned upside-down, we must ask ourselves whether it is changing its nature, whether there is to be a new creation and a new order in the world. Therefore to-day we need a historian who can declare the state of the world, of its countries and peoples, and show the changes that have taken place in customs and beliefs."[6]

Ibn Khaldun's cyclical view of history, combined with his wide perspective, influenced many subsequent historians, particularly in the West. In his greatest work, the *Muqaddima*, he explained how the people of the desert are imbued with *assabiya*, a sense of group strength that empowers them to conquer and rule over more civilized people who have grown effete in their urban lifestyles. But the process is ongoing: once the conquerors establish themselves, they in turn succumb to civilization and lose their *assabiya*,

rendering them in turn vulnerable to conquest by a new, hardier people. The process is unstoppable and endless.

Although the flow of travelers to Egypt diminished during medieval times, some intrepid wanderers came and recorded curious impressions of their visits. Occasionally pilgrims stopped on their way to the Holy Land, as did Bernard the Wise and his two companions in 870. They were thrown into jail in Cairo and had to buy their way out. Even so, Bernard managed to look around, concluding that the Pyramids of Giza were the granaries that Joseph built during his time in Egypt. Benjamin of Tudela, who sojourned in Egypt from 1165 to 1177, fared much better, even serving as vizier for a time. Because he arrived from the south through Abyssinia, he was the first to describe how the annual inundation was caused by seasonal rains in the Ethiopian highlands. In his opinion, the Pyramids of Giza were built by witchcraft.

Abd al-Latif, an Arab physician from Baghdad and later a teacher of philosophy and medicine in Cairo, wrote an account around 1200 that is remarkable for its lack of biblical preconceptions. By then, the pillaging of Giza was far advanced; many of the small pyramids had been robbed of their stones to construct walls in Cairo; but the Great Pyramid had not yet lost its casing stones and was covered, Abd al-Latif noticed, with writings "of an ancient character" that he could not read. The Sphinx was still largely intact when Abd al-Latif saw it, and still showed the red paint that had covered it in antiquity. The destruction of its nose, often but wrongly blamed on Napoleon's soldiers, was probably committed soon after Abd al-Latif's visit.

Egypt was also part of the itinerary of the greatest of all Middle Eastern travelers, Ibn Battuta from Morocco, who came to Egypt in 1326. Ibn Battuta wrote, "I arrived at length at Cairo, mother of cities and seat of Pharaoh the tyrant, mistress of broad regions and fruitful lands, boundless in multitude of buildings, peerless in beauty and splendour, the meeting-place of comer and goer, the halting-place of feeble and mighty, whose throngs surge as the waves of the sea, and can scarce be contained in her for all her size and capacity."[7]

The medieval traveler whose work received the most renown in the West, however, may have been entirely a fictional creation by a fourteenth-century French author who traveled no farther than his library. The book was *The*

Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundevile, Kt., to give it in its English translation, for it was widely read and translated into many languages. The pseudonymous Sir John held to the biblical view of the function of the Pyramids. "And thei ben made of Ston, fulle wel made of Masonnes craft; of the whiche two ben merveylouse grete and hye; and the tother ne ben not so grete. And every [one] hathe a Gate, for to entre with inne . . . . And with inne thei ben alle full of Serpentes. And aboven . . . with outen, ben many scriptures of dyverse Langages. And sum Men seyn, that thei ben Sepultures of grete Lordes, that weren sometyme, but that is not trewe, for alle the commoun rymour and speche is of alle the peple there, bothe fer and nere, that thei ben the Garneres of Joseph."[8]

After the reign of Barsbay, signs of decline in the Mamluk Empire became obvious. One of the most ominous was a breakdown in the Mamluk system itself. Young Mamluks had once been strictly trained in all the arts of war, especially the equestrian ones, and were not promoted until they had mastered them. These exercises fell into disuse, and the Mamluks' quality as soldiers correspondingly declined. Yet, even as they neglected their traditional strengths, they refused to recognize how much technology was altering the nature of warfare. Slow to adopt the use of cannon, they despised handguns as weapons for common foot soldiers, not elite mounted warriors. Furthermore, their discipline was breaking down, making them unreliable as soldiers and dangerous to social and economic order. Riots by Mamluks troopers became common occurrences; shops and bazaars were pillaged; public safety declined.

The economy that supported the Mamluk system had been in a state of increasing crisis since the Black Death. Recurring epidemics of bubonic plague prevented the population from recovering. The irrigation systems decayed. Revenues dropped precipitously. In 1215, land tax receipts for Egypt had been more than nine million dinars; by the end of the Mamluk era in 1517, they had shrunk to less than two million. Besides damaging the economic base of the Mamluk regime, the plague also took an unusually heavy toll among Mamluks. For whatever reasons, there were probably fewer than half as many Mamluks on the eve of the Ottoman conquest at the beginning of the sixteenth century than there had been during the great days of the Mamluk Empire.

Another serious blow to the Mamluk economy came at the end of the fifteenth century, when the Portuguese found the ocean route around Africa, providing Europe with a direct connection to India, the Far East, and the east coast of Africa, disrupting the Mamluk's lucrative Red Sea trade and diminishing the importance of Egypt as a commercial connection between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Within a few years the Portuguese were threatening the Mamluk maritime position within the Red Sea itself, and only with timely aid from the Ottoman Empire were the Mamluks able to thwart the European interlopers.

The most interesting of the later Mamluk sultans was Qaitbay (1468–96), in part because of his exquisite architectural statements but primarily because, unlike most of his immediate predecessors, he was not ephemeral, ruling across nearly three decades. These were not trouble-free years, however, for the behavior of the Mamluks grew progressively worse, and Qaitbay could never fully control them. The countryside fell into increasing disorder as Bedouin tribes attacked settled areas, destroying their productivity, and even raided downtown Cairo on one occasion. When large-scale tribal rebellions broke out in Upper Egypt, the government's military responses were more like punitive expeditions than reassertions of law and order, and they only caused the situation to deteriorate further. The bright spot in Qaitbay's reign is his building program. Its masterpiece, and one of the jewels of Islamic architecture, is his madrasa and mausoleum, built 1472–74, in Cairo's Eastern Cemetery. But such expensive buildings may have placed a further burden on an already overstrained economy, and the apparent stability of Qaitbay's long reign turned out to be illusory, for five sultans followed it in the space of as many years.

At the time of Qaitbay's death in 1496, the three great powers in the Middle East were the Mamluk Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Persian Safavid Empire. Of these, the Mamluk Empire was by far the weakest and at best could hold the balance between the other two. The Ottoman Empire, on the other hand, was in an especially dynamic phase, growing stronger in precisely the areas where the Mamluk Empire was declining. Recovering from the ruin that Tamerlane inflicted on it, the Ottomans prospered and expanded under the rule of four able sultans, Murad II, Mehmed II, Beyezid

II, and Selim I. In 1453 they captured Constantinople, and as Istanbul it became the greatest city in Europe and the Middle East, and grew wealthy from expanding trade. The Ottomans extended their dominions in every direction. A thorough overhaul of the empire's financial system gave the Ottoman sultan direct control of most of the empire's tax revenues. A powerful navy was built, and a large standing army established, trained in new techniques of drill and skilled in the use of artillery and muskets.

Given the Ottoman Empire's expansionism, a clash between it and the Mamluk Empire was probably inevitable, but relatively little hostility preceded the Ottoman invasion. There had indeed been a desultory war beginning in 1484, but it concerned peripheral issues. Qaitbay won a number of victories over the Ottomans but lacked the resources to defeat them decisively. Peace was arranged in 1491. As late as 1511, the Ottoman sultan Beyezid II sent aid to the Mamluks in their confrontation with the Portuguese in the Red Sea.

When the Ottomans turned on the Mamluk Empire in 1516, it was almost as an afterthought, resulting from a dispute between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires. Troubled by revolts in his eastern dominions fostered by the Safavids, Selim I struck hard against the Persians, carrying his campaigns deep into their territory. This tilted the balance strongly in favor of the Ottomans, therefore the Mamluk sultan al-Ghuri responded to a Safavid plea for help by sending forces into northern Syria. Selim I, who was at that moment preparing another campaign against the Safavids, decided not to leave his right flank exposed to this threat and attacked the Mamluks instead. The Mamluks were no match for the Ottomans, who were superior in organization, discipline, numbers, and equipment. Betrayed from within their ranks, the Mamluks were routed at Marj Dabiq, north of Aleppo, on 24 August 1516. Damascus and Jerusalem surrendered without a fight.

Al-Ghuri suffered a fatal attack of apoplexy during the Battle of Marj Dabiq. Only with difficulty did the Mamluk magnates in Cairo persuade his nephew Tumanbey to assume the sultanate. There was not much the reluctant new sultan could do except hope that Selim I would be content with his Syrian conquests and proceed against the Safavids, but with the encouragement of many disaffected Mamluks, Selim continued south and entered Egypt

unopposed. Tumanbey made a stand outside of Cairo but was defeated. He escaped, only to be defeated again at Giza and betrayed into Ottoman hands. He was hanged at Bab Zuweila on 14 April 1517. The rope broke twice. Not until the third try was the execution completed, ending the era of the Mamluk sultans in Egypt.

Notes

1 In which the name of the ruling sultan was mentioned during Friday prayers in the mosques.
2 Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 297–98.
3 Bernard Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*, 2 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. 1, 84–85.
4 Peter M. Holt, The Age of the Crusades (London: Longman, 1986), 126.
5 André Raymond, *The Glory of Cairo: An Illustrated History* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 269.
6 H.R. Trevor-Roper, *Historical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1957), 24–25.
7 Ibn Battuta, Travels in Asia and Africa 1325–1354 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1929), 50.
8 Sir John Maundeville [pseud.], *The Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundevile, Kt.* (London: J. Woodman, D. Lyon, and C. Davis, 1725), 63–64.

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Muhammad Ali and Modernization

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In 1800 Cairo was still considered a medieval city by European travelers. Napoleon's engineers produced plans and diagrams that showed Cairo almost unchanged since the sixteenth century under the Ottoman Empire. The axis of the city ran from Husayniya in the north to Sayyida Zaynab in the south. At this time, the city wall had seventy-one gates, including twelve major ones. Around the city there were gardens, orchards, and twelve lakes, the largest of which were Birkat al-Azbakiya and Birkat al-Fil.

Muhammad Ali began his quest to modernize Egypt when he took over as governor-general in 1805. His rise to absolute power was consolidated by defeating Mamluk uprisings and eventually authoring a massacre of 480 Mamluk leaders and their followers at a ceremony in the Citadel in 1811. He then turned his attention to controlling the Muslim leaders and scholars, the ulema, who supervised property and economic activities in their areas. He began the curtailment of their power by targeting the highly respected and influential Sheikh Omar Makram.

Sheikh Omar Makram, a descendent of the Prophet, was born in Asyut in Upper Egypt and educated at al-Azhar University. He fought for Egypt's

independence first from the Ottoman Empire and then against Napoleon's invading army. He initially supported Muhammad Ali and thwarted conspiracies to remove him as *wali* (governor) by bringing many Egyptian notables to the ruler's side. However, after Muhammad Ali provoked the sheikh over taxing religious endowment property *(waqf)*, Omar Makram led the ulema into opposition against the *wali*, and was exiled to Damietta. Upon an appeal four years later he returned to Cairo, but was accused once more of instigating a rebellion and was again sent into exile, this time at Tanta, where he died.

Muhammad Ali's challenge in reforming Egypt was to define modernity and articulate how institutional structures could convey the criteria of change—whether discarding, transforming, or building on current ideologies. He brought law and stability to Egypt after years of unrest by eliminating competition from the Mamluks and Egyptian notables. In 1807 Muhammad Ali installed his son, Ibrahim, as governor of Cairo. As the rivalry among Mamluks, Ottomans, Albanian militias, and Egyptian notables was widespread, Muhammad Ali needed loyal people who spoke Turkish. He brought his relatives and compatriots from Albania, placing them in important civil and military positions. This set a precedent of moving family members into official positions, a practice that had been unacceptable under the Mamluks. One individual who gained Muhammad Ali's confidence was Muhammad Laz Oghli, who, if not a relative, was from Albania, and who arrived in Egypt after the defeat of Napoleon's army. When Istanbul confirmed Muhammad Ali as governor of Egypt, Muhammad Laz Oghli took the title of *katkhuda,* or deputy viceroy. His allegiance proved invaluable, as he protected the new ruler from a conspiracy to overthrow the fledgling regime.

The antiquated Mamluk military system of recruiting soldier-slaves from other countries proved unsatisfactory for Muhammad Ali's desire to create a modern military force: soldiers often did not speak the same language, and their loyalties were to their commanding officers rather than to the ruler or the country. So the pasha created a conscript army of Egyptians under a centralized command. In 1816 Joseph Anthelme Sève made his way to Egypt via Persia after serving in Napoleon's navy at the Battle of Trafalgar. An incident of insubordination had resulted in him leaving the navy, after which he served

in other regiments in Russia, Germany, and France. He arrived in Egypt having conferred the title of colonel on himself, and soon gained Muhammad Ali's confidence. His first assignment was to train three hundred unruly recruits in Aswan, which led to the foundation of a French-style military academy where Egyptians were trained to make up the new army, the *Nizam Gadid*. Ibrahim Pasha, Muhammad Ali's son and the commanding military officer, became a recruit under the instruction of the Frenchman to set an example for his troops.

After a successful campaign in Arabia against the Wahhabis, Colonel Sève employed modern military techniques when fighting against the Greeks in the Morean campaign and against the Ottomans in Syria and southern Turkey, where he helped Ibrahim Pasha defeat the Ottomans at the Battle of Nezib in 1839. Sève converted to Islam and changed his name to Soliman, becoming known as Soliman Pasha al-Faransawi ('the Frenchman'). Muhammad Ali said of him: "There are three men in particular who have rendered me great services. They are Soliman Pasha, Cerisy Bey, and Clot Bey. These are the first Frenchmen that I have known and they have always merited the highest opinion that I have of them and of France."[1]

In 1844 a military school connected to the Egyptian consulate opened in Paris, with a curriculum specializing in military science. Soliman Pasha selected the first class to attend the school, which included two of Ibrahim Pasha's sons, Ismail and Ahmed.

Soliman Pasha married Maryam, a daughter of Muhammad Ali, and spent his remaining years in Cairo, where he died in 1860. His daughter Nazli Hanem married Ismail Pasha's prime minister, and his granddaughter Nazli Sabri was the wife of King Fuad and the mother of King Farouk. Soliman Pasha is buried with his wife in Old Cairo.

When the Ottoman sultan asked Muhammad Ali to suppress the Wahhabi revolt in Arabia, the Ottoman–Egyptian army was initially led by his young son, Tusun, but after his premature death in 1816 the ruler's eldest son, Ibrahim, took over the military command. Ibrahim Pasha proved to have a superior disposition for strategy, and quickly destroyed the Wahhabis' political power and captured Medina in 1816. With Arabia now under Ottoman control, Ibrahim Pasha led his army through the hostile desert and

conquered the Sudanese territories between 1820 and 1822. Again, the Ottoman sultan requested Muhammad Ali's help, this time to suppress a Greek revolt, and in 1824 Ibrahim Pasha led the Ottoman–Egyptian army of seventeen thousand through Crete, Cyprus, and Morea, eventually capturing Athens in 1826.

Muhammad Ali's vision of expansionism included the control of Syria, and this meant turning on his patron the Ottoman sultan. Ibrahim Pasha directed his troops into Palestine and Syria, conquering Sidon, Beirut, Tripoli, and Damascus, and continuing his march into Anatolia, where he defeated the sultan's army near Konya. Britain and France interceded to divert Ibrahim Pasha from marching toward Istanbul, and negotiations with the Ottoman sultan gave major concessions to Muhammad Ali, who gained control over Syria and Crete. Now the ruler and his son controlled lands from the Sudan to the Levant, giving Egypt a regional dominance and protecting the country from invasion.

Ibrahim helped his father unite and maintain his authority by supervising all government departments and officials and overseeing the reforms that the ruler initiated. Muhammad Ali's overall determination and vision of a modernized Egypt was to focus on the economy, transportation, education, and opening up of the country internationally, particularly toward Europe. Education was crucial for reforms to be effective. Recognizing this dilemma, Muhammad Ali introduced the first advanced educational institutions to Egypt, such as the Qasr al-Aini Medical School, founded in 1827, and the School of Translation, established in 1830. Men chosen to study in Europe and educated in these new institutions played key roles in development projects that continued throughout the nineteenth century. Educated sons of prosperous landowners, military officers, and civil servants became the basis of a professional class of Egyptians; and with the opening of government schools, youth were educated under government controlled curricula, which provided a more diverse education than the village Quranic schools. As more opportunities were made available for European travel and study, a precedent was set that different ideologies and cultures were worthy of consideration, and an assimilation of western civilization began.

Ibrahim Pasha, deeply committed to his father's modernization policies, supported his directives to maintain the condition of streets, upgrade the appearance of Cairo, and construct major roads. One edict was to drain and fill in the lakes and stabilize the riverbanks in response to growing concerns that the water, stagnant in the dry season, caused disease. Once the ponds were drained, the level of the land was raised to prevent further flooding from the Nile. Meanwhile Ibrahim stabilized the east bank of the river by planting fast-growing figs and orange trees, the basis for pleasure gardens and plantations. André Raymond writes: "A number of public works were undertaken to prepare the way for future developments. The mounds of debris surrounding Cairo were leveled along the north and west borders. And the grading and planning carried out under Ibrahim Pasha of some 160 hectares in the zone between the city and the Nile behind the flood dike facilitated the urban development projects ultimately undertaken by Ismail Pasha."[2] Among his orchards and banyan trees along the Nile Ibrahim Pasha built a palace, Qasr al-Ali, which was later torn down to accommodate the urbanization in the district of Qasr al-Dubara and Garden City. Prince Muhammad Ali Tawfiq preserved part of his great-grandfather's magnificent gardens by building his Manial Palace on Roda Island in 1919.

In 1848 Ibrahim Pasha briefly inherited his father's title of viceroy when Muhammad Ali's health and mental capacity deteriorated, but he died before his father after a long battle with an illness contracted when on an expedition searching for the source of the Nile. His military campaigns had earned him the position of governor in the Levant, where he followed his father's vision and introduced economic reforms, becoming quite popular with the people. If it were not for Ibrahim Pasha's statue standing on Opera Square for nearly 150 years, might we forget this colorful figure in Egyptian history? His father, who ruled Egypt for four decades, and Ibrahim's son, Khedive Ismail, who opened Egypt to Europe, can easily overshadow his memory. Yet the population of southern Turkey remembers him for his reform policies, Europeans remember him as a great soldier, and Egyptians remember him as a military strategist and conservationist.

Abbas Hilmi I (r. 1848–54), grandson of Muhammad Ali, took control of Egypt after Ibrahim's death, followed by Said Pasha (r. 1854–63), son of

Muhammad Ali. After the death of Said Pasha, Ismail Pasha (r. 1863–79), son of Ibrahim Pasha, ruled Egypt.

Abbas Hilmi I, who succeeded his grandfather Muhammad Ali, built barracks to the northeast of Azbakiya. Though he was not open to foreign intervention like his predecessors, he did sign the contract with the British to build Egypt's railway system, which opened up Cairo to the Mediterranean Sea: in 1856 the first railway station in the Middle East and Africa was inaugurated in Cairo at Bab al-Hadid. Abbas's successor, Said Pasha, built his palace, Qasr al-Nil ('the Nile Palace'), on the river's eastern bank, and continued railway expansion under British contract.

The next ruler, from 1863 to 1879, was Ismail Pasha, granted the title khedive by the Ottoman sultan Abdulhamid. Born in Cairo and educated in Vienna and Paris, Ismail was in the right place at the right time to carry through Muhammad Ali's modernization policies. He had been familiar with the old Paris but Baron Haussmann's extensive urban renewal project changed the face of the French capital after 1853, cutting through the narrow, winding roads to make way for broad boulevards and the incorporation of squares and parks. When Ismail returned to Paris for the Exposition Universelle in 1867 he found a changed city, and its gardens, boulevards, and elegant promenades inspired him to imitate Haussmann's vision in Cairo by creating a new city layout with grids of streets, and boulevards radiating from squares.

In 1863, the population of Cairo was 270,000, living in the area from the Mosque of Amr ibn al-As to the district of Husayniya in the north, but from the Citadel to Azbakiya, most of the quarters were run down and cut off from the Nile by ponds, swamps, tombs, and hills. The khedive put all his efforts into the development of Azbakiya and a new district between there and the Nile (today's Tahrir and Qasr al-Nil), which he named after himself: Ismailiya. He enlisted engineers, botanists, architects, artisans, and translators from France and Italy. He employed the French-educated Egyptian Ali Mubarak to oversee French engineers and technicians. Reclaimed swampland came under a system devised by the ruler that offered free land to anyone who would construct a European-style building worth thirty thousand francs and within two years. Jean-Pierre Barillet-Deschamps, a highly acclaimed

French landscape gardener, was employed to re-model the Azbakiya area, fashioning it after Parc Monceau in Paris. Gaslights illuminated nearly twenty acres of green lawns, botanical gardens, paths, grottos, open-air cafés, and theaters. The garden was enclosed with railings and gates, and from time to time an entrance fee was charged.

But the scheme had its casualties: Ismail ordered Mamluk buildings and palaces to be demolished. Nearly four hundred monuments were destroyed in the wake of Muhammad Ali Street alone. The Azbak Mosque, from which the district of Azbakiya took its name, was taken down. The only monument to survive in the area was the Mosque of Uthman Katkhuda, built in 1734 on what is now the corner of Qasr al-Nil and Gumhuriya Streets. When the khedive inaugurated Muhammad Ali Street (al-Qal'a Street), it extended 2.5 kilometers between Bab al-Hadid (Ramsis Square) and the Citadel. On both sides, archways covered the sidewalks to protect the pedestrians from sunshine and heat.

Like preceding dynasties, Ismail created two distinct cities: the old Islamic Cairo remained untouched alongside the remodeled Azbakiya and the new Ismailiya. Ordinary Egyptians lived in the old Islamic, Coptic, and Jewish areas, while the new designation of space to the west was regulated for foreigners and wealthy Egyptians who sought a western style of city life, shielding them from the Egyptian milieu. In Ismailiya and Azbakiya men and women intermingled freely in public places, and no one frowned upon the consumption of alcohol or gambling. In 1875 Charles Dudley Warner, an American, stayed at the original Shepheard's Hotel. "We are in the Frank quarter called the Ezbekeëh [Azbakiya], which was many years ago a pond during high water, then a garden with a canal round it, and is now built over with European houses and shops, except the square reserved for the public garden. From the old terrace in front of the hotel, where the traveler used to look on trees, he will see now only raw new houses and a street usually crowded with passersby and rows of sleepy donkeys and their voluble drivers."[3] Azbakiya in its day was the fashionable center of Cairo: the home of the original Opera House, elegant hotels, manicured gardens, European cafés and boutiques, bookstores and galleries, the place where the European community resided, foreign travelers and dignitaries stayed, and the Egyptian élite visited.

In the public squares of Paris and London statues of European generals and noblemen had also caught Ismail's attention, and he added to the new streets and squares of Cairo another innovation: heroic statues in public spaces, starting with his own family. He commissioned the famous French sculptor, Henri Alfred Jacquemart, to cast a lifesize equestrian statue of his grandfather, and Charles Henri Joseph Cordier—whose busts of African and Arab men were highly esteemed in France—to make a statue and bust of himself and an equestrian statue of Ibrahim Pasha. The two equestrian statues debuted on the Champs Elysées in Paris in 1872, before being shipped to Alexandria. Clearly, the message to the Europeans—and Ottomans too—was that Ismail intended to remain as ruler of Egypt, and that he was stepping into his rightful shoes in a chain of succession.

Muhammad Ali's statue was unveiled in 1873 in Alexandria, where it still stands in what is now Midan al-Tahrir. In the same year Ibrahim's statue was erected in Azbakiya, in front of the great Opera House that had opened just a few years earlier. (Initially known as Midan al-Teatro, then Midan Ibrahim Pasha, this square was formally named Midan al-Opera in 1952.) Jacquemart's four bronze lions were to stand guard around Muhammad Ali's statue—but instead they were mounted at each end of the newly built Khedive Ismail Bridge that linked Ismailiya with Gezira Island. Now Ismail Pasha commissioned Jacquemart to complete two more statues—that of Soliman Pasha, unveiled on Soliman Pasha Square in 1874 (and now at the entrance to the Citadel's Military Museum), and Laz Oghli Pasha, erected in 1875.

While Jacquemart and Cordier successfully gained Khedive Ismail's favor, other sculptors did not. Fréderic Auguste Bartholdi had toured Yemen and Egypt in 1855–56, and upon his return to France received a commission to sculpt a statue of Jean François Champollion, the Egyptologist who had deciphered the hieroglyphs on the Rosetta Stone. The statue was displayed in the Egyptian pavilion at the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris. Bartholdi had offered to design a lighthouse in the form of an Egyptian peasant woman to commemorate the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, but Ismail declined. (Bartholdi's best-known work, the Statue of Liberty, unveiled in New York harbor in 1886, is thought to be a reworking of the Suez Canal lighthouse design.) Bartholdi next presented Ismail with sketches for a monument

to be placed where the ruler would be buried; again, however, Ismail was not impressed, and Bartholdi would never see one of his sculptures on Egyptian soil.

One of the three Egyptian pavilions at the Exposition Universelle, awarded more than twenty medals for originality, creativity, culture, and opulence, was a pharaonic temple designed by Auguste Mariette, protector of Khedive Ismail's ancient artifacts and founder of the Bulaq Museum for Antiquities in Cairo. Hassan Hassan writes, "At the great Paris Exhibition of 1867, the Egyptian Pavilion aroused international enthusiasm with its magnificent pharaonic treasures, which were exhibited within a reproduction of an ancient temple. The Empress Eugénie did not hesitate to ask the khedive—on behalf of the French government—for the fabulous jewels of queen Ahhotep, and for the rest of the antiquities displayed . . . . But by then the law prohibiting the exportation of antiquities from the country had been passed, and the khedive was able to reply quite firmly: 'Madam, there is someone at Bulaq who wields greater power over these matters than myself.'"[4]

Auguste Mariette was born in Boulogne, France, the child of a civil servant. He distinguished himself in school and through a twist of fate took the position of assistant to Jean François Champollion. While organizing the papers of the man who deciphered the hieroglyphs of the Rosetta Stone, he became passionate about Egyptology. In 1850 he accepted a position with the Louvre Museum to travel to Egypt to purchase Coptic, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic manuscripts. Upon reaching Egypt his interest shifted to the antiquities of Saqqara and, encouraged by the first-century writing of Strabo and the eighteenth-century discovery of the Serapeum by Paul Lucas, he went on to find the sarcophagi of the Apis bulls. He founded the Service for the Conservation of Antiquities, which aimed to prevent the pillage of ancient Egyptian treasures and their export from the country. In 1858 he became the conservator of the khedive's magnificent collection of ancient treasures and moved his family to Cairo. He opened the Bulaq Museum, and explored pyramids, temples, and monuments, providing the world with brilliant discoveries.

The Azbakiya Gardens was the site chosen by Khedive Ismail to build the Opera House, designed by Italian architects Fasciotti and Rossia as a

replica of La Scala in Milan. It was the first opera house in Africa or the Middle East, built to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and Ismail wanted an Egypt-themed opera at its opening. He commissioned Mariette to write the libretto, based on a book he had written, *La Fiancée du Nil*. Mariette persuaded the khedive to commission Giuseppe Verdi to compose the score. But Verdi declared himself too busy to complete anything in time for the opening of the Canal, though he did accept Mariette's libretto, and with it went on to compose one of his greatest operas, *Aida*. In the meantime Verdi's existing opera *Rigoletto* was chosen for the opening of the Opera House and the Suez Canal. *Aida* eventually premiered in Cairo on 24 December 1871, to great acclaim.

Notes

1 Reported by A. Vingtrinier, Soliman Pasha's biographer, 1886, and quoted in Adel Sabit, *Seventy Centuries of History: People of the River Valley and the Land of the Risen Sun.* Cairo: Maged Farag & Adel Sabit, 1993.
2 André Raymond, *Cairo: City of History.* Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001.
3 Charles Dudley Warner, "1875, My Winter on the Nile, among Mummies and Moslems," Orient Line Guide: Chapters for Travellers by Sea and by Land. London: Thomas Cook and Sons, 1890. http://www.travellersinegypt.org/archives/2004/12/hotel_life_at_shepherds.html.
4 Hassan Hassan, *In the House of Muhammad Ali: A Family Album, 1805–1952.* Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000.

Edward William Lane

Bool‘la‘ck

from

Description of Egypt

2000

The distant view of the Egyptian metropolis and its environs I enjoyed to great advantage on my first approach: the Nile being at its highest point, many objects which at other seasons would have been concealed by its banks were visible from our boat; and the charm of novelty, with the effect of a brilliant evening sunshine, contributed as much to the interest of the scene as those romantic fascinations with which history and fiction have invested it. I was most pleased with the prospect when about a league distant from the metropolis. The river (here about half a mile in width) was agitated by a fresh breeze, blowing in direct opposition to the current. Numerous boats were seen around us: some, like our own, ploughing their way up the rapid stream: others drifting down, with furled sails. On our left was the plain of Heliopolis. The Capital lay directly before us; and seemed to merit the pompous appellation by which Europeans have long dignified it: I believe, however, that it was originally called by them “Grand Cairo” merely to distinguish it from the town improperly named “Old Cairo.” It certainly had a grand appearance; though partly concealed by nearer objects; being situated on an almost perfect flat, and about a mile distant from the

river. I might have counted nearly a hundred ma'd'nehs (or menarets), towering above the crowded houses. These, while they showed the extent of the town, seemed, from their vast number, and from their noble proportions, to promise a degree of magnificence far beyond what I had previously expected; and I began to think that I might find in the Egyptian capital some of the very finest existing specimens of Arabian architecture: nor was I disappointed by the subsequent examination of the monuments of this city. At the further extremity of the metropolis was seen the Citadel, upon a rocky elevation, about two hundred and fifty feet above the level of the plain. The yellow ridge of Mount Moockut'tum, behind the city, terminated the prospect in that direction. The scene on the opposite side of the river possessed, with less varied features, a more impressive interest. Beyond a spacious, cultivated plain, interspersed with villages and palm-groves, we beheld the famous Pyramids of El-Gee'zeh. Viewing them under the effect of the evening sun (the sides presented towards us being cast into shade), their appearance was peculiarly striking; their distance not being diminished to the eye, as it is through the extraordinary clearness of the air, when they reflect the rays of the sun towards the spectator. As we approached Boo'la'ck, the second and third pyramids became gradually concealed from our view by the greatest. Arriving within a mile or two of this town, our boatmen began to testify their joy by songs adapted to the occasion, according to their general custom; and to these songs succeeded the ruder music of the zoomma'rah and darabook'keh (the double reed-pipe, and earthen drum), which was prolonged until we reached the port.

Boo'la'ck بولاق the principal port of the metropolis, has now a more respectable appearance, towards the river, then it is described to have had when Egypt was occupied by the French. The principal objects seen in approaching it by the Nile, from the north, are the warehouses and manufactories belonging to the government; which are extensive, whitewashed buildings, situated near the river. In the same part of the town are seen large mounds of corn and beans, piled up in spacious enclosures, in the open air: such being the general mode of storing the grain throughout Egypt; for there is little fear of its being injured by rain. The great mosque, surrounded by sycamores and other trees, has a very picturesque appearance.

The landing-place presents a lively scene; the bank being lined by numerous boats, and thronged by noisy boatmen, porters, sack'ckas (or water-carriers), and idle Turkish soldiers, besides camels, asses, & c. The costume of the lower orders here is the same as throughout Lower Egypt; generally the blue shirt, and the white or red turban. The dresses of the middling classes, and of the Turks, being gay and varied, contribute much to the picturesque character of the scene. Above the general landing-place is a place which was built for the late Isma'ee'l Ba'sha, son of Mohham'mad 'Al'ee. It is a large building, white-washed, and painted with festoons of flowers, like many of the palaces of Constantinople; and having glass windows. Of late, it has occasionally been made use of as barracks for some of the Niza'm Gedee'd, or regular troops.

Boo'la'ck is about a mile in length; and half a mile is the measure of its greatest breadth. It contains about 20,000 inhabitants; or nearly so. Its houses, streets, shops, &c. are like those of the metropolis. Of the mosques of Boo'la'ck, the large one called Es-Sin'a'nee'yeh, and that of Ab'oo-l-'El'ë, are the most remarkable; the former, for its size; the latter, for the beauty of its ma'd'neh. The principal manufactories are those of cotton and linen cloths, and of striped silks of the same kind as the Syrian and Indian. Many Franks find employment in them. A printing-office has also been established at Boo'la'ck, by the present viceroy. Many works on military and naval tactics, and others on Arabic grammar, poetry, letter-writing, geometry, astronomy, surgery, &c. have issued from this press. The printing-office contains several *lithographic* presses, which are used for printing proclamations, tables illustrative of military and naval tactics, &c.

Qasim Amin

The Family

from

The Liberation of Women

and

The New Woman

1992

Changes in upbringing alone are insufficient to reform the status of women—reform also requires the perfection of the institution of the family. It is true that developing women's mental abilities contributes toward this change, but the family itself, with its ties to traditions and Islam's canonical laws, also plays a major role in the development (or underdevelopment) of women. Thus it is necessary to examine the most important issues related to family life: marriage and divorce.

Marriage

In their writing Islamic scholars define marriage as 'a contract by which a man has the right to sleep with a woman.' I have not found a single word that indicates anything more than the intent of satisfying physical desires between a husband and wife. All these writings neglect the most significant responsibilities desired by two cultured individuals from one another.

I have found passages in the Quran that refer to marriage and that may assist us in defining it. I am unaware of any other legal system in the world, however modern, with a better definition of marriage than the one we have in the Quran.

God the exalted has said:

> And of his signs is this: He created for you helpmeets from yourselves that ye might find rest in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. (XXX, 21)

Whoever compares the first definition, written for us by our theologians, and the second definition, revealed to us by God, will discover the degree of inferiority to which our theologians relegate women. This low opinion has spread from them to all Muslims. One should not therefore be surprised to find that marriage also has fallen to a position of low regard in society; it has become a mere contract permitting men to find pleasure in a woman's body. This idea has been developed further by the lawyers through the creation of secondary laws based on this disgraceful view.

God's plan for this beautiful institution was based on love and mercy between husband and wife, but thanks to our scholars it is presently a tool of pleasure in man's hand. It has also become customary to neglect whatever fosters love and mercy, and to adhere to whatever violates them.

One of the prerequisites of love is that the partners should not commit themselves to the marriage contract before being sure of their feelings toward one another. Likewise, one of the requirements of mercy is that during their marriage they should treat each other kindly. However, when we forgot the true legal definition of marriage, we neglected the responsibilities associated with it and took the relationship lightly. One of the manifestations of this neglect appears in the drafting and signing of marriage contracts, which quite often are completed without either partner having had a chance to see the future companion.

We have shown earlier that the various schools of theology consider it permissible for a fiancé to see his bride-to-be. We have also mentioned an incident recorded in the oral tradition about the Prophet, God bless him and grant him salvation, in which he ordered one of his followers to look at his fiancée: "Look at her, it is appropriate that you do so." Why did we neglect this useful advice and listen to other advice less sound? This is the behavior of ignorant people, who choose what is harmful over what is beneficial.

How can a man and woman of sound mind commit themselves to a contract by which they must completely blend their two lives, without having had a chance to become acquainted? Most people refuse to buy a sheep or a donkey before seeing it, examining it thoroughly, and receiving reassurance about any apparent defects. Yet these same rational people go ahead with a marriage with a carelessness that baffles the mind!

Perhaps you will argue that a woman quite often has the chance to see her fiancé from a window, or that a man will become familiar with the character of his fiancée through descriptions given him by his mother or sister. They may describe, for example, the blackness of her hair, the whiteness of her cheeks, the smallness of her mouth, her upright posture, her serious mind. This is all very well, but such glimpses and descriptions are partial and do not provide an adequate, comprehensive understanding of the other person. On the basis of these experiences it is impossible to form a favorable and reassuring opinion of someone as a future companion or to attach one's hopes to them or to their offspring. It is important for discerning individuals to see for themselves the real thing—thinking, talking, active, and with all the good qualities to match their preferences, tastes, and emotions.

Quite often we dislike a person we meet for the first time, and are unable to identify the reasons for our dislike. On the other hand, sometimes we develop positive feelings toward a person we have seen at a distance, but change our mind as soon at that person draws closer (the change may result from having a chance to talk together at length). We may also see a person who appears to be exquisitely beautiful until we come close and find that our perceptions of appearance change after the first exchange of words. This emphasizes the point that physical feelings, whether positive or negative, quite often depend on the standards of the observer rather than on inherent beauty of ugliness. Such feelings are shared by all people because there are no uniform standards of beauty, and the physical appearance of a person may be very attractive to one individual but quite repulsive to another!

The attraction of the senses in quite necessary between two people who intend to marry. If it is not necessary in marriage, then I cannot see a role for it anywhere. Physical attraction alone, however, is not an adequate basis for marriage. It must be accompanied by a harmony of spirit. I am not suggesting

that they should become identical, which is impossible. I am suggesting that there should be harmony between the personalities, manners, and minds of the two people. This type of harmony cannot be achieved if the individuals do not have a chance to interact with one another, even if this interaction is for only a short period of time. A marriage built on this type of harmony inevitably results in a relationship of mutual respect. Such a marriage will have a solid tie that will be difficult to break, and will be a major source of honor. A marriage not based on this type of harmony is a lost cause that benefits neither spouse however long it may last and whatever the qualities of the man or the woman. As al-A'mash wrote: "Every marriage that takes place without the couple having had a chance to see each other is cause for distress and grief." Present-day marriages not based on this prerequisite are fragile, and they disintegrate with the first unexpected problem that the couple encounters. Quite often the cause of this disintegration is the desire of both partners to escape a bond they do not value or wish to preserve.

Every truly sensitive person realizes that it is just as important for a woman to have a say in the choice of her husband as it is for a man to have a say in the choice of his wife. Indeed, her opinion is more important than that of her relatives. Not allowing a woman to have a say in her marriage and restricting the decision to her guardians is unacceptable.

Tradition dictates that we do not discuss with a young woman any details of the man to whom she is engaged. She remains ignorant of his qualities and manners, and her view of him as a future husband is not considered. No one wants to know her ideas, wishes, or preferences, and she does not have the courage to express them. People generally consider it inappropriate to consult a woman about the most important decisions related to her. So we have a situation in which family members and others discuss her marriage, and people erroneously perceive her acquiescence to reflect her perfect virtues of politeness and acceptable manners.

Our liberal Islamic legal system grants women marriage rights similar to those given to men. A woman has the same right to ensure the possibility of fulfilled hopes. We must listen to the voice of our legal system and follow the laws of the Holy Quran, the appropriate teachings of the Prophet (God bless him and grant him salvation), and the works

of his followers in order to bring about marital happiness for women. The Quran says:

> And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness. (II, 228)

Ibn ʿAbbas, in accordance with this honorable verse, said: "I like to be elegantly attired for my wife just as I like to see her elegantly attired for me." The Most High also said:

> But consort with them in kindness . . . (IV, 19)

> In exalting women's rights, God also said:

> . . . and they have taken a strong pledge from you. (IV, 21)

It is related that the Prophet, God bless him and grant him salvation, said: "The believer who has the most perfect beliefs is the one who has the best character and is kindest to his family." According to tradition, the Prophet, God bless him and grant him salvation, loved women; he is reported to have said: "I have loved three things in this world: women, kindness, and prayer, which have become the delight of my eye." He respected women immensely, which was sufficient proof to the world of his good character. He even used to place his knee on the ground so that his wife could step on it to mount an animal. He would jest and joke with women, and even run races with ʿAisha, may God be pleased with her, who was sometimes able to beat him while at other times he beat her, when he is quoted to have said, "My success this time balances yours last time."

The Prophet showed women mercy and always commended them to others. "The best of you are those who treat women the best," he said, and, "The good of women should be of concern to you." Many sayings of the Prophet refer to this topic and demonstrate that the Islamic tradition urges esteem for women, respect for their rights, and kindness and courtesy toward them.

Nevertheless, marriage will take its current inequitable form as long as women continue in their present ignorant condition. Marriage will continue to be one of the many ways by which men can tyrannize women.

If, on the other hand, women understand their rights and become aware of their worth, marriage will become the natural means for fulfilling the dreams of both men and women. The foundation of marriage will be two individuals who love each other completely—with their bodies, their hearts, and their minds. A woman's life will be controlled by her mind, she will be able to choose the man to whom she is attracted, and she will be committed to him through the marriage contract. Her family will also realize that she is sufficiently mature to make her own choice. They will agree with that choice and she will not fear their anger or other people's criticism. When women achieve these changes, men will know the value of women and will taste the pleasure of true love.

If a husband and wife truly love one another, they experience the bliss of paradise. They are not worried if their money box is empty, or if they have only onions and lentils on the table. Are not their constantly joyful hearts sufficient for them? This type of joy creates physical energy, reassures, enlivens a heartfelt pleasure in life, and enhances its beauty. It lightens life's load and becomes a source of contentment. 'Umar ibn al-Khattab said: "After faith the best thing for God's servant is having a good wife."

How does this compare with the condition of families today, in which spouses are so distant from one another? If this remoteness were the only problem, it would be easier to bear. However, human nature pushes everyone to search for happiness. In families today, each spouse believes that the other is the obstacle to personal happiness. This belief creates a climate charged with clouds, electrifying the environment of the home. Both spouses live with hearts harboring the other's faults. Arguments and quarrels erupt all the time, with or without cause, day or night, and even in bed.

One of the consequences of this continuous quarreling is that the woman relinquishes her household responsibilities to her servants, who run it in whatever way they wish. Confusion reigns and the signs of neglect appear everywhere. To an outside observer, the house looks abandoned. Dust covers the furniture, dirt covers the tables, and the woman neglects her husband

and children, even if they need food, drink, or clothing. Such a wife spends her time brooding about her situation; she may leave her home in the morning and wander to her neighbor's house to find relief for her sadness.

The husband's condition is not much better than his wife's, because he too leaves the home and is happy only when he spends time in the coffee shops or with his neighbors. When he does return home, he avoids his wife and commits himself to silence. This indicates that marriage as it now exists is simply a means by which a man can have the pleasure of controlling a number of women simultaneously or in succession. As it now exists, marriage holds no advantage for women.

Every man who assumes that marriage will provide him a companion with whom to share the good and bad days will be disappointed. It is impossible for him to achieve this companionship through marriage. This may explain the reluctance to marry that we are observing among the able young men around us. The increasing number of cultured men is a result of the value placed on boys' upbringing, which will continue to be emphasized in the future. The increasing number of cultured men will necessitate that we implement the proper methods of upbringing for women, methods based on the principles of freedom and education. The only other option left to us is to admit our loss of faith in marriage, to admit that it has become a worthless institution, and announce its failure.

It is not an exaggeration to claim that the new generation of men prefer bachelorhood to marriage because they do not believe that present-day marriage will fulfill any of their dreams. They refuse to be committed to a wife whom they have never seen. What they would like in a wife is a friend whom they can love and who can love them. They do not wish for an all-purpose servant. They want their children's mother to be educated and experienced so that she can bring them up according to the principles of good manners, good behavior, and good health.

Anyone who has renounced bigotry and the old traditions will inevitably be delighted to find this new tendency among our young men. He will also discover the importance of listening to the opinions

of these young men and considering their requests, and will not disapprove immediately, nor accuse them of blindly adopting European values. He will evaluate their ideas and consider them within the context of reason and law. When he finally concludes that the changes we suggest are in reality a call for a return to the religious principles and traditions of the earlier Muslims, and that they are changes based on sound thinking, he will immediately support the young men and help them to achieve their aims.

Hassan Hassan

Marg

from

In the House of Mohammad Ali

2000

My father had four sisters, of whom the youngest was Princess Ziba. She emanated a gentle quietude which was like a screen between one and the exterior world. A dim sort of luminosity seemed to surround her, as if she lived in a gray, limbo world of her own—also conveyed perhaps by the fact that she had very poor and limited eyesight. I felt quite drawn to her but never got to know her well. To judge by appearances, she did not have the active kindness of Aunt Aziza, or the beauty and mind of Aunt Iffet, or the wit and personality of Aunt Behidja. She was always discreet in her bearing and apparel, although this at times could be relieved by a cascade of diamonds, which gave one the impression that all worldly awareness of rank had not deserted her. Many years after her death I came across two or three people, foreigners, who had known her well and who had retained quite an impressive image of her. One of them in fact, a diplomat, named his daughter after her.

As a young girl she had a pleasant figure, lovely coloring, like all her sisters, and a face with a weak-looking chin. Silky fair hair and gray eyes added to her color charm. She was married off to a Turkish gentleman, with whom

she was to lead, for the rest of her days, a pious and dignified life divided between Istanbul, Egypt, and Europe. Most of her time was spent in prayer and in the company of holy men, who guided her thoughts, and indeed at times her dreams, for she was often blessed with visions of the Prophet and other exalted persons of religion. Her psychic capacities, perhaps sharpened by this ascetic life, were not to be underestimated, as once when travelling in Sweden she manifested extraordinary sensitivity to her surroundings. When shown up to her hotel room in the company of her lady-in-waiting, she stepped out on the balcony, only to recoil in horror, saying, "Who is that poor girl laying crushed on the ground?" whereupon she proceeded to give a detailed description of an unfortunate person who, only a few days before, had committed suicide by jumping from that very same place.

Her existence could have been considered passably normal, and we suppose happy, if there had not been a major setback (or had it been a deliberate omission?): she was childless. Somewhere in the family—I know it wasn't her, she was terrified at the thought—the idea got started that she would be a more suitable person to bring up Prince Aziz's children than their mother, who, as a foreigner, could hardly be expected to know much of the family's ways. The idea took root and blossomed forth into a grand family council, composed of my aunts, Great-Aunt Nimet (Grandfather's sister), her husband Mahmud Mouhtar Pasha, and our great-uncle (Grandfather's brother), King Fuad, who had been invested by my father with the supreme authority over our upbringing.

The discussion for our abduction was well underway, and everything pointed to our landing in Aunt Ziba's reluctant lap when the unexpected occurred. King Fuad had had time to think over the matter, and plans for our future were shaping in his head, making him prefer that we should be brought up by his sister, Great-Aunt Nimet. Unexpectedly again, Mahmud Mouhtar Pasha joined his wishes to the King's, saying that all their children had grown up and that their house was empty without them. Great-Aunt Nimet readily accepted, being utterly devoted to her husband and always willing to accede to his wishes. So Aunt Ziba escaped this turbulent intrusion into her life and returned to her solitary

five-prayers-a-day at Bebek in Istanbul, and we were to join Mahmud Mouhtar Pasha and Great-Aunt Nimet at Marg, their estate near Cairo.

For years afterward I was to deeply resent our having been wrenched away from my mother. It was only much later on, at a very mature age when the harsh realities of life were finally beginning to pile up around me like tombstones for my illusions, that I was able to understand our relatives' reasons for subordinating sentimentality to the observance of certain conventions. All this was strictly against my father's wishes, since in his remarkable will he had stated that we should be brought up away from the rest of the family, and that my brother and myself should become an engineer or a doctor and my sisters qualified medical nurses. He also specified that we should not touch a piaster of our inheritance before the four of us were successfully earning our livings by means of the stated professions, for the day would come when this would be the only means we had for our livelihood. But there was no one to heed the words of the dead, and the living—with perfectly valid reasons of their own—were to steer us in a diametrically opposite direction.

The first to leave our mother's side was Ismail, followed after a few months by my sisters, and after another interval myself, being at the time eight years old. I remember well arriving with my mother at Marg on a beautiful afternoon and meeting Great-Aunt Nimet for the first time. She was seated at the end of the main drawing room by a window which gave on the gardens, wearing a pale-blue gown reaching to the ground with a large cluster of diamonds on her chest in the shape of a bow. She was very composed, very regal, hair carefully set, extremely expressive dark eyes and a firm, wide mouth. On a chair to the left of the couch on which she was seated, a little bit apart and on her own, a lady was discreetly keeping her company, one of those silent witnesses without face or voice always to be found around more important personalities.

I was terribly shy, hardly managing an answer when spoken to, but fortunately quickly fascinated by a most beautiful painting hanging behind my aunt. It was a Claude Lorrain landscape, whose calm and serene atmosphere I grew to love dearly, and which somehow has managed to remain my favorite mood painting for life. My mother appeared to be her usual self,

talking about me, my habits and health. All seemed very normal until the moment for parting arrived, and then she could no longer restrain her tears. I did not completely realize what was happening, that I was leaving her forever, and although rather bewildered it was not till later that I was to understand the full magnitude of our loss. Now I was looking forward to meeting my sisters, whom I had not seen for months. Ismail had already left for Robert College in Istanbul.

Looking back, I find it surprising how easily I adapted myself to my new life despite the fact that I was passionately attached to my mother. But for her it was the handing over of her last child, her youngest one, and the solitude of a future with an empty home. Once a week she would come to see us and we would have lunch together, and finally, Marg was only twenty minutes away from Cairo by car, but somehow as time went by it seemed to be worlds apart.

Princess Nimetallah, Great-Aunt Nimet, was the last surviving daughter of the Khedive Ismail and as such the last of King Fuad's sisters. This gave her a unique position in the family, and both her royal brother and other relatives often accepted her opinion on many subjects as law. Her exceptional personality enforced her privileged position. Of a naturally regal appearance without any affectations or mannerisms, a sure sense of humor which would lighten up her dark eyes, eyes that could also be most forbidding, an education combining old traditions of the East and the West which are finally remarkably similar, abreast with the latest philosophical, scientific, or literary thought in several European languages, she was a devoted wife and an impeccable public figure. To make these rather formidable qualities more palatable, she had that most precious and elusive of gifts—charm and magnetism.

She was born to rule, as a despot it must be said, and however much I may have disagreed and found myself in conflict with many of her uncompromising decisions, she invariably left me with the uncomfortable feeling that she was in the right. After many years, and having seen many surprising things, she still remains the most commanding figure I have as yet encountered, and my feelings for her of respect and admiration remain unabated.

Her husband, Mahmud Mouhtar Pasha, was a Turkish *grand seigneur*, a soldier and diplomat, and an authority on the interpretation of the Quran whose works have been translated into several languages. With all the tact that springs from true kindness, he made it a point to make us always feel cared for, as if of his own flesh and blood. He was to die from a heart attack on a trip to Europe, and I think my great-aunt never really recovered from the shock; she became sterner and the atmosphere at Marg more austere. From then onward her health began to waver and fatefully decline; diabetes had set in.

When Great-Aunt Nimet decided to live at Marg, the Palace of Marg was a simple hunting lodge set in grounds that were part desert and part marshes. In front of the house, which was on slightly raised ground, was a row of six date trees growing out of the sand. From this wilderness my great-aunt was to create a home of great charm. The marshes for miles around were drained and the desert pushed back, beautiful formal gardens laid out around the house, lawns and a small forest of eucalyptus trees planted. The same tall, rustling trees bordered long alleyways, while clipped hedges enclosed groves of fruit trees. Tennis courts and a golf course sprang up under unrelenting supervision and care.

The six date trees in front of the house remained, but beyond them on a lower terrace a rose garden stretched out, with—as its central ornament—a life-size red-granite statue of a seated female pharaonic figure, its face heavily mutilated, that had been found in the grounds. It was reflected in a small pool, beside which a banyan tree gave shade to a square clearing furnished with garden tables and chairs. From there a path bordered by white-trunked palm trees led to one of the main arteries of the garden, which was on still lower ground. A new wing was added to the house itself, which was solidly built with double walls of stone, separated by an empty space to isolate the interior temperature from the exterior.

A very lovely color was given to the garden by the coral-red sand that covered its paths and alleyways; these were bordered by a cactus-like plant that hugged the ground and flowered with a lilac-colored bloom called in Arabic 'the staff of life.' The more athletic bignonia, with its rubbery cluster of orange flowers, smothered a palm log-hut where I used to practice my

piano; other bignonias, intermingled with purple bougainvillea, went up into dark casuarina trees, making bright garlands from tree to tree.

Fifty gardeners, under the control of an old Italian, kept this very harmonious creation in impeccable state—not a leaf out of place, not a grain of red sand in disorder, for wherever we walked a gardener would appear from nowhere, in a rather uncanny manner, to sweep away with palm branches the marks left by our footsteps. No detail was too small to escape our great-aunt's notice, and it was this careful supervision that gave the place an air of a royal residence, for the palace itself remained a roomy, unpretentious, one-storied house which Great-Aunt Nimet would refer to as her bungalow. Plans were periodically drawn up for the building of a real palace, but fortunately they were always shelved.

Uncle Ala'adin, Great-Aunt Nimet's son, lived in a two-floored modern villa in another part of the grounds, with its own enclosed garden. When I was living there, it was something of an ordeal coming back at night, for Uncle Ala'adin's Great Danes would charge at anyone without discriminating between family or strangers. The guards, who knew the dogs well, would suddenly take on a vague, absentminded air, hoping, I suppose, to see one thoroughly frightened, which I usually was, for although I have always been fond of animals I was never to get on intimate terms with this lot.

The house was furnished by a well-known European decorator in contemporary, mid-1930s style, which I found very impersonal but which, I suppose, was considered appropriate for a young bachelor who had just finished his education in America. At Great-Aunt Nimet's at least there was a collection of fine paintings, superb rugs, and a happy mixture of furniture, arranged very personally and intelligently. Her grandson Faizy, with his devoted English governess Miss Holbeech, lived in another house, sparsely furnished in the most functional manner.

My sisters and I alternated, or were divided up, between Uncle Ala'adin's and the main house. Our day was well organized, being given over to a series of teachers and tutors for French, Turkish, Arabic, and the Quran, following the usual subjects of a school curriculum. For the Quran a sheikh would arrive all dressed up in his elegant robes and turban and reeking with the most subtle and nauseating scent. A tall, spare man, he would squat,

tailor-fashion, his *sibha* beads moving between his fingers, while he patiently repeated with me one *sura* after another, I following the written verses, until I had learned thirteen of them by heart.

There was a luncheon break, followed by more classes or homework, and on certain days a little tennis and some mild gymnastic movements supervised by Miss Maud Machray. Miss Machray was a wonderful Englishwoman who had been in the family since her early youth as a companion to Princess Emina, Great-Aunt Nimet's sister, to whose memory she was utterly devoted; whenever she mentioned her, her face would seem to fade into some distant past superior to anything that the present could offer. When Miss Machray was dying many years later, she was heard to say: "At last I shall be seeing my dear Princess again." When I went to the hospital to visit her, I think in spirit she was already with her. She did not recognize me, although she was talking quite lucidly, for her gaze was already far away in another world.

After Princess Emina's death Miss Machray came to Marg and, when we arrived, was set to look after my sisters, and myself too when I was there. We communicated together in French, the international social language of Cairo; none of us was ever taught English.

Tall, straight, and vigorous, she had a plain face great character, a charming smile, and a most melodious voice and laugh. She spoke Turkish like a Turk and knew all the intricacies and ways of our family. Great-Aunt Nimet would sometimes ask her to accompany her on visits, and with her yashmak on she was undistinguishable from any other lady of her position.

Nearly every day she would take us for a walk around the garden in the late afternoon until we reached the edge of the fields. There we would wait for the sun to set beyond the mud hamlet, or *izba*, of Marg, its gray cluster of huts surrounding the little mosque outlined against an orange and green sky. Slowly the light would change and the muezzin in a distant, musical voice would call the Faithful to prayer. Processions of peasants, with water buffalo and herds of sheep led by a donkey, would make their way home through a soft haze of dust, while birds flew low over the darkening fields.

In Marg we were truly in the heart of one of the most beautiful of Egyptian countrysides, famous for its forests of date trees which stretched for miles,

sometimes broken up by cultivated fields, but more often thickly wooded with little waterways and canals meandering through its colonnades of trees. On moonlit nights big shafts of light would come down among them in an awesome, cathedral-like manner, and the whole place would become some great silent garden haunted by a distant pharaonic past, set in sculptured immobility.

The forest of Marg took its name from its most important village, a couple of miles away from us and the *izba*. The village was an urban agglomeration of some importance on the main road from Cairo to Khanka. Its railway station looked out of place and shabby, with a black iron railing separating the lines from the main road. But it was so rustic, and its gray functional architecture on an elevated platform so unpretentious, that it finally became something of a landmark.

Great-Aunt Nimet had rebuilt part of the village with two-floored buildings, which boasted shutters, and balconies of wood, and plastered walls painted in pale pastel colors. But basically the place remained one of mud houses and unpaved street intermingling with unattractive buildings of plain brick. Just outside the village a water pump by a little canal was a meeting-place for the village women, who would gather there to scrub their pots and pans, all the while chatting gaily among themselves. Once their chores were done, they would pile everything on their heads and walk away in single file among the trees—stately, graceful figures, with a beauty of movement that is an inseparable rhythm of the Egyptian countryside.

At the other end of the village, the men, a rather rough, shabby lot, would meet at café on the main road facing the black iron railing of the railway line. Beneath a provisional *hasira* awning, made of reeds and propped up by a couple of wooden poles, the clients would sit on straw-seated wooden chairs, sipping tea out of little glasses placed on rickety, three-legged, metal tables. Some would be smoking their water-pipes, in silence, their gaze far away but not missing a thing, their dignity unruffled by poultry pecking at the earthen floor at their feet; other groups of customers, merchants and peasants, would animatedly discuss business transactions; while, flowing in and out among the tables, the café attendant would go backward and forward from the interior to the public section of the coffee shop.

Aunt Emina, Great-Aunt Nimet's daughter, lived in a house close to the village, but to avoid having to pass through its narrow streets she built a road that, when coming from Cairo, started about half a mile before the village began. The new way, bordered by blue jacaranda trees, left the main road at right angles to plunge immediately into the palm forest and then emerge into the fields that almost completely surrounded the house, except for one part facing the village. A pink wall enclosed the garden and rose to meet the big, wooden garden gate, which was flanked on either side by two whitewashed, flat, classical pilasters. A similar gate, but bigger—the original one—gave on the village entrance. Inside the garden, a driveway—bordered unexpectedly by cedar trees with low sweeping branches—led to the house, which was built on a rise and painted the same color as the garden walls. It had been a hunting lodge of Ibrahim Pasha's, and Aunt Emina had managed to convert it into what to me was the most charming place of its kind in and around Cairo.

From a small glass vestibule, one stepped directly into the main room of Sheikh Mansour, as the house was called. On each side of the doorway two deep windows allowed a faint light to filter into the vast room. It was an elongated octagonal in shape, and on both right and left sides of this octagon illuminated showcases harbored some Far Eastern curiosities. The opposite two corners were occupied by two doorways leading, on the left, to a small passage with an entrance to the dining room, and, on the right, to Aunt Emina's private rooms. Both doorways were surmounted very theatrically, but extremely successfully because of the very high painted ceilings, by heavy gilt mirrors with sculptured trophies encasing the Egyptian coat of arms and crest.

Aunt Emina was to me one of the most delightful persons of her generation. Although to some people she seemed unbending and irascible, which she may well have been at times, my relationship with her since my childhood to her last days on the Bosphorus remained without a cloud. I have memories of walking with her through the summer countryside at Kitzbühl, or in later years dining at Sheikh Mansour in the garden by candlelight. I can hear her tinkling, delightful laugh and see the expression of pleasure on her face when in congenial company or surroundings.

I remember her accepting to come in semi-disguise to a fancy-dress party I gave just after the war (in 1946 or 1947), staying until midnight, enjoying herself thoroughly, and, having seen everything and everyone, departing in high good humor.

All the same her presence imposed on many, and I have seen people instinctively drop a curtsy when greeting her, and others address her by the title of Princess. When the latter occurred, she would quite firmly point out that she was the daughter of a princess and not of a prince, and therefore had no right to any such title, since the children of princesses inherited only their father's name and status. Her sense of decorum went so far that when she received from her mother, among other magnificent jewels, a most remarkable tiara, she used it for some time abroad but then had it broken up as it embarrassed her to be bedecked more ostentatiously than other members of the family who were her elders.

She entertained splendidly at Sheikh Mansour. The octagonal room would be turned over to dancing, and then, when one stepped through the study to the terrace, one would find a huge marquee divided up into different sections, dining rooms, drawing rooms, all arranged with the taste and perfectionism which were so much part of her.

Married to a Turkish diplomat, aunt Emina was often abroad and it was Sheikh Mansour's fate to remain for long periods shut and unused. The house and the lands around it had been given to Aunt Emina by her mother at the time of her marriage, but before that it had remained unoccupied for many years. A band of robbers, thinking it an easy prey, had tried to break into it, but the garden watchmen had resisted and something of a siege had taken place. Finally a truce was called and, after a lot of palaver, it turned out that the robbers were not local peasants but men from the desert region, misfits among the agrarian population, who had turned to brigandage for lack of suitable work. On hearing this, Great-Aunt Nimet had found them jobs throughout the estates, many becoming night watchmen in her own garden, and law-abiding citizens for ever afterward.

It took hardly a few minutes to get from Sheikh Mansour to Great-Aunt Nimet's place, which was always referred to as 'Marg.' One passed through the village in a matter of seconds and straightaway into fields that stopped at

the *izba*, which pressed its huts on the home farm. The palace was filled with water buffalo, from whose milk was made the most incomparable yogurt I have ever tasted. Next came the ocher-colored administrative buildings of the estate, which preceded the main entrance to the garden—a simple, low, black iron gate surmounted by an arch of evergreens springing from the hedges on each side of it.

The entrance could be spotted from afar in the flat landscape by a clump of gigantic old eucalyptus trees standing like sentinels opposite it. Behind the trees, parallel to the road, passed the railway lines. The train, if desired, would stop just opposite the garden gate at a modest, wooden platform with two posts holding a board announcing the name of the little station—'Nimetallah,' my aunt's name, so baptized by King Fuad as an affectionate compliment to his favorite sister who lived there. Further down the road, adjoining the garden, was a brick factory also belonging to the estate.

The obvious question now arises as to what sort of relationships were maintained between two such different sectors of society, visibly poles apart, as the peasant population and the landlords. Naturally this was conditioned by the personalities of the people concerned, but there were everyday functional ties as well and some of a more subtle nature.

Perfectly normal and nice but absentee landlords, who might not supervise personally their given instructions, would get a bad name through their greedy stewards, who would exploit both their master and the peasants ruthlessly; both, for different reasons, would be almost helpless in their hands By contrast, an exemplary landowner such as Sherifa Hanem Effendi, mentioned earlier, would spend some of her time on her estates (even her mother's tomb was there); she had built 150 houses for her peasants, a school, and a public bath which was shared by the two sexes, who used it on alternate days. Sherifa hanem continued to receive courtesy visits from her peasants years after she had had all her lands confiscated by the republican military government that took power after 1952.

Marg was a halfway house between these two segments of society, being so close to Cairo. Uncle Ala'adin ran the farm and tried to bring in innovations in the local agriculture. The men servants who waited on us at table (white jackets and gloves, black ties, trousers, and shoes, red tarbooshes) were all local peasants who had come up 'through the ranks' into the house. But the major-domo who presided over them was one of the more important kalfas, assisted by another maid who had the dual role of being in attendance on Great-Aunt Nimet.

Great-Aunt Nimet herself would make unannounced visits to the *izba* dispensary to see if everything was running properly, ready for first aid or minor ailments. It could house eight to a maximum of ten women and the same number of men. But only minor surgery, or ophthalmological and gynecological interventions, were carried out there; more serious cases would be referred to hospitals in Cairo, some of which were family-supported institutions. The oiling of these wheels within wheels that went to make up a whole were a common religion (I am referring to a majority) and a stable government.

Strange as it may seem to people conditioned by years of propaganda, both at home and especially abroad, no one was above the law. The everyday advantages or abuses of influence, position, and wealth stopped before the law courts, and it is only fitting here to pay homage to the Egyptian magistrature of the period, which proved itself to be of complete integrity and incorruptibility. It was considered quite justly to be the nation's crowning glory without which no security exists. And the basic patterns of behavior which a common religion, never neglected by either side, imposed on both worlds was a subtle bond which kept everyone flowing in the same direction.

On official religious holidays, the Eid al-Kabir or the Kurban Bairam, one would see on the normally rustic Marg road a line of cars bringing members of the family, or dignitaries and their wives, to call on Great-Aunt Nimet or sign their names in the Visitors Book. At the garden entrance the two porters, wearing caftans with the family colors, dark-blue trimmed with cyclamen, would perform a deep *téménah*—that particularly Turkish way of bowing in which the right hand reaches toward the ground and then up to the chin and the forehead—when ushering the guests in, and announce their arrival by ringing an electric bell communicating with the

house. There Béchira, an old black eunuch, a relic of harem days, dressed in a smart black frock-coat ('stambouline'), would help visitors out of their cars, aided by a few other men in dark-blue suits, all of course wearing tarbooshes on their heads. If the visitor was of princely rank, or the King in person, a double row of kalfas—usually about fourteen of them—would make a passageway in the marble paved hall, bowing to deep *téménahs* as the person passed between the two lines, which uncurled like a breaking wave.

On these occasions table covers ('sirmas') of velvet embroidered with gold thread would be brought out, only to be wrapped up again in tissue paper afterward, and put in a cloth satchel, to be stored away so that the thread would not tarnish. Refreshments would be served from fine crystal ware, Bohemian nineteenth-century colored glass, or silver goblets (rarely of gold) which had matching covers and saucers.

When the moment of departure arrived, the guest would be escorted to the house door by one of Great-Aunt Nimet's ladies, some of the kalfas would be hovering around for minor services, and discreetly in the background one could feel, if not see, other attendants ready to step in if needed.

In the opposite direction from Cairo, toward Khanka, the untroubled countryside would remain unchanged except for some horse-drawn carts carrying whole families of peasants, dressed in bright, shiny holiday finery, singing or clapping their hands to the beat of a *darabukka* or tambourine.

One early summer Great-Aunt Nimet was staying with her brother, King Fuad, and his wife, Queen Nazli, at the Palace of Montaza in Alexandria, when my sisters and I were summoned to join them. There we were to meet our great-uncle and his wife, and their children, the future King Farouk and his sisters, the Princesses Fawzia, Faiza, Faika, and Fathia. King Fuad, out of veneration for his mother, whose name, Ferial, began with an 'F,' had wanted all his children's names to start with the same letter. (Her tomb is in the same chamber at Rifai as his own; but, out of respect for her, hers is the bigger and the more important of the two.)

Accompanied by Miss Machray, we boarded the train at Cairo station and got off at Sidi Gaber, one stop before the Alexandria terminus. A chamberlain and two bright-red palace cars were waiting for us, and we drove off to Montaza. On arrival there, we kissed our aunt's hand and were served with

refreshments of sherbets (fruit syrup mixed with water) and fresh fruit. Then a lady-in-waiting appeared, followed by a maid (short black dress and white apron, very different from Marg kalfas) carrying on a tray presents for us from our uncle the King: a diamond brooch for Hadidja, a sapphire-and-diamond pendant for Aicha, and a child-size gold watch for me. We asked the lady-in-waiting to thank and convey our respects to His Majesty. Then we were introduced to our cousins on a large, covered marble terrace on the first floor, where we played about with a ball until Queen Nazli appeared, accompanied by Great-Aunt Nimet, who presented us to her. The Queen[1] must have had a most magnetic personality, for, forgetting my usual shyness and all thought of proper manners, I ran to her and, jumping up, flung my arms around her neck and kissed her soundly on both cheeks, much to the general merriment.

Then the Queen and Great-Aunt Nimet left, and some time later we were ushered into a small drawing room, where we were presented to the King. Here there was no question of forgetting oneself; we kissed his hand and did our *téménahs* down to the ground, stood to attention, hands clasped in front of us, and listened to his little speech: We were to work hard at our studies and obey our Great-Aunt and Miss Machray in all matters.

The King had an alarmingly severe appearance, with handlebar mustaches. He seemed to us children remote and set apart from humankind; but this was a childish impression, for he was simplicity itself in family circles, and as long as he lived we had continual proof of his concern for our welfare. We felt his presence, however distant, in all our doings, and in later years I was able to confirm this. Of all the members of our numerous family he was unquestionably the one who did his best to take over our father's responsibilities toward us.[2]

As a child King Fuad had left Egypt with his father, the Khedive Ismail, for exile in Italy and, when he grew up, went with the future king of Italy, Victor Emmanuel, to the military academy in Turin. Later, as a young man, when not busy with state duties he had led the life of an Edwardian man of fashion, in the sense that he had been very much a ladies' man. But almost overnight he had come to the throne and turned out to be a most remarkable,

hardworking, and enlightened monarch; and, on his marriage to Queen Nazli, a devoted husband and family man.[3]

Like his ancestors Muhammad Ali and Ibrahim Pasha, who literally almost to their dying breath would go through the length and breadth of the land to see that projects were being carried out properly and did not remain a dead letter through indifference or corruption, King Fuad would insist on supervising many things himself and, at times, with what one might think unnecessary precautions. I have been told by a particularly discerning foreign ambassador who was in Egypt during his reign that receptions at Abdeen were extremely well thought out, even down to the smallest details of the cuisine. This was because the King often supervised everything himself. If there was an especially delicate or tricky ceremony ahead, he would have the whole thing run through the previous day in front of his unerring and attentive eye. He would not entrust to others what was an official, and therefore national, occasion which would reflect on the country as a whole. Within the family, for the same reasons, he would keep a watchful eye. If anything was seen to be amiss, quick retribution would follow in the form of a palace chamberlain with a message from the royal head of state. If things really went too far, the person in question would be officially and publicly ostracized.

Kind Fuad was strongly opposed to the ladies of the family frequenting the diplomatic missions. Personal acquaintances and friendships were permitted, but never of an official character. The exception was Aunt Aziza, who was asked by him to entertain once a week the wives of foreign diplomats to tea. She had a beautiful dining room in her villa at Giza, the walls lined with showcases filled with priceless jade which, with the right lighting, created a fairy-like atmosphere. She herself was a kind and simple person, but like many of her generation had the appearance of being slightly aloof, as if everyone had been assigned an allotted amount of vital space in life, with invisible barriers for privacy. She was the one of her sisters-in-law whom my mother liked best.

Largely through King Fuad's personal efforts, Egypt was in 1922 again recognized as an independent country. By royal decree in the same year a democratic constitution was drafted, based on the Belgian constitution, and the final version was promulgated—again by royal decree—in 1923. It was

by this constitution that the country was to be run henceforth. According to one authority, "It left something to the future, but tried to guarantee the people an effective participation both in the administration of public affairs and in the framing of laws and their execution. This Constitution guaranteed equality before the law, individual liberty, inviolability of the domicile and property, liberty of opinion and assembly, a free press, and compulsory education for both sexes." And again: "The importance of the power conferred on the King as opposed to the parliament in the 1923 Constitution can be appraised correctly only if the prestige of the House of Muhammad Ali is brought into account. The King enjoyed admiration, even veneration, in Egypt as shown by many national Hymns."[4]

King Fuad dexterously steered the ship of state through one of the most crucial and complex moments of contemporary history, filled with patriotic riots, manifestations and aspirations, and British opposition to complete self-rule. One had to know how far to go and no further without risking the loss of what the country had gained, for gunboat policy was still rampant. Thus, in 1926, when the Egyptian government formulated a wish to lighten British control over the Egyptian army, three British warships were sent to Alexandria, and no one had any trouble in taking this rather heavy-handed hint—or in remembering the bombardment of the second capital by the British fleet in 1882. Similarly industrialization was discouraged, for the looms of the British Midlands had to have priority. But this was skillfully by-passed through the founding of a national bank with all-Egyptian capital—a measure that was to allow the great industrial center of al-Mahalla al-Kubra to emerge and to furnish the country with the necessary textiles.

One of King Fuad's lesser-known interventions, according to one of the most distinguished Islamic scholars of the time, Mrs. Devonshire, was his work to save and prevent the destruction of medieval Cairo, which was going on at an alarming rate around the Azhar University. She comments on "the enlightened taste of King Fuad, to whom archeologists owe the timely rescue of so many precious monuments. It was H.M. who prevented the destruction of the whole façade of what is perhaps the most beautiful house in Cairo, the Sehemy Palace." We are also indebted to King Fuad for founding innumerable cultural and scientific enterprises and institutions, said to number over

eighty. The only share that he requested for himself, at the death of his brother Prince Ibrahim Hilmy, was the prince's remarkable library, which was housed at Abdeen.

The King's death proved to be a turning point in the history of the country, and he was greatly mourned and regretted—to this day. After a revolutionary eclipse of many years, his imposing stature is beginning to take shape in the minds of many concerned with the history of Egypt.

King Fuad, it must be admitted, was inadvertently the cause of the mishandling of the interior decoration at Abdeen. He was informed that the Palace needed renovating, and a budget of two million pounds was set aside for the purpose. As the King had neither the time nor any interest in these matters, he was advised to give the work to what he was told was a competent European decorator, who proceeded to push into distant corridors very nice pieces of already existing furniture and replace them with contemporary replicas of period pieces. But the decorator's most ridiculous and offensive blunder is in the Byzantine Room, which he filled with art-deco reliefs. In our days these may be considered amusing or modish, but the whole arrangement is a museum piece of bad taste and a complete anachronism. A few rooms were not molested and are all right, among them the Throne Room, which is dignified and in the spirit of the country. I am afraid that Montaza did not fare better than Abdeen; only Ras al-Tin survived without damage.

But to return to that particular day when we were summoned to the palace of Montaza. After the King's departure, we went to lunch with Queen Nazli and some of her ladies, Great-Aunt Nimet, and our cousins, all except princess Fathia who was too young to be at table with us. In the middle of the meal the King joined us and everyone stood up. Then, in a voice like thunder, he said: "Asseyez-vous," the Queen sat down; "Asseyez-vous," Aunt Nimet sat down; "Asseyez-vous," and we all sat down!

Here is the menu of one of these family luncheons, in this case one that took place at Qubba:

Hors d'œuvres variés
Filets de sole Orly, sauce tomate
Cotelettes d'Agneau à la Villeroy
Cailles au Riz
Céléri à la Moelle
Petits pois frais à la crême
Dinde de Fayoum rôtie
Pommes de terre Anna
Salade pointes d'asperge
Umm Ali,[5] *Gateau du Soleil, Dessert*

After lunch we went for a drive with our cousins in the wonderful gardens. Montaza was a self-sufficient paradise. From afar one saw a wooded promontory stretching into the waters of the Mediterranean with—in the Middle, on a slight hill—the turrets and towers of what seemed some Ruritanian castle.

But Montaza's crowning glory are its gardens, with beautiful sheltered coves and bays on the sea, sandy beaches, and savage cliffs and rocks. On the land side, close to the sea, are sturdy if uninteresting casuarinas; in the center part are, or I should say were, lawns, rockeries, rare flowers, and a profusion of different varieties of trees; near the main entrance one was greeted by especially splendid date groves of great height.[6] Yet it must have been a very empty paradise for our cousins, for we were the first children they had ever met, and when little Princess Fathia was taken away before lunch, she cried out after me: "I want the little boy, I want the little boy," as one might ask for some new-found toy.

So every Friday we went to spend the day with our cousins, either at Montaza or at the Qubba Palace in Cairo; but my sisters more often than myself, for I was soon to leave for school abroad. These 'Fridays' lasted as long as King Fuad lived, then they were discontinued. We were to be replaced by a group of attractive young people more in keeping with Queen Nazli's wishes.

Notes

1 Queen Nazli was the daughter of Abd al-Rahman Sabri Pasha and the sister of Sherif Sabri Pasha.
2 J. W. McPherson, in his very charming book *The Moulids of Egypt: Egyptian Saints-Days* (Cairo: N. M. Press, 1941), refers to him as "that kindhearted monarch."
3 Before his coming to the throne, he had been married to Princess Chivekiar by whom he had an only child, H. R. H. Princess Fawkiya; a son, Ismail, died young.
4 Jacob M. Landau, *Parliaments and Parties in Egypt*, with a foreword by Bernard Lewis. Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1979.
5 A delicious Egyptian dessert, served hot and a bit like bread-and-butter pudding but with almonds, raisins, and pistachios, and a lot of cream.
6 Since the government takeover in 1953, changes have taken place, apart from the building-over of parts of the garden. Here is a report of the Ministry of Agriculture, 1982: Of the botanical gardens, 40 feddans are no longer under culivation, 5,000 trees have been felled, over and above 250 of the famous palm trees. Most of the other trees that have survived have been attacked by parasites.

Ahmed Fakhry

Siwan Customs and Traditions

from

Siwa Oasis

1973

The majority of the Siwans still preserve many of their old customs and traditions. The changing times, and the new currents of modernism, have influenced and to a certain extent modified some of their customs, but Siwan society has not yet broken down. A great number of the inhabitants, and especially the women, still find great pride in their old traditions and pity those who are drifting away from the traditional way of life.

The early travelers to Siwa were greatly interested in the life of the people and recorded in their writings what they heard from the inhabitants through interpreters who accompanied them; all of these travelers spoke neither Arabic nor the Siwan language, and none of them was in position to mix with the people freely during their short stays.

The Siwan Manuscript

Apart from these writings, we have an important source of information in the Siwan manuscript. It was begun some ninety years ago by the head of the family of Abu Musallim, the religious judge of Siwa at the time, who

had studied, in his youth, at al-Azhar, in Cairo. He recorded in this book mention of Siwa and the other oases as recorded by some of the medieval Arab writers. He added to it oral traditions existing among the inhabitants concerning the origin of the different families, the wars which took place between the Easterners and Westerners, as well as a general account of some of their customs and traditions. His work was continued by his son after his death and afterwards by his grandson. The original, however, was presented to Prince ʿUmar Tūsūn in the late twenties, after several copies had been made. The family still adds to it whatever they consider worth recording, such as the dates of arrival or departure of some of the prominent officials and very important incidents. I saw a copy, in 1938, and was allowed to keep it for two days and take from it all the notes I wanted. Other members of the same family and other families also started other books of the same type.

The family says nowadays, that one of the Ma'mūrs of the oasis took away the copy which I saw in 1938 and sent it to Cairo and has never returned it, but in all probability they still have the copy and are unwilling to show it to every visitor who asks to see it. The important parts are those which give an account of local laws and regulations in Siwa and the detailed description of the ancient town and the old customs which were deeply rooted among the inhabitants. A number of the important points in it are included in the present work. However, in the following pages, I give only some of the customs and traditions which I consider necessary to an understanding of the social life of the oasis. The subject still needs more study.

The Zaggālah

This word is the plural of *zaggāl* which means, literally, "club-bearer." These are a special class of the inhabitants whose duty was, and still is, to work in the fields and gardens of the rich landowners during the day. A number of them were supposed to constitute a body of guards for the oasis during the night. A group of them were also chosen to be in attendance on the heads of the families and the rich landowners. They used to be referred to as *khādim,* which means literally "the one who is in the service of another". Some of them were entrusted with the punishment of any person who transgressed against the law. They belonged to the same families as their

masters, but were generally among the poor who owned no land and had to work for the rich.

When the Siwans were still living inside their walled town, none of these bachelors was allowed to spend the night in the town but had to sleep outside the gates, in caves cut in the rock or in the gardens. Their age varied between 20 and 40, for they were not allowed to marry before that age. With time, they turned into a large group of strong-bodied youth, who spent their leisure time in drinking an intoxicating drink, *labgī*, a special kind of fermented juice extracted from the heart of the date-palm, singing and dancing and indulging in all kinds of pleasures which suited their age and temperament. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that homosexuality was common among them.

The rich person who engages a *zaggāl* to work for him is responsible for all his meals the year round, clothes him with a shirt of cotton with short sleeves in the summer, and a shirt with long sleeves, a woolen hand-woven tunic, which they called a *gibbeh*, and a turban-cloth in winter. At the end of the year he must give him forty bushels of the best variety of dates (the *sa'īdī*) and twenty bushels of barely for his services. In return, the *zaggāl* cannot marry, but must give all his time to working for his master. The reason for their being forbidden to spend the night inside the town was to prevent them from having the opportunity to have relations with married or unmarried women.

The merry parties of the *zaggālah* were, and still are, the gayest in Siwa. Many of the sons of the rich joined them and soon became accustomed to their way of life. With time, the rich owners depended entirely on the *zaggālah*, not only for hard work in the fields and gardens, but also in their fights. In the middle of the 17th century, the *zaggālah* had become a powerful group and acquired the right to have their voice heard in any dispute concernign the gardens, or in the fights which often occurred between the two factions of the town. In more than one place in the Siwan Manuscript we read that the council of the heads of the families had to change their decisions, or their agreements with others, because their own *zaggālah* did not consider them acceptable.

The following story shows that they were far from being under control. In the early years of the 18th century (circa 1705) a number of Bedouin women of doubtful character, under the leadership of one of their number, settled at Siwa and pitched their tents at the foot of the hill at a spot known nowadays as al-Manshiyah. This was during the season of selling the dates, when many caravans arrive in the oasis and business flourishes. They succeeded in giving many of the Bedouin "a home away from home", and managed also to attract some of the *zaggālah* who used to go there to enjoy their evenings. After the season, the *shaykhs* were forced to agree that the women continue to live where they were, because they thought that this would make their laborers happier and, in the meantime, help to ease the minds of the married Siwans. With the passing of time, the leader of this group of women had become very powerful and the majority of the *zaggālah* where under her influence. On more than one occasion, the proud, conservative shaykhs had to ask her to help them, when there were difficulties between some of the shaykhs and their *zaggālah*.

I attended, on many occasions, the parties of some of these groups, either in the day in the gardens, or in the evenings in the town square, or inside one of the houses. The parties held during the day were generally quiet and those who took part were happy, singing and playing their music. Their musical instruments are the flute, a drum and sometimes a pipe, or the beating on a tin with the hands or short sticks. Their songs are in their own Siwan language and are sung either by one person at a time or by the whole group.[1] Their gayest parties are those held in the evenings, when they get very drunk and begin to dance in a circle. Each one puts a girdle around his waist and another above his knees and moves round and round, jerking his body, leaning forward and putting his hands on the shoulder of the man in front of him. The musicians sit in the middle, or at one side, and the dancers are supposed to sing together, but in their excitement one hears shouts and shrieks as if they were wounded animals. It does not take long before the onlookers observe that some of the dancers come very close to those in front of them and the dance turns into erotic movements.

Morals

If the *zaggālah,* or some of them, behave in this way, can we say that all the Siwans share with them their attitude towards accepted principles of morals? I must say that most of the new generation of Siwan youth tell the strangers that they disapprove of it, but no one can say that it has completely disappeared. In almost every book or article written about Siwa, the author refers to the homosexuality of the inhabitants, but it must be made clear that this has become much less prevalent, and that the Siwans are now in this respect no better nor worse than any other community in the towns of Egypt, or elsewhere in other countries of the world.[2] The men of Siwa pay great attention to being seen performing their prayers and go very often to the mosque, but this does not mean that all of them abstain from drinking, or avoid committing other vices.

The Siwan is by nature a conservative person, hates to be criticized or ridiculed by others and pays the greatest attention to avoid doing anything wrong in public. They are thrifty and always reluctant to encourage any intimate friendship with strangers, unless they know that it is in their own interest and that they can profit from it. In the meantime they are very keen to be on good terms with government officials and especially those in key positions in the oasis, and take great pride if these officials agree to visit them in their houses or gardens, where they do all within their power to impress their guests. In my long experience with the Siwans, I never had occasion for serious complaint. I have always taken them as they are; and I cannot understand why most of those who have written about them have been so unkind.

In one of the best books written on Siwa, the author—who spent a long time with them as District Commissioner from 1917 onwards—says of the Siwans: "They are not immoral, they simply have no morals." In another place in the same book he says: "They seem to consider that every vice and indulgence is lawful."[3] This is a very polite and fair criticism when compared with what was written by others, and especially in Arabic. I wish that people could remember the very wise saying: "Let him without sin amongst you cast the first stone."

As for the Siwan women, they used to live in complete seclusion and were not allowed to meet strangers, but there were no real barriers to prevent them mixing with their relatives and some of their neighbors. The *zaggālah* laborers working for the family had every opportunity to go into the houses at all times during the day, and in the evening whether their masters were at home or not. However, if we wish to compare the morals of the Siwan women with their sisters in the other oases, or in the Nile Valley, they are by no means the worst.[4]

Clothes and Ornaments

The clothes of the Siwan girls and their silver ornaments are generally the first thing to attract the attention of visitors.

The young girls who play in the streets are dressed in garments of very bright colors, with wide, long sleeves and they wear around their necks bead necklaces. Some of the girls nowadays dress their hair in many tresses in the traditional way, but others simply let their hair fall on their backs, or make it up in two tresses only. It is a source of pride to every woman to have her hair done in many small, thin tresses, numbering as many as thirty of forty, and to do the hair of any of her daughters, who have reached the age of eleven or twelve, in the same way. Sometimes, a clever relative does the hairdressing, but more often it is one of the professional women who specialize in this work, who comes to the house and spends four or five hours in dressing only one person's hair. While the women make much fuss about their hair, the men cut it very short, or shave their heads completely. Only the *zaggālah* leave one tuft on the top of their heads. In the past, it was common to see the small children with several small tufts of hair on their shaven heads. Every one of the leading families had a certain type of haircut for their children, and thus it was possible to identify them, even when they were playing in the streets. Nowadays, this practice is neglected and very few still follow it.

Whenever the women, or their grown up daughters, go out to attend a marriage, or to congratulate a relative or neighbor who has given birth to a child, or to make any important visit, they might well wear more than one garment. However, the outside robe must be black in color, with rich silk embroidery of variegated colors around the neck and the front part of the

dress, and they must wear a number of their traditional silver ornaments. The Siwan ornaments consist of broad silver bracelets, finger-rings, different kinds of necklaces of a special design, threaded with round silver and coral beads. They also wear ear-rings, either light ones in their pierced ear-lobes, or heavy ones which hang from the top of the head at each side, over the ears. There are many varieties of these silver ornaments; some of the very rich women may own not less than ten pounds weight of silver. However, the most essential and very typical silver ornaments of the Siwans are two—a circular silver bar which they call in the Siwan language *aghraw*, and which is used by all the well-to-do females. The unmarried girls hang from it a decorated disk, which they call *adrim* in the Siwan tongue. The second important ornament is the *ti'lāqayn*, which hangs at each side of the head; it has silver chains ending with sleigh-bells attached to crescent-like ornaments. The number of chains at each side varies between five and nine.

When I first visited Siwa thirty-five years ago, two silversmiths were busy making silver jewelry for the women, besides what was imported through the Bedouin from Alexandria and Libya, where silversmiths at Benghazi also used to make them. Nowadays, and indeed for fifteen years past, there are none; all the new articles are made in Alexandria, where one silversmith has specialized in making the same kind of ornaments for the Siwans. However, most of the rich Siwan girls are parting from the old tradition of wearing the heavy silver ornaments and prefer to use gold necklaces and gold finger- and ear-rings, which they wear along with some of the traditional silver ornaments.

In their houses, the women wear garments of bright colors, always with wide, long sleeves. They give the greatest attention to the dressing of their hair, constantly smearing it with olive oil, and applying *kuhl* for darkening their eyes. When they go out, they wear a black dress over the other colored ones, and put on trousers of white cotton cloth tight at the ankles, the lower parts embroidered with colored silk in beautiful, geometric designs. Whenever a Siwan woman leaves her house she wraps herself in a wide sheet of cloth (called a *milāyah*), striped in black and gray. It is not woven in Siwa, but is always imported from the village of Kirdāsah, near the pyramids of Giza where for hundreds of years some of the families have woven this kind of cloth for the Siwans. Kirdāsah was the starting

point of all the caravans which used to travel between Cairo and Siwa up to the twenties of this century.

Whenever the women see a stranger, they pull the *milāyah* together over their faces, leaving only a small hole for one or both eyes, since they never use veils. It is not very common to meet an adult Siwan grown-up woman in the street, because they rarely leave their houses except to visit relatives, attend a funeral or a wedding, or to join in the festivities at the birth of a child. Shopping and any kind of work outside the house is the duty of the men.

Sometimes we see some of the women, especially the middle-aged or elderly, walking in the town or in the roads leading to the gardens. Up to ten years ago, many of them could be seen riding donkeys.[5] Nowadays almost every Siwan family owns a donkey-drawn cart, which they call a *karussah*, a word which apparently reached Siwa from neighboring Libya when it was under Italian occupation. The *karussah* is always driven by a man or a boy, who sits at the front; behind him one or more women and their children. Doubtless, it is more economical, more comfortable and useful, since it is used also for the other needs of transportation.

Apart from the black or dark garments, which the visitors often see, at home the Siwan women wear other colored dresses. They treasure most the two dresses which are made for brides; one is black silk and the other is of white cotton or silk. Both are very wide with long, wide sleeves and are richly decorated with silk embroidery and buttons of mother of pearl.

In spite of the wave of modernism which is beginning to sweep over Siwa, there are certain things to which the Siwan women attach great importance. These are the celebration of the birth of a child, marriage ceremonies, and the ceremonial when a dear relative dies. In spite of the modifications which are inevitable in these changing times, many of the old traditions are still respected.

The Birth of a Child

The birth of a child is celebrated with many festivities, particularly if the parents belong to rich families and the child is male. The most important occasion is, of course, the birth of a firstborn.

The midwife is still the principal person to take care of the pregnant women and delivers the infants, in spite of the presence of more than one government physician and the availability of a hospital. They appeal to the physician only very rarely and, when the midwife sees that her patient is at the point of death, she cunningly prefers to avoid all responsibility; thus she can later put all the blame on the physician if anything happens.

As a rule, the woman who gives birth must lie on a mat on the floor for seven or ten days.[6] The first six days pass quietly—only the very intimate relatives can call on her; the seventh day is the day of celebration. The female relatives, neighbors, and friends come to the house accompanied by their young children. All must share a meal prepared for the occasion, which must include salted fish. This is a traditional dish connected with the miraculous birth of their local saint Sīdī Sulaymān. The ceremony of naming the child begins after the meal; if it is a boy, the father alone has the right to choose the name; if it is a girl, it is the mother who selects the name. After this, everybody may look at the baby; then the midwife marks the cheeks, nose and legs of the infant with a paste of red *hinnā*[7] then rush into the streets and the market place, calling out at the top of their voices the name of the baby and the name of the father.

After the departure of the children, a large earthenware bowl, especially made for this occasion, is brought into the room where the mother lies; it must be half filled with water. Each woman in the room throws into it her silver ornaments, and then the women make a circle around it, raising it from the floor while the midwife recites rythmically good wishes and prayers to God to make the child live and have a happy future. When she has finished, the women raise the bowl and lower it seven times and then drop it to the floor. It smashes to pieces, the women collect their ornaments and thus ends the ceremony; the smashing of the bowl is believed to drive away the evil eye and assure the child a happy life.

In the case of a firstborn boy, the father calls the barber after some time, to shave his head. He gives the barber the weight of the hair in silver, if the family is poor, and its weight in gold if he is rich. Mothers love to hang amulets around the neck of the child or attach them to his garments; the most precious is that which is written by the shaykh of the mosque and is

placed in a small leather bag. All such amulets are to protect the baby from evil and to keep him healthy.

All the boys are circumcised, not when they are very small babies, but when they reach the age of four or more. In the Siwan Manuscript, we read: "One of the old customs is the ceremony of circumcision. He who wants to circumcise his son informs his relatives, and if he is rich he informs the whole town. On the day preceding the circumcision, they shave most of the head of the boy and, in the evening of the same day, the relatives come to the house, and make a *qushatah* over his head.[8] They hang decorated paper above his head, and some of the relatives and friends of the family dye his hands with *hinnā*. The following morning they take the boy to the spring of Tamūsī,[9] where they wash him, and then bring him home to be circumcised.

"After three days, every person who was present at or invited to the *qushātah*, comes to the house with a small basket full of peas, pomegranates, cucumbers or watermelons. The relatives bring a pair of pigeons or a chicken, or give money." The manuscript adds: "The father of the boy used to give a banquet, but nowadays he offers tea to all the guests."

Marriage

Marriage at Siwa can be considered as the most important of all the festivities; it is an occasion when tradition is still respected to a great extent.[10] I begin with what is recorded in the Siwan manuscript and then add other details. "When an important marriage takes place, the whole town is invited. They eat *azqagh*, a Siwan food made of lentils and peas. The food is provided by the family of the bride, but the marriage feast is celebrated in the house of the bridegroom's family. On the marriage day, the women of the man's family go and fetch the bride; they struggle until they win and take her away from the women of the bride's family. The bridegroom goes into her room for about one and half hours and then leaves her. All who are present at the feast bring *gummār* with them. A woman accompanies the bride to the house of the bridegroom; the girl is brought wrapped up in a *jird*[11] and a sword hangs at her side until she reaches her husband. The custom of bringing *gummār* has ceased since the days of ʻAbdul-Rahmān Muʻarrif (one of the judges of Siwa in the 19th century). The presents

had become in his time peas and cones of sugar; these are replaced in recent years by money. The old custom does not exist anymore."

These brief notes lack many important details and need commentary. A fixed *mahr* (dowry)—the sum of 120 piasters (six riyals, the equivalent of six dollars or one and third English gold sovereign)—is to be paid for any girl whether rich or poor, young or old, virgin, divorced or widow, because the Siwans consider them all as the daughters of the same equal forty ancestors. This *mahr* is taken by the father, or the relatives of the girl if they are very poor. As is usual, four are to be paid when married and two when divorced. The rich do not accept it. The difference lies in the gifts which the bridegroom presents to the bride: these include different kinds of clothes, expensive silver ornaments and, in recent years, also some of gold. To avoid all possible complications, many bridegrooms prefer to give the family of the girl a fixed sum of money and, if her family wants to make a show, they can add from their own money to what is actually paid.[12] In any case, the family of the girl also spends large sums of money on her clothes and ornaments—more than they usually receive from the family of the bridegroom. Nowadays, the clothes alone cost more than a hundred pounds, if the bride and the bridegroom belong to well-to-do families.

When the bride is dressed in the evening of her marriage day, she must wear seven garments one over the other. The first, which is next to the skin, must be white in color and of a thin transparent cloth; the second is red and transparent also; the third must be black; the fourth is yellow; the fifth is blue; the sixth is of red silk and the seventh is of green silk. Over these, she wears a special marriage dress, very richly embroidered with silk around the neck; over her head she puts a red silk shawl. The silver ornaments also cost a considerable sum of money.

The average age of marriage for girls is now sixteen years, and for men twenty-five. Until some thirty or forty years ago, the girls used to get married at the age of twelve to fourteen or less. A very strict custom forbade a man to have real intercourse with his wife for at least two years, since they believed that if the girl reached the age of puberty in the house of her husband, she would remain more obedient and faithful to him. Some Siwans (a small minority) still adhere partly to this custom, but they

find that half a year or less is more than sufficient, since the brides are already mature.

However, it is very rare in Siwa to find a husband and wife who spend all their lives together; divorce is easy and occurs frequently. One seldom meets a man who is married to more than one wife living together in the same house; but it is not rare to hear some men boast that they have married several times, one after the other. Not infrequently, under these sad circumstances, many of the young girls who are not yet eighteen have already been married and divorced once or twice.

When all the arrangement between the two families are made, generally by the women, and the family of the bride has had enough time to sew and embroider all the clothes and buy her ornaments, they fix a date for the marriage. This is generally after the season of selling the dates, or the season of selling the olives.

In the early afternoon of the day of betrothal, the bride puts on her best clothes and goes forth in the company of some of the women of her family and a few of the male relatives, to the spring of *Tamūsī*.[13] Previously, it was the custom that the bride would descend into the spring, wearing a single garment and wash herself in its waters, but nowadays she washes her face, feet and hands only. Here at the spring, the bride removes the decorated disk (the *adrim*) from its circular bar (the *aghraw*) and hands it to her mother or one of her aunts, to be used by her younger sister or any other young girl in the family.

The women constantly serenade the bride, from the moment they leave the house and during the so-called bath at the spring. On their way back, they continue their singing until they meet the women of the bridegroom's family, who await them at an appointed place in the gardens on the outskirts of the town. Each of them offers her some money as a present, and the women of the two families continue their singing until they arrive at the house of the bride. There they spend their time in singing and dancing, waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom.

In the late evening, the bridegroom goes to the house of the bride accompanied by his relatives and friends. The bride waits in one of the rooms, guarded by some of her female relatives. A mock fight between the women of the two families ensues, ending in the "victory" of the bridegroom's party. They

then take the bride to their house; joined by the other women where they resume their singing and dancing. The girl used to ride a led donkey, but nowadays they generally take her by car. When they reach the house, a woman carries her, helped generally by other women, until they seat her in her new chamber. It is very important that her feet should never touch the ground while she is being carried, since this is considered very unlucky.

Later on, the bridegroom goes to see his wife, taking with him a present of fruits and some biscuits, peanuts, peas and sweets; when he arrives, the other women are supposed to leave the room.[14]

The first thing he does, after entering the room is to take away the sword which hangs from the bride's right shoulder and put it under the bed. It was formerly the custom that he then removed her right shoe and struck her gently seven times on her right foot with his right hand; nowadays he presses very gently her right toe with his right toe. After this he opens the bag or basket containing the fruits and sweets, and persuades her to eat some of them with him. After an hour, he descends to his friends. If he fails to do so, they knock on the door until he comes out. He spends the rest of the night with them, sharing their drinks and watching the singing and dancing until dawn. After this, he leaves the house with his best friend and spends two days in one of the gardens with him and his other friends.

On the third day, the family of the bride brings to her their presents and the rest of the furniture, including a carved red wooden chest which is made generally in Alexandria, and the rest of her clothes, also the finely woven plates and pots which the girl has woven herself, including several conical baskets, the *margūnahs*. These, like the other plates, are made of the fine leaves of the stalks of the date palms and are richly decorated with silk, leather and buttons of mother of pearl.[15] They bring also the cooking pots and some food. On the same day, the bridegroom returns to his house and brings with him for his bride, the traditional present consisting of all kinds of fruit of the season on their branches and fixed around a *gummār*; these are arranged very nicely and decorated with flowers. The present is sometimes so heavy that more than one person is needed to carry it from the gardens to the house. The bride eats a little from it, and then they begin to cut pieces from the *gummār* and send them, together with some of the fruit,

to every person who has provided a persent, or helped in the arrangements for the marriage.

On the seventh day, there is another small gathering at which the leading members of the two families have a meal in the bridegroom's house; after the seventh day the young couple begin their normal life together. These detailed ceremonies and festivities are performed only by the rich families when the girl marries for the first time.

Death

The Siwans bury their dead without any special ceremonies which distinguish them from other Muslims. They wash the body of the deceased according to the rules of Islam and wrap it in shrouds; the number of the shrouds depends on the wealth of the family.

Among the things which attract the attention of every visitor to Siwa is the great number of graveyards, which he sees around the houses of the town and its suburbs. This is due to the fact that every large family has its own. Whenever a person dies, they dig for him a deep trench in the ground; the dead person, wrapped in shrouds, is placed in the trench which is then covered with logs from the trunk of palm trees and earth and small stones are piled over them. They mark the tomb with one or two larger stones and sometimes encircle it with a low mud enclosure. The women of the family and their relatives show all the signs of exaggerated mourning and shriek at the top of their voices. The signs of mourning reach their peak at the moment when the body of the dead person leaves the house, carried on a bier on the shoulders of the relatives. The women utter very loud cries, tear their clothes, beat their breasts, throw dust over their heads and, sometimes, smear their faces with mud or some blue grit. At such times of excitement, the women forget the rule of avoiding being seen by any stranger and can be observed without any shawl covering the heads or faces. With their hair plaited in a number of small tresses and their exaggerated signs of grief, they present a living picture of ancient Egyptian women represented on the funeral scenes on the walls of the ancient tombs. They avoid, as much as they can, letting the body of a dead person remain in the house overnight; this is considered very unlucky and brings all kinds of misfortunes on the head of the family. If

a person dies in the early afternoon, they prepare everything for the burial on the same day, even if they have to take the body to the grave and bury it by the light of lanterns or torches. Nothing is put in the tomb with the dead, but sometimes, a pot of incense, or a small vase of water is placed on the grave.

When a man loses his wife, it is considered very proper to marry another one, even during the same month, and nobody can criticize him; but when the contrary happens and a married man dies, the attitude toward his widow is quite different.

The Ghūlah

The word *ghūlah* means literally "the female *ghūl* (goblin, gobble), the devourer of humans."

When a man dies, his widow is called *ghūlah*, for the entire community believes that she has become possessed of a very strong evil eye which brings misfortune to any person upon whom she sets her eyes. The poor widow may be a child of sixteen or seventeen, but in any case, her misery begins at the moment her husband is carried to the grave. Some of her female relatives accompany her to the spring of *Tamūsī* where she removes her silver ornaments and ordinary clothing, washes herself and dons a white garment, a sign of mourning. Thereafter the unlucky woman is required to live in complete seclusion, for as long as four months and ten days in former times, forty days now. Her food, which must not contain meat, is brought to her by an elderly woman, the only person permitted to visit her personally during this period. She is allowed to speak, without opening the door, to her female relatives and those male relatives whom, by law, she is forbidden to marry, as for example, her father, brothers or uncles. Meanwhile, she is not allowed to change her white garment, wash herself, dress her hair, apply *kuhl* to her eyes or use any kind of ornament.

When her period of seclusion has been fulfilled, the town crier, accompanied by a boy beating a drum, goes from street to street announcing that the *ghūlah* will reappear on the following day.

In mid-morning of that day, some of the children run through the streets announcing that she is coming forth; at noontime, a male relative climbs to the roof of the house and shouts at the top of his lungs that she is about to

appear. Although her seclusion is over, the people still fear that some of the evil may yet remain. They believe, that even now, if she sets her eyes on a person, she brings him bad luck. Thus after all these warnings, she leaves the house, her face uncovered but her eyes bound. She is accompanied by a few relatives including children who keep repeating a phrase in Siwan, meaning: "Avoid your misfortune, the *ghūlah* comes to you." This warning is, in most cases, superfluous, because the men who live near her house have long since disappeared into the gardens from early morning, and the women and their children have shut themselves in their rooms.

If she lives in the town of Siwa, she goes to the spring of Tilihrām, but if she lives in a distant place, she goes to the nearest spring or well to wash herself with its waters. Thereafter she is considered free from the evil spirit which possessed her. On reaching her house she adorns herself with her ornaments, dresses her hair, puts on her finest apparel and receives her relatives and friends. At dawn next day she climbs to the roof and drops a piece of a palm-stalk on the first man or woman who passes in front of the house; if it finds its mark, the person can expect something unpleasant during this day. But whether the stalk hits or misses, the widow thus rids herself completely of all her misfortunes, and can resume her normal life. One year from the date of her husband's death she can marry again to anyone she wants.[16]

This cruel custom is completely unknown anywhere else in Egypt, for it is in no way representative of the spirit and usage of the Muslim people, or the ancient Egyptians. However, it reminds us of other traditionally severe treatment of widows in some Asiatic and African communities. I wonder whence the Siwans inherited it, since no Berber or Arab community observes any custom of this kind nowadays.

Notes

1 For a detailed study of the music of Siwa and its songs, including several sung by the *zaggālah,* see Brigitte Schiffer, *Die Oase Siwa und ihre Musik* (Bottrop, 1936).

2 Up to the year 1928, it was not rare that some kind of a written agreement, which was sometimes called a "marriage contract", was made between two males; but since the visit of King Fu'ād to this oasis, it has become completely forbidden. Orders were issued to inflict the severest punishment on those who dared to commit such a crime. However, such agreements continued, but in great secrecy, and without the actual writing, till the end of World War II. Now the practice is not followed. The celebration of marrying a boy was accompanied by great pomp and banquets, to which many friends were invited. The money paid as *mahr* (i.e. dowry) for a boy, and the other expenses were much more than what was spent when marrying a girl. For this abnormal marriage, see G. Steindorff, *Durch die libysche Wuste Zur Amonsoase,* (Bielfeld und Leipzig, 1904), pp. 111–12. Steindorff's visit took place in the year 1900.

3 C. Darlymple Belgrave, *Siwa: The Oasis of Jupiter Amon* (London, 1923), pp. 149, 150.

4 We cannot expect women to live the life of saints in a society where the husbands indulge in abnormal ways of pleasure and where the youthful laborers were supposed to have all their meals in the house and enter the houses whenever they wished. The following excerpt from the Siwan Manuscript is worth mentioning: "The women who commit adultery were punished either by killing them, or by banishment to the Oasis of Bahriyah." This used to take place in the past. None of the Siwans can remember nowadays that any one of the women who committed adultery was killed or banished. In the present century, all that is done is to divorce the woman if she is married, or to keep the whole matter a secret.

5 The Siwan men ride donkeys with both legs to one side, and when they wish to mount they hold the reins in one hand then jump from the ground and seat themselves on the donkey's back. They say it is only the women and the very old and weak men who ride astride. All the donkeys one sees near the town of Siwa are males; the females are grouped at the village of Abū Shurūf, to which the male donkeys can be taken. The conservative Siwan men of previous generations were very keen to keep their wives and daughters away from everything which reminded them of sex. This old custom is still followed.

6 The numbers three and seven have a prominent place among the Arabs and have passed from the Arabs to all the African Muslims. Among the Berber, before their conversion to Islam, t he two numbers five and ten had this place; they are still very important and play a significant part in the life of the Berber, including the people of Siwa.

7 The *hinnā* (colloq. Hinnah) plant is the "Lausonia inermis." It is a perennial shrub, which grows abundantly in Egypt; its leaves and flowers were used in cosmetics and also in the mummification in ancient Egypt. A paste of its leaves is used as a dye for hair, hands and feet.

8 Meaning that each of the relatives must give some money to the barber in order to shave the small tuft or tufts which he leaves on purpose. This is generally done amidst the cheers of women and their singing.
9 The spring of Tamūsī has a special significance in the traditional life of the Siwans. We shall hear more of it subsequently in the paragraphs on marriage in this chapter.
10 For details of marriage customs see the works of Schiffer, *Die Oase Siwa und ihre Musik*, pp. 27–29; Steindorff, *Durch die libysche Wuste Zur Amonsoase*, pp. 111–2; Mahmud Mohammad Abdallah, "Siwan customs" in *Harvard African Studies*, 1: 8–17; and the writer's *Siwa Oasis: Its History and Antiquities* (Cairo, 1914), pp. 12–13.
11 A large sheet of wool, or silk, in which Bedouin men wrap themselves; it is used by the well-to-do Siwan men.
12 Thirty years ago, the presents offered by the bridegroom did not exceed 20-30 pounds, among the riches families; in very recent years 150 pounds is considered a modest and reasonable sum of money.
13 In previous times the brides were taken to "'Ayn al-Gūbah" the ancient "Spring of the Sun" which was also called "'Ayn al-Hammām" i.e. "Spring of the Bath" because of this ceremony. Since the middle of the last century, the Siwans prefer to take the brides to 'Ayn Tamūsī because it is far from the crowded roads and there the women can find more privacy.
14 It was the custom till some fifty years ago that the bridegroom took with him a stalk of a date palm and, before entering the room he removed his white garment, soaked it in oil, wrapped it around the stalk and lighted it. When it was half burnt, he placed it on two stones set apart until it burnt completely. If it broke, it was not a lucky omen. Nowadays, this is no longer done.
15 One *margūnah* is for the use of the husband, when he takes his food with him to the gardens during the first few months of married life.
16 This custom is mentioned in some detail by Maher, "L'Oasis de Siwah", p. 101; Stendorff, *Durch die libysche Wuste Zur Amonsoase*, p. 112; Belgrave, *Siwa: The Oasis of Jupiter Amon*, p. 22, Schiffer, *Die Oase Siwa und ihre Musik*, p. 29–30; Abdallah, "Siwan Customs," pp. 11–13; and Wākid, *Wāhat Amun*, pp. 130–2.

Cynthia Nelson

Storming the Parliament (1951)

from

Doria Shafik: Egyptian Feminist

1996

The freedom granted so far remained on the surface of our social structure, leaving intact the manacles which bound the hands the Egyptian woman. No one will deliver freedom to the woman, except the woman herself. To seize this freedom by force since our polemic over the past three years has led to zero. To use violence towards those who understand only the language of violence. I decided to fight to the last drop of blood to break the chains shackling the women of my country in the invisible prison in which they continued to live; a prison, which being invisible, was all the more oppressive.*

By the early fifties, political unrest in the country took a more violent turn. In addition to the protests instigated by both the left and the Muslim Brothers, there was a growing conflict between the forces of nationalism on the one hand and the British and the Egyptian crowns on the other. In fact, the two developments were connected in the sense that the radical groups rejected any compromising solution to the British occupation.

Al-Nahas reiterated his assertion that the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty had lost its validity and that the total evacuation of the British was essential to Egyptian independence. The British, on the other hand, with three times the number of troops stipulated in the treaty, intensified attacks against the various Egyptian resistance groups.

It was during this period that a more radicalized Doria Shafik emerged, voicing a more militant feminist protest than had yet been heard within the Egyptian women's movement. According to al-Kholi, "By the beginning of the early fifties she began to use a political and social language which, in my estimation, flabbergasted Nour al-Din. She began to enter the political fight. She transformed Bint al-Nil from being a movement whose only aim was to liberate bourgeois women, into a movement that related the liberation of women to the larger political struggle. From here emerged the linage of democracy to social justice, to social development. Doria began to have a more political agenda. By degrees she became convinced for the first time, of the idea of protesting in the streets."[1]

Three years had elapsed since the founding of her movement, and Doria was fed up and impatient with al-Nahas's inability or lack of will to fulfill the Wafd's campaign pledge. In an editorial titled "A Free Man Fulfills His Promises," Dora ironically asked her readers: "Why are we doubting the prime minister's words? Didn't His Excellency, Mustapha al-Nahas, announce last summer that the Wafd's primary goal was to grant the Egyptian woman the right to vote? Who can deny that His Excellency is a man of principles? His Excellency was one of the leaders of the national movement and he saw for himself the Egyptian woman's share in the national struggle, whether political, social or economic. Our case is in the hands of somebody who knows how to fulfill his promises." She decided that the time had come to change tactics, "to assail the men; surprise them right in the middle of injustice, that is to say, under the very cupola of parliament."[2]

Nothing that Doria had yet attempted would take her society by surprise, catch the imagination of both the national and international press, and intensify the hostility of her enemies as greatly as the carefully constructed and successfully executed plan to storm the Egyptian parliament on the afternoon of February 19, 1951. With nearly fifteen hundred women at her

side, Doria left Ewart Memorial Hall of the American University in Cairo, marched the few blocks south along the main street of Kasr al Aini, forced her way through the gates of parliament, and orchestrated four hours of boisterous demonstrations before finally being received in the office of the vice president of the chamber of deputies and extracting from the president of the senate a verbal promise that parliament would immediately take up the women's demands.

That such a daring act of public defiance against the bastion of male authority could actually be organized and executed was a tribute to the strategy of secrecy and surprise followed by Doria and her small circle of coconspirators, who had sworn a solemn oath on the Quran not to divulge their plans to anyone, not even to their husbands. It was "an affair that concerns us only. Why mix the men up in it?" A month before the demonstration, during the course of a meeting with the executive council of Bint al-Nil, Doria remarked to the great surprise of those assembled, "We are only playing." Then she got up, banged her fist on the table and exclaimed, "We must go out into the streets!" She sat down and, in a low voice, added, "Why don't we organize a demonstration?" A profound silence fell over the room. One woman asked, "And if we fail?" "Then we will be the only ones responsible for our failure. But you must guard this secret!"[3]

And effectively the secret was kept for a month as preparations were made for what was ostensibly to be a large feminist congress. The element of surprise was maintained until the moment Doria stood on the podium in Ewart Hall and announced:

> Our meeting today is not a congress, but a parliament. A true one! That of women! We are half the nation! We represent here the hope and despair of this most important half of our nation. Luckily we are meeting at the same hour and in the same part of town as the parliament of the other half of the nation. They are assembled a few steps away from us. I propose we go there, strong in the knowledge of our rights, and tell the deputies and senators that their assemblies are illegal so long as our representatives are excluded, that the Egyptian parliament cannot be a true reflection

> of the entire nation until women are admitted. Let's go and give it to them straight. Let's go and demand our rights. Forward to the parliament!

This was indeed an historic moment not only for Doria but also for the women's movement. The Egyptian press, who followed the events surrounding Doria's audacious manifestation closely, remarked: "This was the first public meeting organized conjointly by two groups who have identical aims yet a different history. The first is the Egyptian Feminist Union founded by Huda Sha'rawi, who joined the battle thirty years ago when the spirit of national revolution animated the land. The second is the Bint al-Nil Movement which marches under the banner of youth. But the two organizations are resolved to collaborate. They have declared themselves in favor of unified action."[4]

It is testimony to her seriousness that Doria Shafik would invite Ceza Nabaraoui—"with whom I had believed I had definitely made peace"—to join her in the demonstration in order "to unite the largest number of women regardless of their ideological and temperamental differences, to prove to society the solidarity of all women in their demand for political and civil rights and to demonstrate through this solidarity women's ability to have a major impact on society."[5] Ahmad al-Sawi, Doria's calamitous former '*aris* (legal fiancé) and outspoken critic, was fully aware of the antipathy between the two women, and commented in *al-Ahram* newspaper: "It is inconceivable that there would come a day when we would see Ceza Nabaraoui and Doria Shafik exchanging kisses in the street, but that is exactly what happened yesterday."[6]

Doria's rebellious march resulted in a feminist delegation's being able to proclaim within the hallowed halls of parliament for the first time its specific demands: first permission to participate in the national struggle and in politics; second, reform of the personal status law by setting limitations on polygamy and divorce; and third, equal pay for equal work. When a group of women, headed by Doria, finally forced their way into the chamber of deputies, they were met by the vice president, Gamal Serag al-Din,[7] who remonstrated with them as to the legality of their actions. To which Mme. Shafik answered: "We are here by the force of our right."

"Tell your girls to hold their tongues," countered the vice president.

"For over two years we tried to make ourselves heard in a correct manner. It is time that you listen to us. They will not keep quiet before I have a promise on your part," threatened Mme. Shafik. Seeing that the president of the chamber refused to meet the delegation himself, she decided to meet the president of the senate, His Excellency, Zaki al-Urabi Pasha, and present her grievances. Unfortunately he was ill that day and had not come to the session. Mm. Shafik entered the Senate and did not hesitate to telephone him: "Excellency, we have forced open the door of parliament. I am calling you from your own office. Over a thousand women are outside demanding their political rights, based on your own interpretation of Article 3 of the Constitution, which states that all Egyptians have equal civil and political rights. You yourself have declared that 'Egyptian' designates women as well as men. Nothing in the constitution stands in the way. Only the electoral law discriminates against women. We are convinced you will not go against your own words."

In the face of such a barrage the president of the senate, in an effort to appease Mme. Shafik, replied that he would take this question personally in hand.[8]

Doria was placated by the pasha's assurance and repeated his words to the throng outside: "'Our negotiations have won a solemn promise that the Egyptian woman will have her political rights!' From the crowd a voice shouted, 'We'll see that he keeps his word!' We left the parliament feeling victorious."

The following morning, Doria found a letter from the wife of the Indian ambassador, apologizing for not having attended the congress of the day before and explaining that she was ill. She ended her note with: "Bravo! Allah helps those who help themselves."[9] Later that day, Doria and Ceza headed another delegation to Abdin Palace, where they deposited copies of their demands—then to the office of the prime minister, where a meeting was arranged for the following week. One week after the assault on parliament, a draft bill, amending the electoral law granting women the right to vote as well as run for parliament, was formally submitted to the president of the chamber of deputies, by a Wafdist representative, Ahmad al-Hadri.[10]

All seemed to be going well until the prime minister reneged on his promised appointment with the feminist delegation. The initial feelings of euphoria were tempered by the realization that once again, oral promises were being broken. Having felt cheated by the prime minister, the members of the delegation demanded that the *chef de cabinet* remind his Excellency that (1) his August 1949 election pledge had posited the realization of feminist demands would figure as a top priority in the Wafd program when they returned to power, and (2) Egypt was one of the signatories of the UN Charter, in which the first article accorded equality to all human beings without distinction of sex. They left the office refusing the traditional cup of coffee.[11] The London *Times* described this incident as "Nahas Pasha's Snub to Suffragettes."[12] By now, the foreign as well as the Egyptian press had taken up Doria's "storming of parliament" as a major media event. The *New York Times* ran a five column feature on the event including two photographs of Doria, one looking through a book with Jehane and Aziza, and the other, leading the march on parliament. The headline read: "Rising Feminism Bewilders Egypt: Muslim Conservatives Shocked by Suffragettes' Behavior in Invading Parliament."[13]

Doria was summoned to appear in court on March 6 to hear the public prosecutor's formal accusations: "I assume full responsibility for everything that has happened and I am even ready to go to jail!" she declared. Because of the extraordinary nature of the case, a number of lawyers, particularly women, volunteered to defend her. At this time, women lawyers in Egypt were fighting male opposition that still placed barriers before their admission to the Tribunals. Appointments to judgeships were absolutely denied to them. Although there were a few hundred women lawyers in Egypt during this period, these obstacles functioned to discourage women from entering the profession, and their numbers were not increasing. Those who did come were from as far away as Samalout and Alexandria as well as from Cairo. But it was the eminent Mufida Abdul Rahman, a successful career-woman and mother of nine children, whom Doria selected to defend her case. Under the banner headline "*Bint-al-Nil* in Court: The Case of Mme. Doria Shafik Will Be the Defense of the Egyptian Feminist Movement," *La Bourse Egyptienne* declared on its front page that the case had "stirred the enthusiasm of Egyptian

feminists and roused their energies. The true object of the flimsy accusation against the founder of Bint al-Nil is the entire feminist movement. The case to be pleaded on April 10, 1951 is not just a matter of conscience but a political affair that is destined to have repercussions nationally and internationally. The dynamic Egyptian feminists are certainly not going to waste the opportunity of using this unexpected tribunal to plead their cause with the government."[14]

In response to questions about how she was going to conduct her defense of Doria's case, Mufida Abdul Rahman commented:

> It appears to me that there is no crime in going to lodge the petition in parliament. As regards having forced the gates: We know that the public is not banned from parliament. Sessions may be observed by people who have invitations. But is there a law that says one must have an invitation? Such a law does not exist. The women went to parliament to demand their property, to demand the right which is denied them and which they cannot obtain by other means. The door of parliament ought to be open like other doors—those of factories, of the professions and of higher education. All women, literate or not, have the same right as men to participate in the social and political life of the nation.[15]

As a symbolic gesture of solidarity, four female Egyptian university students submitted a petition written in their own blood to King Faruq, demanding equal rights for women.[16] Two days later, the council of administration of the Association of Sunnites submitted an anti-feminist petition signed by the chairman, Muhammad Hamid al-Fiki, to the palace, requesting the king to "Keep the Women Within Bounds!"

> The feminist movement is a plot organized by the enemies of Islam and the Bolshevik-atheists, with the object of abolishing the remaining Muslim traditions in the country. They have used women, Muslim women, as a means to achieving their goal. They made the woman leave her realm which is the home, conjugal life, maternity. They have followed these hypocrites in participating

> with them in acts of charity which are nothing other than evil and corrupt. Not content with their exhibitions, hospitals and dispensaries, now they have created associations and parties that strive to demand equality with men, the limitation of divorce, the abolition of polygamy and entry into parliament. Your majesty, protect the orient and Islam.[17]

The king, who was not at all amused by all this feminist fuss in the wake of Doria's assault on parliament, told her husband, whom he frequently met at the Automobile Club, "Let your wife know that as long as I am king, women will not have political rights!"

The trial was set for April 10. In anticipation, feminists and anti-feminists were carrying on a war of petitions. Doria meanwhile went to Athens on March 26 with Zaynab Labib to represent Egypt at the congress of the International Council of Women. She had been invited to present a talk on the results of Bint al-Nil Union's literacy project among the urban poor. As a consequence of the dramatic situation awaiting her back in Egypt, she remarked ironically to the assembled delegates, "I noticed that the day after we stormed parliament in Egypt, the Greek government granted the women of Greece the right to vote. Others profit from our work!" She ended her speech by presenting a motion "requesting UNESCO to help all those countries who fight for the education of illiterate women."[18]

Following her return from Athens and on the eve of her trial, Doria faced renewed public criticism from Ceza Nabaraoui and Inji Efflatoun, her erstwhile allies during the march on parliament. They published two articles in the Egyptian press (one in French, the other in Arabic) accusing Doria "of sharing a point of view contrary to the policy of the country and its national interest because Doria Shafik voted for an ICW resolution approving the occupation and supporting the argument of Great Britain concerning the maintenance of her troops on the Suez Canal under the pretext of defense."[19] Doria's answer was swift and direct: "I did not participate in any resolution about armaments, which would have been contrary to the principles of the peace charter, but simply to a motion supporting the right of every country to have its own system of defense."[20]

This debate reveals how feminist issues became embroiled with cold war ideological struggles.

Finally the day which many Egyptian feminists were impatiently awaiting arrived, and Doria appeared before the tribunal, "dressed in a somber gray flannel suit, totally feminine, poised and charming. How delicate the president of Bint al-Nil appeared, surrounded, almost to the point of being carried off her feet, by lawyers enveloped in their austere black robes. Far from letting herself be intimidated by this solemn entourage, she personally defended the cause so dear to her heart and for which she struggles with so much energy. Because of the justice of the cause and its strong defense by these lawyers, who have honored the Egyptian Bar, the case was postponed *sine die*."[21]

In addition to Mufida Abdul Rahman, there were other lawyers " honoring the Egyptian Bar." They included Abdul Fatah Ragai, Doria's father-in-law, who had helped her with the al-Sawi saga; Maurice Arcache, a prominent political lawyer from an upper-class Syrian-Lebanese background; and al-Kholi, the young Marxist, who commented that "Doria's storming parliament surprised Nour al-Din and it came as a shock to him when she was arrested. In my opinion her storming of the parliament was a landmark."[22] Doria Shafik was acclaimed a national celebrity by the press, but for her, the battle had just begun as she, along with other Egytpians, were swept up by the events surrounding the national struggle, events that would shape the course of her fight for women's rights in the years to come.

After months of negotiations with the British government, the Wafd unilaterally abrogated the treaty on October 8, 1951. This was followed by the outbreak of a full-fledged guerilla war against the British which intensified over the next three months, particularly in the Suez Canal cities of Port Said and Isma'iliyah, and unleashed a moment of tragic violence in Egypt's modern history. By autumn 1951, as the armed clashes between Egyptian guerrilla squads and British army units intensified, Doria called for women's participation in the national liberation struggle against the British:

> Egypt, country of our birth, who has taught us the meaning of freedom, is calling her sons to fight for her dignity. This is a call from our Great Mother, that should move the whole nation to sacrifice for her. I am calling upon the women of Egypt to fall into the line of battle and to carry guns in order to save their nation from its enemies; so that she can occupy an honorable place under the sun. Come on, turn the wheel of history, and take your place at the head of the troops doing your utmost for the sake of Egypt. You have no choice but to answer the call of the present hour, which states that women have a responsibility towards their nation—their own blood should be shed for their nation, not only the blood of their husbands, sons, and brothers. This blood will nourish the tree of honor, which will reach to heaven itself.[23]

Bint al-Nil Union organized "the first female military unit in the country to prepare young women to fight alongside men; to train field nurses and provide first aid training to over two thousand young women. It opened a subscription campaign to give financial aid to workers who lost their jobs in the Canal Zone."[24] Through these actions, Doria intended to demonstrate that by sharing equal responsibilities with men in armed struggle, the Egyptian woman would show herself worthy of her right to occupy her proper place in the political and parliamentary life of the nation.

On November 13, 1951, the anniversary of the 1919 revolt, a large demonstration against the continued occupation of Egypt by the British was organized. Along with hundreds of thousands of other Egyptians, Doria Shafik and the members of Bint al-Nil Union marched alongside Inji Efflatoun, Ceza Nabaraoui, and the members of the Women's Committee of Popular Resistance. When the guerrilla war broke out in the summer, Inji Efflatoun along with other leftist women like Aida Nasrallah, Latifa Zayyat, and Ceza Nabaraoui established an ad-hoc Women's Committee for Popular Resistance *(al-Lagna an-nissa'iyah lil-muqawama al-sha'biyah)*, with Nabaraoui as president. This committee sought to support popular resistance in the Canal region by providing medical care and military

assistance for the guerrillas; to mobilize women, and the general public, in backing the struggle against the British; and to establish branches all over Cairo, and even set up a secret branch in Isma'iliyah.[25] This was the last time that all the women's organizations transcended their differing ideologies to unite together toward a common goal.

Doria described that November 13 as a day in which "the world witnessed the gathering of millions of people silently marching in the streets of Cairo, proving that Egyptians, though deeply frustrated by the occupation, could succeed in controlling their anger. A people who experience the tyranny of the English and can still control their feelings, are truly great."[26] Ten years later, while writing her memoirs, she remembered this autumn of 1951, when "I, like several of my companions from Bint al-Nil, was in the grip of this fever. Like tens of thousands of others we were carried along by the spontaneity of our nationalist zeal."

In the midst of the excitement and turbulence of this historic autumn of 1951, Doria was in the process of completing her one published novel, *L'Esclave Sultane* (1952). One is tempted to speculate how far she might have identified with its heroine, that extraordinary thirteenth-century Mameluke slave Shagarat al-Durr, who through sheer determination, willpower, courage, and naked ambition imposed herself as the first woman sultan of Egypt, when the Ayubid dynasty was succumbing to the Mamelukes. Their names are linked by the same Arabic root *durr*, meaning "pearls." *Shagarat al-Durr* literally means "tree of pearls," and *durriya* (from which the name Doria derives) means "sparkling," "brilliant." Doria introduces her novel with the admonition that "this history of Shagarat al-Durr is not fictional. I have adhered to reported facts. And if the astonishing destiny of Shagarat al-Durr, so closely linked to that of Egypt, has inspired some writings already, never, I believe, until this present work, has anyone based their research on anything except the most anecdotal of incidents. I have produced this work with the intention of restoring the personality of an enigmatic woman, which events, most certainly of an exceptional nature, have rendered spellbinding."[27] These words as well as the novel itself are touchingly prescient in terms of Doria's own life. Like her heroine, Doria lived through a moment when Egypt had arrived at one of its turning

pints: "when two dynasties, one dying the other dawning, meet each other and collide head on."[28] Only for Doria, it wasn't the magnificent Ayubids succumbing to the powerful Mamelukes, but rather an enfeebled *ancient régime* crumbling in the face of the rising tide of nationalism.

Notes

* From the memoirs of Doria Shafik
1 Loutfi al-Kholi, personal interview, Sept. 1987.
2 "A Free Man Fulfills His Promises," *Bint al-Nil*, Feb. 1950.
3 Cited in "How the Suffragettes Were Able to Assault the Parliament: Details of the Plans of the 'Crocodiles of the Nile,'" *Akhir Saa*, March 2, 1951.
4 "How the Suffragettes Were Able to Assault the Parliament," *Akhir Saa*, March 2, 1951.
5 Shafik, *Rihlati*, 201–8.
6 Ahmad al-Sawi, cited in *al-Ahram*, Feb. 20, 1951 This is the same al-Sawi whom Doria divorced some fifteen years earlier.
7 Gamal Serag al-Din was the cousin of Fuad Serag al-Din, at that time the secretary of the Wafd and the minister of the interior.
8 "Feminists Storm Parliament," *La Bourse Egyptienne*, Feb. 20, 1951.
9 Mme. Ali Yavar, cited in "Women Disrupt Parliament," *Akhir Saa*, Feb. 27, 1951.
10 Reported by UPI in the *New York Times*, Feb. 28, 1951.
11 "Feminists Snubbed by Prime Minister," *La Bourse Egyptienne*, Feb. 28, 1951. In Egypt, the refusal of a cup of coffee, the traditional symbol of hospitality, is considered a serious cultural and social affront. The women, signaling their hurt and disillusionment, were returning the prime minister's snub.
12 "Nahas Pasha's Snub to Suffragettes," London *Times*, March 5, 1951.
13 "Rising Feminism Bewilders Egypt," *New York Times*, March 5, 1951.
14 "*Bint al-Nil* in Court," *La Bourse Egyptienne*, March 13, 1951.
15 Mufida Abdul Rahman, cited in *La Bourse Egyptienne*, March 13, 1951.
16 *La Bourse Egyptienne*, March 14, 1951.
17 Muhammad Hamid al-Fiki, cited in "Keep the Women in Check," *La Bourse Egyptienne*, March 16, 1951.
18 Shafik, cited in "Bint al-Nil Addresses International Women's Congress," *La Bourse Egyptienne*, March 30, 1951.

19 "Doria Shafik Against National Interest," al-Masri, April 10, 1951; "Doria Shafik Accused of Pro-Zionist Sympathy," *La Bourse Egyptienne*, April 10, 1951.
20 Shafik, cited in "Une Mise au Point de Mme. Doria Chafik," *La Bourse Egyptienne*, April, 12, 1951.
21 "This Morning Mme. Doria Shafik in Court: The Public Prosecutor Presents His Accusations," *La Bourse Egyptienne*, April 10, 195.
22 Loutfi al-Kholi, personal interview, Sept. 1987.
23 "The Egyptian Woman in the National Struggle," *Bint al-Nil*, Nov. 1951.
24 "Bint al-Nil Organizes Female Military Unit," *New York Times*, Oct. 30, 1951.
25 Inji Efflatoun, personal interview, Nov. 12, 1986.
26 "The Mastering Month," *Bint al-Nil*, Dec. 1951.
27 Shafik, L'Esclave Sultan, 7.
28 Ibid., 7.

Nayra Atiya

Alice, the Charity Worker

from

Khul-Khaal: Five Egyptian Women Tell Their Stories

1984

When Saad came along, he used to visit us at my maternal aunt's house. I took a liking to him but of course remained silent about my feelings. A girl must never reveal her true feelings. We were neighbors and saw a lot of him. When he came to my mother and spoke for me, I was pleased but said nothing.

At that same time, another man had spoken for me. My mother took me aside and presented me with the options. She said, "Come, Alice, which one of these two would you prefer? Eskandar is a relative of your father's. He works for the railroads. The advantage of Eskandar as a husband is that he is a government employee and has a stable, permanent position and a pension when he retires. Saad works in a shop, and his prospects are less secure." She preferred Eskandar, but I had fallen in love with Saad and chose him.

I thought at that time that marriage was an easy matter: the end of the road, peace, and security. Saad was twenty-five. I was sixteen. As my father had died when I was a baby, I had no knowledge of what men were or what a husband would be like. My mother had never remarried. Men were a mystery to me.

I was shocked by much of what I discovered after marriage. Saad was hot blooded and had a violent temper, which I never saw until after the wedding. When I married him, we had no household help. I had to do everything. I had no idea that there were specific duties and restrictions incumbent on a married woman. In one's father's house one eats and sleeps when one pleases, and one feels free. Saad shouted at the slightest provocation, argued about the smallest thing, and was ready to strike when I answered back. This all came as a shock to me, but nothing to equal the shock I had when I discovered he had fallen in love with a younger cousin who came to live with my mother after I married. I had had two children by then. It's true that she was fair skinned, not dark like me, but she was no beauty. You never know what it is in a woman which inspires a man's desire.

It happened this way. He started to give her money behind my back, a sign of his affection for her. One day I caught him kissing her. I wept bitterly.

This event left me permanently scarred. Even forty years later it still affects me. I grew to mistrust all men as a result. I dislike and disrespect them all intensely and until now cannot tolerate a single man.

Saad has long since repented. He now adores me. But the damage is done. I would have been better off never marrying. He has tried to make amends, but such wounds never heal. I live with him. I give him his due in every way, and I no longer hate him as I did when the matter was still fresh, but my illusions about men have been permanently shattered. Not one of them can be trusted. Not even my own sons.

Saad contrived to marry his brother to my cousin in order to keep matters in the family. This was no solution, but I could say nothing about it. One day I was looking out of the window with my back to the room. My brother-in-law came in and put his arm around me. I turned and flung his arm off and twisted it hard behind his back and left the room without a word. To this day he has his face glued to the ground when we meet. Men are all the same!

My problem is that I am basically open and friendly. I laugh and talk easily with people. This men mistake for an invitation to licentiousness. One has to remain like an owl to be respected.

One night a friend of my husband came to visit. Saad was out. I received him cordially. No sooner was he seated than he said to me, "I love you." I

answered, "Yes, we love each other as brothers and sisters must." But he persisted, saying, "This is a different kind of love." So I stood up and showed him the door. I've never told Saad about this. What good would it do?

Another night when he was out another friend came to see him. My youngest son was asleep in the next room. I asked the guest to sit down, telling him my husband would be back soon. As he sat, he looked at me and smoked, blowing smoke towards me in a suggestive way. I was again taken aback. This time I was better prepared. I got up and woke my son and kept him beside me for protection until my husband returned.

My dislike for men does not stem from nothing. I hate them. My hopes for what they would be like have been disappointed by my experiences with them. I was loyal and devoted to my husband, and I supposed he would reciprocate.

When we were first married, I brought him his food right to bed. I knew he was tired after a long day at work. Women are moved to serve a man when they love him. I prepared hot water when he came home and washed his feet and dried them. In winter I would put clean socks on his feet myself to keep them warm. I adored him, and this led to my serving him in this way.

After I found him with my cousin, I continued to perform my duties, but I stopped being at his beck and call in this special way. In the end men don't respect a woman who serves them. They want a woman who makes herself attractive and is good in bed.

On the day of my wedding, the women cleaned my body of all hair. We do this with a soft toffee made of sugar and lemon called *halaawa.* We work it well between our fingers, spread it on the arm, legs, and pubic area until it adheres to the hairs, and then pull it off vigorously. When my whole body was clean, they bathed me. I was dressed in a pink satin dressing gown. I sat in my mother's house. Saad had moved our furniture upstairs already. When he came down and saw me he began to cheer for joy. He was happy. We would live upstairs. His brother and sisters would live with us.

For the wedding he had hired four taxis to get the guests and family to the church. My sister and maternal first cousin rode with me.

After church we went to the photographer's to have pictures taken as man and wife. Then we took a little drive around the town and came home. My mother had made dinner for us. It is usually the groom's mother's duty to

make the wedding supper. But my mother took it upon herself to offer it since Saad's mother was dead. We ate and slept until morning.

I was happy. I loved him, and he was young and handsome. I was not bad looking myself, not like now, with my gray hair and half my teeth gone.

In the morning people came to give us money and see what had happened during the night. We had to show them the blood-stained sheets which prove to all that the bride was a virgin. This is still the custom today.

With the money given us as wedding gifts we went out and bought some gold bracelets for me. They cost about LE2 at the time, the equivalent of about LE20 now. Saad bought me three pairs of gold bracelets.

Although men were a mystery to me, my mother hadn't sent me to my marriage bed without an explanation. She said, "He will do such and such." But of course when you love, this comes easily. If you don't and you have been forced to marry, then sex is hateful, and a girl approaches it with fear.

When a girl loves, she will do anything for a man. She will do anything to please him. But later on, what with all the difficulties of day-to-day life, we came to hate this business of sex.

I was sore for about ten days after my wedding night. When a woman has no problems in her life and she loves the man she is married to, then sex is a pleasure. But if there is struggle or daily hardship connected with any part of her life, she resists it. It becomes intolerable to her. There is no sweetness in loving if you are in financial straits.

I was not married long before the problems were upon me. And then there was the morning sickness. I was pregnant almost immediately, and my eldest daughter was born exactly nine months after I married. Tongues wagged, of course. People knew ours had been a love marriage, and they said I was pregnant before the wedding. Egyptians will talk that way!

Saad's sisters and brother lived in one room of our apartment. We lived in the other. There was a sitting room in between, and my mother lived below.

Saad gave me LE6 a month housekeeping money. I budgeted pretty carefully, but it just wasn't enough. By the time the children came and we were four plus his brother and sisters, I had a hard time making ends meet. Penny pinching puts a strain on marriage. Ours was no exception.

When I ran short of money, I would tell Saad. He would beat me and shout. "Why didn't the money last? I earn only so much. Where am I going to get more?" But there were many mouths to feed. At the beginning I would take whatever gold I had and sell it to have a little extra each month. I would cut off bits from a gold chain and sell it for an extra pound here, an extra pound there.

When money ran short, he accused me of giving some to my mother on the sly. When I had a little extra, he would be equally suspicious. It was a frightful round of problems.

We ate almost no meat. I would buy a bone with very little meat on it. I'd cook it and serve him the meat so that he would not feel the bind we were in. He would eat the meat, and the children and I would go without.

I became angry.

I wanted to find a way out. But without a father or any means of support, no skill or property a woman becomes a slave. She has no options. I had to be patient. I also had the children to think about.

It was perhaps this feeling of all doors being closed to me that pushed me to learn to sew. I had to help myself and when I did, Saad became more respectful. He knew then I was not absolutely dependent on him, and he showed me greater consideration.

That was later. In the early years of marriage, however, things went from bad to worse. If Saad insulted me, I'd insult him back. If he beat me, I resisted. Our life was an endless series of battles. But now this has changed. He throws me all the money to show he worships and respects me. I think he finally realizes just to what extent I stood by him.

A profession for a woman means not only self-support but a chance to have a say in things that matter to her. It's what I try to teach the women I work with now. If a husband is a woman's only support, then sooner or later he'll break her spirit. She'll be no more than a slave in every way.

Men cannot do without sex. When Saad treated me badly, it made sex with him intolerable for me. I think it's so with most women. It was torture.

When the urge was upon him, he would come around and ask my forgiveness. Once it was over, he went back to his old ways.

A woman likes a man who has money in his hand and is open handed with it. Saad complained about my spending, and yet he had money put

aside. I spent my youngest and best years in bitterness and perpetual conflict over money. Saad was not only bad tempered but stingy.

Because of my experience, I am sympathetic to the plight of others. I was not sensitive to the problems of others until I had tasted the bitterness of married life. Now, I feel for every woman I come into contact with.

It is true I married a man I loved. But that love was soon crushed. Now I have a blind hatred for men in general although I don't show it. They are nothing, mean nothing to me, and I dislike them with all the energy which I possess.

Man is without fail disloyal. I have faith in no man. The experiences of others, as well as my own, serve to reinforce this opinion.

Despite hardship and bitterness, Egyptian women are generally very loyal to their husbands. I have learned though that a woman must not care for her husband like a slave. A woman who makes herself personally attractive forces a man to respect her in spite of himself. If all of her efforts are directed toward house and children, he will treat her like a servant.

Most Egyptian men like a woman who "cooperates" with them at night. In other words, sex is the most important aspect of marriage. Circumcision of girls in our country does not help in this respect. When I was a girl, it was still the custom among Christians to circumcise girls. This continued through to my eldest daughter's generation. She was born in 1940. After that ideas changed, and most Christians stopped circumcising girls.

I remembered the time when I was circumcised very clearly. I was eight years old. I was to be circumcised along with my maternal first cousin and my sister. The night before the operation they brought us together and stained our hands orange with henna. All evening the family celebrated with flutes and drums. We were terrified. We knew what to expect. Each would ask the other, "Are you afraid?" and each would answer, "I'm very afraid." This went on all night like a refrain. We couldn't sleep.

I heard the midwife come in about five o'clock the next morning. I was to be the first because I was the eldest. They did the operation and then pounded an onion and salt mixture to put on the wound to cauterize it. When it was all over, they carried me and put me to bed. They told me to keep my legs straight in front of me and my thighs apart to keep the wound from healing over.

Next came my cousin and then my sister. They were put to bed in the same room. We were fed copiously. They brought us chickens and pomegranates. We had to eat. Chickens were cheap then, less than 10 piasters the pair. We each had to eat at least one whole chicken. Pomegranates are important, we were told, because the fruit has a beneficial astringent quality. They told us eating quantities of it would help heal our wounds. They brought us plates full of the juicy pink grains. We had to eat. I think they gave it to us because it is constipating and would keep us from moving our bowls too soon after the operation.

On the seventh day we got up. They had new dresses made for us. Mine was shiny red, my sister's shiny green, and my cousin's yellow. We were pleased with the dresses. Our mothers told us to tie our severed clitorises in the hems of our dresses. The family then paraded us through the streets like brides and took us for a picnic by the river. We were told to throw our clitorises to the Nile. This would bring us happiness. Words!

At sunset we went home. It was all over.

This operation makes it harder for a girl to enjoy sex, and as sex is all-important to men, then where is the happiness this custom brings?

If for women sex is not all-important, there are factors which help to make it tolerable. How a man treats a woman, for example, and the financial state of a household. And third is love.

If a man insults, offends, or beats his wife then comes to sleep with her at night, the act is repulsive to her. I suffered in my marriage on all three counts. I said to my husband, "I regret that I ever got married." He has never forgotten this. He answered, "Is this something to say?" But I persisted and said, "I had expected life to be different. Now when I hear you coming up the stairs, the sound of your footsteps strikes terror in my heart." This was said a long time ago, but he still remembers it. My words cut him deeply, it seems.

Not all women are reluctant about sex, however. My brother was married to a woman who wanted him day and night. But this too is an illness. It's not normal. If he moved, she desired him, if he stayed put, she would reach out for him. He was quickly worn out. Thinking that all women were this way, he lost hope, and his health failed. His arms and legs

became paralyzed. They had no children. He divorced his wife. If she'd had children, she might have been cured. She was unlucky.

When I was first married and grew unhappy, I would go to my mother for solace. When something went wrong, I wept on her shoulder. She would be angry with Saad, and she would take my side against him. This made matters worse. It made her unhappy and made him more violent. So I stopped. I soon realized that I had to stand by him, do my duty, and accept my lot. When he saw how other women behaved toward their husband, he began to appreciate my steadfastness.

When I was pregnant with my first child, he was happy. He had a good quality which is unusual in most Egyptians. He liked daughters. In fact, he preferred them to sons. As our first child was a girl, he was very happy. He rejoiced at the birth of all our daughters. This is something to be said in his favor. I prefer boys.

My deliveries were all easy. With the first child I had taken a bath when I began to feel a slight pain. It was afternoon. I went to my mother and said to her, "I feel a little discomfort in my stomach." My mother answered, "O Lord that means you're going to do it."

All evening and night the pain came and went. At ten o'clock in the morning the pain was sharp, and my mother called the midwife. It was the same one who had circumcised me. She came and said, "Heat up some water." My mother did, and the child was born very quickly. It was a girl. I was a bit torn up because she was the first, but she was very pretty, and that pleased me.

Her father was in Cairo at the time. He came back running and saying, "She can't have a child while I'm gone. I'm coming now!" When he arrived, he was happy and took the child in his arms and kissed her. She was very dear to him.

A year and three months later I had a boy. We were having lunch, and he came very quickly, too. I felt the pain, and less than two hours later he was born with the help of the midwife. So it went with the others.

Perhaps I gave birth easily because I was always very active. I used to clean the house myself. I went up and down stairs. I did the washing and scrubbed the floors and so on. This strengthened my stomach muscles and served me well in the end.

My own husband has changed through the years. He now realizes his mistakes and confesses to me that he regrets them. He wants me to take all the money I need, come and go as I please, and please myself. So I'm satisfied. Surprisingly though, the old story between him and my cousin still affects me.

Women are more loyal than men. As to being equal with men, this is another matter. Men don't like strong women. Any woman who takes on man's work is permeated with a masculinity which repels men. They like a woman to be weak. What's the point in a masculine woman? It would be as if a man were married to another man. A woman lawyer, for example, assumes masculine qualities, and a man's appetite is closed for this kind of woman.

A woman has to be fine and weak. No man likes a he-she. A man loves a woman's tears. He loves to see her helpless, and he loves her tears.

God created men to be lawyers and engineers and doctors, although some women can be doctors. But I feel there is man's work and women's work, and the two should remain separate, although women should not be entirely dependent on men.

The formula for happiness, as I see it, is based on health and money. To be in good health and to have enough money makes room for love.

My life now has taken a turn for the better. I enjoy working with the poor. I love my grandchildren and feel great pleasure when they are with me and call me *Teta*, Grandma. This is my greatest happiness. My goal in life now is to serve God through helping the poor.

Ahmed Zewail

First Steps: On the Banks of the Nile

from

Voyage through Time

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Damanhur, where I was born in 1946, is a sprawling Delta town, which now has some 200,000 inhabitants. Only 60 km southeast of Alexandria, it lies on the main agricultural road between Cairo and Alexandria and is the chief town of the Governorate of Behira. The name has changed little from its ancient pharaonic days, when it was called *Dmi-n-Hr*, "The Town of Horus," the sun god. I assume the city got its name not just because there was a temple to Horus here, but also because the sun so generously blessed the area with a good climate and bountiful harvests.

Some might say that Horus continues to watch over his city, since the sun is still generous to Damanhur, with sweet fruit like mangoes, oranges, grapes, and guavas abounding in its open-air markets. Furthermore, people in Damanhur, like most people throughout Egypt, radiate sunshine from within—they are kind and joyous, and they see the bright side of things, even when they receive bad news. In this sense, because I was touched at birth by the sun of Horus, I think I am an optimist and a true son of Damanhur.

I was born in Damanhur by chance, however, and what I remember of Damanhur comes from a later time, when I lived there and went to the

university in Alexandria. My mother, Rawhia Rabi'e Dar, and father, Hassan Ahmed Zewail, were living in Desuq, a charming and serene town on the east bank of the Nile's Rosetta branch. Desuq is not far from Damanhur—it is some 20 km to the northeast. There was regular transportation by train and by car between the two towns, which made it easy to visit Damanhur. On a visit to her mother and one of her brothers in Damanhur, my mother gave birth to her first child, a son named Ahmed Hassan Zewail, on February 26. Forty days later, on *al-arba'in* as it is called, she went back to Desuq. My arrival after five years of marriage was the reason I was nicknamed *Shawqi*, "my desired one." Everyone called me by this name until I went to the university, where I became Ahmed, not Shawqi.

I don't know the true origins of my family or our name. Some believe that our roots are in ancient Egypt, others think that they are Arab in origin, especially since there is a famous gateway called Bab Zeweila, or "the gate of Zeweila," near al-Azhar University in Cairo. After the announcement of the Nobel prize, the Sudanese claimed me, because to them my name apparently derives from *Zuwel*, meaning the "man of *zuq*" (good taste) or "gentleman." Whatever the origin, I know that I am an Egyptian to the bones.

My father was born in Alexandria, on September 5, 1913, one of eight children, four boys and four girls. World War II played a key role in his destiny.

The war was felt in Alexandria along the North African front. By May 1941, the Axis Forces were already in Sallum and Mersa Matruh on the Egyptian western frontier, and Egypt was deeply involved in the conflict—on the one hand, Egypt was supposed to be Britain's ally, as dictated by the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, and on the other hand, Egyptians under the reign of King Farouk were unhappy with Britain's occupation. By November of 1942, Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery and his army had defeated Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's army in one of the war's bloodiest battles—at al-Alamein, 110 km from Alexandria. Together with the Russian triumph at Stalingrad shortly afterwards, it marked the turning point of the war. Winston Churchill wrote: "Before Alamein we survived; after Alamein we conquered." Today there is a huge cemetery in al-Alamein, which stands as a memorial for the thousands of German, Italian, and British and Commonwealth soldiers killed in this battle.

It was during this time that the economic situation in Egypt deteriorated and people panicked. There was a run on groceries and banks and many began to leave Alexandria and Egypt. My father decided to migrate, leaving what the Egyptians call the "Bride of the Mediterranean Sea," Alexandria, for peaceful Desuq. There, he started what was then a unique business of importing and assembling bicycles and motorcycles, and later he was appointed a government official. After settling down in Desuq, he became well known in the town and was ready to get married. Rawhia, my mother, was about ten years younger than Hassan, and they were married in a traditional wedding. My mother did not see the prospective groom in person until he had formally asked for her hand from her family. They remained together for fifty years until my father died on October 22, 1992, at the age of 79.

The Zewail family is very large but concentrated mostly in Damanhur and Alexandria. In Damanhur, they are known for their cotton factories. In these two cities there are more than 120 Zewails now occupying such notable positions as university professors, judges, CEOs of both small and large businesses, and the like. I met some of them when the country was celebrating the awarding of the Nobel prize, although many of them I did not know before moving to the United States.

My mother's family is relatively small and they are mostly from Desuq and other neighboring cities. She had a sister and three brothers; after my arrival, she gave birth to three girls. My sisters were named after our grandmothers and the sisters of my parents, as I was named after my grandfather. These old given names were replaced with modern nicknames—Hanem for Nafisa, Seham for Khadra, and Nana for Nema. According to Egyptian tradition, our middle name is our father's first name, Hassan.

Desuq was the home of the immediate family, but we had a much bigger family—the people of Desuq. Families knew each other well, shared in happy and difficult times, and valued interdependence, socially and financially. I do not recall there being a bank in Desuq; instead, people formed a group called a *gam'iya*, pooling their money to help each family in turn, using a rotation process. My family, like others, were sensitive to the feelings of the community.

We were forbidden, for example, to have the sound of a radio loud enough to be heard outside our rooms for forty days following a death in the town. These community feelings and interests were clearly important parts of my first steps in Desuq.

What is so special about Desuq is that it is on the Nile, and the Nile is part of Egypt's ancient heritage. There is still a saying that after you've drunk water from the Nile, you will always return to Egypt. This is a descriptive expression, because it reveals both the nation's sense of community and its willingness to open its hearts and homes to people from outside Egypt. Egypt is the gift of the Nile, as the Greek historian Herodotus said many centuries ago, in about 450 BC. The Nile is a spectacular river that has flowed for eons with the same regularity, and it is this eternity that defines the Egyptian character.

As a child in Desuq, I used to walk along the road that was parallel to the Nile. This is a special road. It follows the Nile all the way to Rosetta, where the famous stone was found in 1799. The stone, now in the British Museum in London, records the gratitude of the chief priests of Egypt to the pharaoh at the time (early in the second century before Christ), Ptolemy V. It's a remarkable monument because it's in two languages, Egyptian and Greek, and three scripts, hieroglyphs, demotic, and Greek. (Demotic is a "shorthand" form of hieroglyphs, developed in the later pharaonic period.) The stone was recovered by a French officer during Napoleon's expedition, and ultimately supplied Jean-François Champollion with the key to the decipherment of the ancient Egyptian language in 1822—he compared the words in Greek to the Egyptian hieroglyphic and demotic signs, and from this study he decoded the Egyptian signs and words. Rosetta is also an important port city, and thousands of traders and government officials and other travelers used to arrive in Egypt at Rosetta. They would then travel up the Nile by boat—or along the road I just mentioned—to Cairo and other places. These visitors would stop along their journey up the river at Desuq to take a rest or to do business.

Much of that importance of the place still remains and there is more—it has spiritual depth. In the center of the town is the mosque of Sidi Ibrahim al-Desuqi, "Mr. Ibrahim of Desuq." Sidi Ibrahim was an Egyptian scholar and

a sufi. He was a student of another famous sufi, Ahmed al-Badawi, who is celebrated, especially in Tanta, where there is a mosque in his name. Some say the word *sufi* comes from the Arabic root with the letters *sad/fa/waw*, and thus is related to words like *safw*, which mean "clarity, pureness, or sincerity"; it is also related to the word *Mustafa*, which is a name for the Prophet Mohammed, meaning "the chosen one, the choicest, best, most perfect." Most Arabic-language experts claim the word is derived from the root *sad/waw/fa*, transposing the final two root letters, which also makes sense, because *suf*, with the long *u*, means "wool," and sufis originally wore woolen garments.

The Sidi Ibrahim al-Desuqi mosque was very important in my life because it defined my early childhood. As children, we used to gravitate to the mosque. We would go at dawn and study. When I look back at my life, I realize that this mosque was the nucleus for scholarship at that age. By this I mean that we used to go to the mosque to *study*, which is traditional in Islam. The mosque is not just for prayer; it is also for scholarship. It has a sacredness and with its beautiful, spacious architecture of domes, columns, and minarets, it radiates the power of respect. During the holy month of Ramadan, my friends and I would always meet after *iftar* (the meal that breaks the fast at sunset) and go to the mosque. Afterwards, either we would go to my home or I would go to their homes, but in any case, we would study until dawn, and then we would go to pray. So the mosque was central to my life and to the lives of the townspeople. The mosque was like a glue to keep everyone working and living together in harmony.

Sidi Ibrahim was just a few meters from our house. There were many streets and alleys that branched out from it and our house was on one of these streets. As a result, we could hear the prayers five times a day. The Friday prayer was special and my family encouraged our regular participation. The mosque had a positive effect on us and on our behavior. We never heard, or at least I don't remember hearing, of a boy smoking hashish or getting involved with drugs or drinking. Some were trying to learn how to smoke a cigarette, but never in front of their parents. We never heard of violence on the streets. The moral and ethical influence of the mosque created a simple and sheltered environment that was also exciting. I vividly recall the sunset

during the month of Ramadan when people were hurrying home to the tranquil sound of prayer in the background, and all shops closed down for *iftar* just before the boom of the cannon signaled the time for us to eat.

All the shopkeepers around the mosque knew me by my first name; they knew my father and they knew my family. I could buy things from the grocery, for example, and I didn't have to pay. They got the money from my father. A sense of security and trust existed there and it set a standard for community behavior. I remember I used to sit on a wooden bench, with 'Amm ("Uncle") Hamouda, who owned a grocery store and who was the father of one of my friends, Mohammed. The store was across the street from the mosque, and I would welcome the opportunity to ask for advice from 'Amm Hamouda, but more importantly to listen to him and to his wisdom—I respected him and he liked me.

As youngsters we were attracted to, not repelled by, such an institution of faith, and the leaders of the mosque continually encouraged scholarship. We saw the simplicity and the enlightenment of the religion, but not the rigidity and dogma I sometimes see today. We saw scholarship in thinking and analyzing and repeatedly we were told of the fundamental role of science and knowledge in our lives. After all, we were told again and again, the first message revealed to the Prophet begins with the word *Iqra!* ("Read!"). My family supported this attitude and I do not recall incidents in which they imposed rigidity in thought or behavior.

Growing up in Desuq, I had no exotic desires to, for instance, go to Spain for summer vacation or drive to school in a BMW or have private lessons at home. When I see my own children taking classes in swimming, art, basketball, soccer, and violin, I feel that in my adolescence I must have been living on another planet. My soccer balls were made of used (but clean) socks, my hobbies were limited to reading, listening to music, and playing backgammon and cards, and my travel all took place within 100 or so kilometers. But the fundamental forces in life were abundantly present—the love of my parents, their confidence in me, and the peaceful home I had in a middle-class family, with all the expected family quarrels.

Growing up I do not recall being punished except on one occasion. I thought I knew how to drive a car because I had figured out how it

worked—*theoretically*. When my uncle's car was parked near a canal, I tried the experiment without realizing that theory and experiment could be far apart. The car very nearly plunged into the canal and if it were not for my good fortune I would have died. I got what I deserved from my father, though. He had taught me many practical things, including bike riding, which I enjoy to this day, but I don't know why I didn't ask him for driving lessons, perhaps because I didn't anticipate owning a car.

My father was a dedicated person, and he combined two things that I hope I have followed in my life. He was very sincere about his work and his family, and he made us all laugh and have fun until the last day I saw him, just before he passed away; at that time I was living in America and had come to see him by way of Europe. He always believed that "Life is too short—enjoy it." He enjoyed his time with people and everyone who knew him, and I think they liked and admired him—'Amm Hassan. I admired his wisdom too; life is a journey that you have to learn to enjoy—and he did! Perhaps the most valuable thing he taught me was that there is no contradiction between devotion to work and enjoyment of life and people.

My mother is a devout person and always says her five daily prayers on time, including the one at dawn. Her name, Rawhia, comes from the word *ruh*, or "spirit," and she is indeed spiritual. Only 18 when she married my father, her official record of birth is February 2, 1922. My mother now is close to 80 years old. She is a kind and serious person and has devoted her life to her children. Even today, she worries about us and about me, with lots of tears. Such devotion from the age of 18 to 80 is surely heroic, especially by the standards of the modern world! My mother is intuitive and smart, but she wasn't educated formally. She saw her job as creating a stable family environment and taking care of the household and finances. She was central to the peace and contentment of the home and was certainly the driving force supporting my education.

I went to a state school, which was tuition-free in Egypt, and the family was supportive of whatever direction my achievements would permit. Throughout my schooling, I strived to achieve the best possible, though the drive came from within. Incidentally, the alphabet did help in pushing me to the front of things. When I was born, as I mentioned, my father named me

Ahmed. In so doing, he did me a favor. With the *A* in Ahmed, I came at or near the top of listings in schools and elsewhere, since in Arabic we list people by their first names, not their last, as is the custom in most Western countries. In America I lost this privilege as the *Z* of Zewail took over and I now appear toward the end of alphabetical listings.

Education in Egypt was of excellent quality. It had the elements of healthy competition and was centered in a community environment. Moreover, the teachers were highly respected and the student–teacher relationship was genuine and supportive and not customized around moneymaking private lessons. The community as a whole respected and valued education—if you really excelled, the community would take notice of you. Desuq would know that So-and-so was an excellent student, and people would offer encouraging comments. Additionally, the educational achievements paid out social benefits. They conferred a unique high-status position for marriage into a well-off family. As people used to say, "they [the family] are investing in the future." It's clear that the positive memories of my education exceed any negative ones.

The worst thing I remember about school was the intense memorization that was required in some subjects, like the social sciences or languages. These subjects were taught strictly and formally. Emphasis was placed on the memorization of full names, for example, Mohammed ibn Rushdi ibn 'Ali ibn al-Khalif—but what did he really *do* that is exciting? How did his work fit into the big picture? My interest has always been in analytical subjects, with the desire to ask why and how. It's ironic that one of my most enjoyable hobbies now is reading history. I have a library of diverse history books and I enjoy the subject immensely, but I didn't as a youth.

Another aspect I didn't like was the use of corporal punishment in primary schools. The punishments were never so severe that they were abusive, but the whole idea was an assault on my sense of what a school should be and what educators should do for their pupils. When the occasional disruptive incident occurred, sometimes the teachers would strike the students. I remember once, the children did not like one of the Arabic teachers, so we all decided (I don't remember how) to do something to tease him. He lost his temper and slapped me on the face. When my father learned

about this incident, he was displeased, especially since he knew I was a good student. He came to the school and lodged a formal complaint in protest. He subsequently received an apology from the headmaster.

Those negative elements were counterbalanced by a certain degree of freedom to run and play and let off steam. I learned to play basketball, for example, while I was in preparatory school, and there was always the recess time, when I would get a morning snack. I vividly remember the taste of the fresh falafel sandwiches made by our local street vendor. His name was ‘Amm Ibrahim, and I would run to his cart, which was parked just outside the perimeter of the school grounds near the train station, and say, “Please, I need a falafel sandwich.” I would watch as he formed the dough, dropped it in the oil, and then took it out piping hot a few seconds later—what a sandwich! And he wouldn’t take money, because he would get that from my father, and I would just run back to the school. I still enjoy falafel sandwiches and I always eat them in the first days of my arrival in Cairo.

The activities in preparatory school, which is between the primary and secondary schools in the Egyptian system, were memorable and enjoyable. For example, I took part in a play, and although I have forgotten the role I played, I remember having a lot of fun taking part in it. We didn’t have a regular theater, but we made do with imagination and creativity. For example, we had to make our own curtain and we did it with a line of students, and I remember being part of this. We would stand side by side to form the curtain. Someone announcing “Ladies and Gentlemen!” would be our cue to quickly jump down on our haunches so the “curtain” could open. It was fun and taught us how to be together and how to enjoy ourselves socially. We also went on field trips to historic places and had picnics along the Nile.

During school vacations and when my father had his vacation from his government job, we would go to the Zewails’ chalet on the beach in Alexandria. That was a big treat for me. The chalet was owned by some of the Zewails who were better off, but other members of the family were welcomed. We went in July or August, and we would be joined by relatives. We spent the time playing games like beachball or backgammon, chatting, swimming, and eating fish. At night we would either stay with relatives in Alexandria or go back to Desuq. Interestingly, I was more inclined to use the beach time for

relaxation and general reading—the time for developing swimming skills must have been limited since I now know my real skill in this sport leaves a lot to be desired.

I also used to use the vacation to read ahead for the following year's subjects. I was inquisitive and eager to get back to my studies. Even as a young child, I dreamed of going to the university. For me, the university was something special, because of my passion for learning and because of its prestige. My father had what might be called a basic education, one sufficient to earn a post in the civil service. In his day, I was told, you couldn't get into the university unless your father owned land or was rich. It was also a matter of *wasta*, or "influence," for a select group. This was to change in 1952.

The Free Officers Revolution, which overthrew King Farouk, opened up opportunities for the youth in Egypt. At the time I was six years old, just going to the first grade. Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser, the charismatic leader of the revolution, said in his speeches: "We're all equal. We're all the same." That meant that *ibn al-fallah* (the son of the peasant) and *ibn ra'is al-gumhuriya* (the son of the president) could both go to the same university. This made us aware that this was a new era for all of us and it gave us hope. By 1956, when I was ten, I was so excited to see the first Egyptian-born president now in charge, with a new future ahead of us, that I decided to write to him. So I wrote to President Nasser and told him *Rabbina yiwaffaqak wa-yiwaffaq Misr* ("May the Lord give you and Egypt success").

I still have his reply to me, dated January 11, 1956, and remember the thrill of seeing where he wrote my name by hand and signed the letter. In retrospect, it was as if he was predicting my future in science. He wrote, from the Office of the President:

> My son Ahmed, I wish you the very best . . . . I received your letter, which expresses your thoughtful sentiments, and this letter has had a great effect on me. I pray to God to protect you to remain essential to Egypt's bright future. I ask you to continue with patience and passion in harvesting *al-'ilm* [knowledge, science], armed with good behavior and good thought so you can participate in the future of building the great Egypt.

It was about this time that I was introduced to Umm Kulthum's singing by a very special uncle, Uncle Rizq Dar, my mother's brother. He and my mother were close and she became like a mother to him, especially after their mother's death, when he was living in the same building with us. He was a self-taught person, meaning he didn't go to college, but he was a voracious reader. He was the one who introduced me to reading newspapers critically; he showed me how to read an editorial and how to grasp the impact of what I was reading. Like my father, he too was good with people.

With Uncle Rizq I spent a lot of time, especially in the summer. He had become a successful businessman in import–export, and he had a big workshop for cars. He was well-off and owned a three-story house in Desuq at a time when most people rented an apartment. At his place I learned backgammon and intermingled with many of his friends. I had a special relationship with him and he was pleased with my success in school. I still remember him as a wise and supportive uncle who wished to see me reach the highest goals. From my father and mother I learned about the present, day-to-day life; with my uncle I dreamed about the future.

For a treat, Uncle Rizq would take me to Cairo to hear Umm Kulthum, a lady who was to become an important part of my life. If there is one thing that has been consistent in enhancing my mood, it's Umm Kulthum. Umm Kulthum came from a village in Egypt and rose to become the "Pyramid of Arabic Song." She sang poetry in classical Arabic and sang passionately about love. My appreciation of her songs began when I was in preparatory school, about age 13. Throughout my study days in Egypt, the radio would be next to me, and I would go through all the channels to find her voice, because we didn't yet have LPs or tapes or CDs. I knew what time her songs would be broadcast on the different channels, Sawt al-'Arab, Cairo Broadcasting 1, Middle East channel, and so on. I would just keep turning the dial so I could have her songs in the background as often as possible while I was studying in my room.

Omar Sharif, the famous Egyptian actor, asked: "Why do we feel so connected to her?" Perhaps each of us hears our own story in her songs. And, I would add, her singing inspires in us what is called in Arabic *tarab*. There is no direct translation for this word into English, but perhaps "ecstasy"

comes closest. I recall almost every one of her concerts and especially the one in 1964 when she sang "Inta 'Umri"—"You are My Life." I felt that all of Egypt and the Arab world were enjoying her *tarab* that evening. The words were powerful:

> O my love
> Come, enough, we've already missed so much
> O love of my soul
> What I saw, what I saw before my eyes saw you was a wasted life
> How can it even be counted? You are my life
> Which began its morning with your light
> You, you are my life.

This was the first song composed for her by another famous Egyptian, Mohammed 'Abd al-Wahab. He was a modernist and she was a classicist, and in their collaboration the two joined to reach *al-qimma*—the summit—of Arabic song in "Inta 'Umri."

With the passion I developed for Umm Kulthum, it was a truly special thrill to go with Uncle Rizq to one of her live concerts—she appeared every first Thursday of the month in season. Her concerts were broadcast live and the streets were empty. She would give three *waslat* (performances), with extended songs, each one of which was like a concert in itself. I knew all the details of the songs of the season—the musical composition, the lyrics, and even some touches of her own that she introduced on different occasions. The quality was outstanding. To Egyptians and to the Arabs, Umm Kulthum was like Mozart and Beethoven are to Westerners who love classical music. When she died, I went into mourning, as did millions of like-minded lovers of her art. But the voice of Kawkab al-Sharq ("The Star of the East") never died; it remains, echoing love and passion. Classics such as "Ruba'iyat al-Khayyam," "al-Atlal," "Ana fi Intizarak," and many others are still part of the daily life of millions, not only in Egypt, but all over the world.

I have been listening to Umm Kulthum for forty years and derive real joy from her voice. It's amazing how she has stayed with me and contributed to the shaping of my sentimental feelings. At Caltech, I have a stereo in my office

where I play her songs, and along with photos of my family, my wife, and my children, I have one of her near my desk. Even now, when I'm pressured, with work, with four secretaries, faxes, emails—the whole world—I turn on that CD player and I am relaxed by her voice in the background. It is enough to hear a classic like the one composed by the renowned Sayyid Mekawi, "Ya Msahharni." Recently, a Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) documentary featured her life and work, reflecting the immense reach of her voice beyond Egypt.

This background music did not distract me from learning. On the contrary, it enabled me to handle many hours of study with pleasure. I have a passion for learning, and as my mother used to say, I was always intrigued and excited about learning new things. The family predicted the future—a sign was posted on my door reading "Dr. Ahmed" when I was in preparatory school. I did not have a sense of guilt about having to study and this came from within, without any family prodding. My father used to come to my room and tell me I didn't have to kill myself over my studies. But then, if I got a score of, say, 98 out of 100, he would joke with me, "*Ya-bni*, my son, what happened to the other two?" It was all in good fun. I had a small room, which was highly organized, and at late hours during a break they would visit me and we would discuss family matters.

The *thanawiya* (secondary) school in Egypt was academically strong and had programs for disciplinary and extracurricular activities. In the morning, we would come into the courtyard where the flag was raised, and we would all sing the national anthem. We were proud to be Egyptians, proud of our country, and the morning anthem heightened our self-confidence and self-esteem. Besides the academic work, there was time to pursue hobbies. In my case, I took part in art and photography activities. There were two kinds of photography projects that I got involved in. One was just to learn how to take photographs of friends and to develop them. I still have a number of these. I was also involved in enlarging a famous person's portrait. For example, we would take a small portrait of Nasser, typical of the time, and learn how to magnify it by hand, dividing the photograph into twenty or thirty graphed blocks. We would use carbon pens to shadow it and do other things to manipulate the image. At the end, we had a big, impressive portrait.

But the academic competition was fierce, because at the end of three years there was a nationwide exam called the *thanawiya ʿamma*. Each student competed with every other student in the country, not just the twenty or so in his or her local class, and the scores determined which students would enter which university and which department. It wasn't like in the United States, for example, where a student chooses whatever course of study he or she would prefer. In Egypt it was all determined by the scores, and the students with the highest scores were selected to study for the most prestigious professions. During my last year of secondary school, the pressure of the upcoming exam made life more intense, but I was comfortable with my progress. All through the previous years, I loved solving problems in mechanics, physics, and chemistry and other analytical challenges. I also enjoyed explaining things to others in the class.

Experimentally, I was interested in observing how things worked, so I built a little "instrument" in my bedroom using an Arabic coffee burner as the heater. I wondered how and why a substance like wood—a solid—changes from a solid into a gas when it burns. That transformation just intrigued me so much! So I put some wood in a test tube, connected with a cork to an L-shaped glass tube, and then I burned the wood to see how the gas would come out at the end of the tube. In the company of a friend, Fathy Gaweish, I then used a match to see a flame. I was observing the transformation of one substance to another—eureka! I came close to burning the room and my mother reminds me of this incident to this day.

The final exam of the *thanawiya ʿamma* passed uneventfully for me. The scoring was done by subject, and I passed Arabic and history, but I scored very high in chemistry, physics, and mathematics—it was abundantly clear that it was the orientation to science that was driving me. To enter the university, one had to apply, and the student's score determined the admission to the different faculties. I knew that I had the chance of being admitted to either Cairo or Alexandria University. But the government—this was still under Nasser—established an institute *(maʿhad)* system, so there was an institute for agriculture and an institute for every kind of technical applied field. As it turns out, one of the institutes was in Kafr al-Sheikh, near to Desuq. After some consideration, my father thought I

could go to this institute, get a B.S. from there, then go on in life as an agricultural engineer. But I wanted to go to the university; in Egypt universities are more prestigious than institutes. Fortunately, my mother and Uncle Rizq supported my decision, even if the expenses were higher.

I then applied to Maktab al-Tansiq (the placement office), which was in charge of assigning students to the various faculties and universities throughout Egypt based on their test scores. In those days the top disciplines were engineering and medicine, followed by pharmacy and science. After a few weeks, I got the note saying that I had been admitted to the Faculty of Science (equivalent to a US college of sciences) at Alexandria University. I was thrilled! I didn't think of how much money I would make as a graduate, but I *was* thinking of the great future ahead—the potential for learning at the highest level.

But the boy from Damanhur and Desuq had to make the transition to Alexandria, after a send-off party by my friends at Desuq's club on the Nile. There were some problems with this transition. Culturally, Desuq had a comfortable, sheltered environment. I didn't know much about the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria and its people. In Desuq, boys and girls were separated in two different schools, and I still recall waiting with my friends, Ahmed Barari, Nabeel al-Sanhoury, and Mohammed Hamouda, until we could see the girls coming out from their school—that was our biggest adventure! In Alexandria University, young men and women studied together. Studies in Desuq's schools were also very different from those at the university level—I didn't know what to expect. And there was the financial burden created by the need to live in Alexandria. Perhaps the most difficult part was leaving my family for the first time in my life.

Jehan Sadat

On My Own

from

My Hope for Peace

2009

According to our beliefs, after Anwar died, my son Gamal was responsible for taking care of me. I would not allow it, and not because I had inherited a great fortune from my husband. Anwar and I were never wealthy, and after his death, I was actually left with some debt. Nevertheless, I did not want Gamal or any of my other children to have to support me. After all, for years I had been urging Egyptian women, and women throughout the world, to be self-reliant, to take their lives into their own hands, to stand on their own two feet. While married to Anwar, I tried to practice what I was urging others to do by throwing myself into projects that reflected my commitment to helping women and families. I began a women's collective near Anwar's hometown of Mit Abul Kum. At the Talla Society, village women learned to operate sewing machines, sold the goods they crafted in Cairo, and for the first time in their lives earned their own money and achieved a degree of self-sufficiency. Talla evolved into a large, thriving cooperative that provides vocational training not only for women, but also for men and boys. Some years later, I began the Wafa' wal Amal, which began as a rehabilitation facility specifically for veterans but later

broadened to treat all kinds of cases. Later still, as a result of state visits to Austria and Germany, I helped to establish three SOS Villages for orphaned children following the model that the Austrians had developed, in which small groups of children live in houses with foster parents.

Eager to pave the way for women's political participation, I stood for election and won a seat on the People's Council, Egypt's organ of local government, in the Munifiyya District. There, my fellow council members and I sought to improve the infrastructure and the standard of living in a largely agricultural area. On my fortieth birthday, I matriculated at Cairo University, where I eventually earned my bachelor's and then my master's degree in comparative literature. Egyptian television broadcast all three hours of my thesis defense live to a national audience (an excruciating experience) but one I hoped would show other Egyptian women, who, like me, might have deferred their dreams of education, that returning to school was possible. I also wanted it to be absolutely clear that I had *earned* my master's degree; it was not given to me because I was the president's wife. Once my master's was concluded, I enrolled in the doctoral program at Cairo University. All of this is by way of saying that I worked hard to carve out an identity for myself. Suddenly becoming a widow, being forced to face life on my own, tested me beyond anything I had ever imagined. I felt bereft and frightened. Anwar was dead, and so was a part of me.

Although I am inclined by nature to keep myself busy, immersing myself in my work was not an option. In response to the stress and far-fetched allegations made against my family after Anwar's assassination, my children begged me to leave most of my civic projects. They could not bear the thought of my being pressured and falsely accused. And I did not want them to suffer any more than they already had. They wanted to protect me, and I vowed to do the same for them, but giving up the work that I loved, the work that, along with my marriage, had defined me, was wrenching. I felt rudderless, useless, and consumed by grief. For a while, grief held sway. I knew, however, that as acutely as I missed Anwar, I could not live out my life as the widow of the slain president of Egypt. I had to figure out how to move from being a partner, half of a team, to a person on my own. I was praying that something might come along to help me answer the question "What

next?" I did not expect, however, that it would be a job offer to teach in the United States.

In 1985, American University invited me to Washington, D.C., to moderate and coordinate a series of lectures with prominent American women. Soon after, the University of South Carolina at Columbia proposed that I begin teaching there. As much as I wanted to jump at these challenges, insecurity held me back. The implications of living and working, even if only temporarily, in the United States frightened me. I was afraid I would disappoint people—those who hired me and those who came to listen to me. I was no stranger to teaching in a university or public speaking, and I had traveled to the United States on more than one occasion and felt at home in America, yet I was assailed by self-doubt. When I finally accepted both offers, I think it was because I was too scared *not* to. I consoled myself with the thought that I would be away from my family for only a few months. I could not have imagined that more than twenty years later, much of my life and my work would be in the United States.

Back then, just the idea of living in a place without fences or guards was overwhelming. From the time of Egypt's revolution until the moment I boarded the plane to leave for Washington—some thirty years—I had hardly been anywhere without a security detail hovering nearby, watching my every move. Being without them was liberating but strange. In the United States, the smallest, most inconsequential details of everyday life, like carrying house keys and a wallet—things I had never done before—became symbolic of my newfound independence. I realized how much I had relied on others when, shortly before I was slated to fly to the United States, it dawned on me that I had not arranged for a place to live, and I certainly could not afford to live in a hotel for several months. In that instance, Henry Kissinger came to my aid and arranged for me to stay in a friend's home while she was away. I was as embarrassed as I was grateful. I realized that here in America, I was completely free—whether I liked it or not—to take care of and be responsible for myself, a feeling that was both exhilarating and disquieting.

For the first several weeks after arriving, every waking minute I longed for the home I had left behind. I dreamed of walking in my garden and along the Nile. I wanted so badly to lay eyes on the river that has always been my

anchor, a source of pleasure, and a reminder that my life is irrevocably tied to Egypt. Most of all, I missed my children; each of the thousands of miles that separated us registered as a palpable ache in my heart. Why had I moved so far away? In an effort to avoid being alone with my thoughts, I was only too happy to dive into my work. I was teaching at two universities that are nowhere near one another, something I had not considered carefully enough when I accepted both offers, and I was working on my doctoral dissertation as well. This too filled me with anxiety, for I worried that I had taken on too much too soon. Before going to sleep each night, I would tell myself that as soon as morning broke, I would pack and go home to Cairo. In the light of day, however, thoughts of Anwar kept me from doing so. He had always encouraged me to think for myself, express my ideas, and be independent. My husband never tried to hide me or discourage me as so many Arab men of his generation did—and unfortunately still do. I knew he was proud of me.

Memories of our time together helped sustain me. In particular, I thought of the first party, a reception for the diplomatic community in Cairo, that I attended at Abdin Palace as first lady. Anwar not only invited every foreign ambassador posted in Cairo, but also their wives, something unheard of at that time and a prelude to another revolutionary act: Egypt's president entered the event with his wife at his side. This probably sounds trivial to Americans and Europeans, but it was of great significance in the Arab world. It was a harbinger of the extraordinary changes yet to come during the tenure of President Anwar Sadat. The guests were speechless, stunned by what they were witnessing. With that simple solitary act, Anwar publicly declared that the president of Egypt, a new leader in the Arab world, embraced the philosophy and supported the practice of equality between men and women. I was floating on air. I was so proud of the statement my husband was making to the world, not just about us but also about our country. The ambassadors and their wives watched in disbelief and unconcealed joy. They understood that they were not only being a part of something unprecedented, but also an unthinkable act in our part of the world. In retrospect, I am convinced that the reception was the moment when Jehan Sadat became an attraction to the Western media and a lightning rod for criticism in ours. My husband took it in stride, however, and he knew that I would too. In his eyes, I was a

strong person who could face down any of life's adversities, and so, as I tried to adjust to my new life in the United States, a new career, a new sense of self, I could not let him down.

The first challenge had been considerable. At the University of South Carolina, I knew I would be teaching, *really* teaching, American students. But what was I to teach them? I had no idea. When I accepted the job, I thought, admittedly vaguely, that my students in America might be interested in knowing about my husband, my family, and our life together in Egypt. Soon, however, I realized this material would cover at best one or two sessions. Moreover, conversational vignettes about the life and times of Anwar and Jehan Sadat hardly seemed the stuff of a college education.

After much deliberation and some panic, I decided I would talk about Egypt's feminists; surely, their achievements and heroism would be educational, interesting, and informative for American students. Furthermore, I was hoping my subject matter would give me the encouragement to make it through the class. I also wanted to tell Americans something about modern Egypt, which, though more relevant, is never as popular a subject as ancient Egypt. The tombs and temples of the pharaohs are indeed fascinating, but to ignore the vibrant contemporary culture and view my country as an open-air museum is to do Egypt a disservice. People are products of their pasts; they are not their pasts. How can Americans understand the modern Egyptian woman when their knowledge is limited to Cleopatra, Nefertiti, and perhaps Hatshepsut? I say this not to belittle our ancient history—for the tradition of powerful women is well established in Egypt, and the achievements of our glorious queens are part of every Egyptian woman's birthright—but I do think that it is high time that our pantheon of celebrated heroines admitted some more contemporary figures.

As I researched and prepared—a laborious process that involved handwriting my notes in Arabic and translating them into English—the more I realized that my teaching offered an unprecedented opportunity to challenge stereotypical images of Egyptian women, and Arab women in general. I was determined to eradicate all the preconceived ideas, dispel every myth, and replace them with the truth. I was, of course, setting myself an impossible task. After those first lectures about the women of Egypt, I

decided that in my own way, I would paint an accurate picture of Egyptian and Arab women—without recounting a seven-thousand-year historical disquisition that my students probably felt was taking place in real time. I am, however, still convinced that people interested in the status of women in the Arab, and more broadly the Muslim, world are well served to learn, at the minimum, the names, the accomplishments, and the legacies of the following women. Why? Because by looking at their struggle, it is possible to see the way the women's movement in Egypt and the Arab world both ran parallel to and diverged from the same suffrage movements in America and Europe. Outspoken, courageous, assertive, and patriotic: these women are an antidote to the daily dose of shrouded stereotypes served up by the contemporary media.

Huda Sha'arawi is known in my country as the mother of Egypt's feminist movement. Moreover, she is considered one of the Arab world's foremost feminist pioneers, the woman who literally brought the feminist agenda from behind the veil, out of seclusion, and into the public eye. During her day, the late 1800s and the early 1900s, most upper-class Egyptian women lived a carefully circumscribed life; ironically, only affluent families could afford to practice the complete seclusion of women that had become the fashion, and a mark of privilege, among the Ottoman elite. Huda, who was born in 1879 to a wealthy family, grew up in the harem, or women's quarters, an experience she described in her memoir, *Harem Years.* In 1908, she founded the first philanthropic society run by Egyptian women. In 1914, she founded the Intellectual Association of Egyptian Women. In addition, she and her associates were deeply involved in the Egyptian nationalist movement: as it expanded and gained momentum, the social and political activities of these women progressed in step with our country's march for independence.

The year 1923 was a momentous one for Sha'arawi, for in it she founded the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), the most prominent and only forum for women's rights. It fought for our right to be heard, vote, and stand for election to parliament. Also in 1923, on her return to Egypt from an international women's suffrage conference in Rome, she and a fellow delegate, Ceza Nabarawi, descended onto a train platform with their faces uncovered. Other women followed their example, and within ten years, the

harem system and attendant segregation of sexes were well on their way to obsolescence. As more and more educated women joined the EFU, they evolved into a formidable force for educating other women about their political and social rights. The EFU was the voice of the feminist agenda, an agenda that included, among other things, raising the legal age of marriage to eighteen for men and sixteen for women, extending women's custody rights over their children, placing some restrictions on polygamous marriage, and agitating for the right to vote. In a comparison of the feminist movement in the United States and the United Kingdom and Egyptian women's movements, historian Mary Ann Fay makes the following interesting observation in "International Feminism and the Women's Movement in Egypt, 1904–1923":

> The demands of British and American feminists were different in certain specifics from the EFU. For example, polygamy and repudiation were not issues for British and American feminists, while property rights and legal personhood were not issues for Egyptian women. The EFU's rejection of the private, domestic sphere as representing women's only role, its insistence on women's right to work and education and its demand for suffrage in order to enact legal and constitutional reform to benefit women were goals that were shared by feminist/suffrage organizations in Great Britain and the United States.

It is also important to note that the EFU was not an exclusively female organization. Various male nationalists not only supported but also worked hard to propagate its message. Some even served on the board of directors. In 1938, Huda Sha'arawi, along with women of similar beliefs in Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria, organized the first conference of pan-Arab women in Cairo. Once again, it bears pointing out that these women were not pursuing a separatist agenda but one deeply involved in the mainstream of political current.

Ceza Nabarawi, a close friend and protégée of Huda Sha'arawi, was another feminist pioneer. Severely and unjustly criticized for her activities,

she was even publicly accused of flouting the teachings of Islam. Her response is as timely and useful today as it was a century ago: “We, the Egyptian feminists, have great respect for our religion. In wanting to see it practiced in its true spirit, we are doing more for it than those who submit themselves blindly to the customs that have defamed it.” Unshaken in her principles and commitment, she steadfastly followed the course she had set to bring freedom and equality to the women of Egypt. She was the editor in chief of the influential magazine *L’Egyptienne,* and in the 1940s, she founded the Youth Committee to recruit young women to the feminist cause and later joined the Movement of the Friends of Peace, an organization that opposed the imperial presence of Great Britain on Egyptian land.

As is probably clear by now, education is an issue dear to my heart. When it comes to securing the right of equal education for boys and girls, one woman stands above all others: Nabawiyah Musa. She believed the education of women is our essential right, and educated women are indispensable to the development of Egypt’s workforce. When Nabawiyah’s mother, a young widow, brought her children to Cairo, she acted solely for her son’s benefit. Like many other women of her generation, she believed that Nabawiyah could learn all she needed to know at home, by her side. Nabawiyah, however, was an intelligent, ambitious girl who longed for knowledge that transcended the domestic sphere. She enlisted her brother’s help in teaching her to read. Then she began a rigorous program of independent study that eventually led to her qualifying as a teacher.

During her first teaching position in Fayyum, she was dismayed to discover that she was being paid less than her male counterparts for precisely the same work. Appalled, she carried her complaint directly to the Egyptian Ministry of Education; there she was told that male teachers were given higher salaries because they held higher degrees, in this case, secondary diplomas. What went unsaid was that women could not obtain such a degree, since they were legally barred from attending secondary school. Undeterred by the impossibility of her situation, Nabawiyah set about preparing herself for the secondary examination, all through her sole efforts, just as she had done as a girl. In 1907, she became the first woman ever to take this exam. When she passed, she wrote: “When the results of the examination were

announced, I was among those who passed. I think I was thirty-fourth out of two hundred who passed. This news was well received by the [Ministry of Education] employees and by my fellow students. That was in 1907 . . . Had I conquered France my name would not have reverberated more."

At this point, the Ministry of Education could no longer make excuses. Her achievement forced them to increase her salary to a level commensurate with that of her male colleagues. Thereafter, Nabawiyah Musa was promoted from teacher to headmistress of a primary school, and finally she became the first Egyptian woman to serve as inspector of girls' education in Egypt, a position previously reserved for British women. Later in her remarkable book, *The Woman and Work*, written in 1920, Nabawiyah Musa set forth the standards for all working women. Her refusal to accept unequal treatment in the workplace established the precedent for Egypt's policy today of equal pay for equal work. She, along with Huda Sha'arawi and Ceza Nabarawi, made up the Egyptian delegation to the 1923 International Women's Conference. That the conference was in Rome is quite fitting, for these three women are the great triumvirs of the Egyptian women's movement. They in turn inspired and were succeeded by younger women who took up the cause.

One such warrior in the fight for women's rights was Amina el-Said. Amina, like Huda, for whom she had worked as an assistant, grew up at a time when the education of girls was of little concern, especially to rural families. Amina's father, a physician, however, worried about what would happen to his daughters if they lacked a proper education. In a decision that would be considered progressive by today's standards, he moved his family to Cairo where his girls could attend the recently established Shubra Secondary School for girls, which opened in 1925. She went on to attend King Fuad I University (now Cairo University), which, under pressure from Egypt's feminist movement, had begun admitting women in 1929—only five years after this once-colonial institution had been reopened as a public university. After her graduation in 1935, el-Said went on to become one of Egypt's most successful journalists and magazine editors, and the first woman to earn her living as a journalist. She founded Egypt's first magazine for women, *Hawaa*, in 1954, and was its editor, writing a weekly column until her death. She was the first female president of the publishing house Dar el Hilal.

Over a career that spanned more than sixty years, she faced her share of obstacles and criticisms: she was the target of ruthless, unrelenting ridicule and personal attacks. But Amina refused to retreat from her work or back down from her stance on issues. At first, she published her work under a man's name, hoping that the pseudonym would protect her from the prejudices against women prevalent among the so-called enlightened intellectuals of the day. When her ploy was revealed, she was assailed with greater personal and professional criticisms. Undaunted, she did not surrender her feminist principles or her career, because she believed that what she was doing was not just for her own good, but also for the welfare of other Egyptian women.

Amina el-Said remained true to herself and her ideals until the day she died at age eighty-five. On the threshold of death, in pain from the cancer that consumed her, she would not accept the aid of a wheelchair or walker. Instead she insisted she could make it on her own. On the last day of her life, she turned to her daughter to help her to the bathroom. Just before reaching the door, Amina fell to the floor and was gone.

The life of Amina el-Said was full of courage and reason. She was dedicated to the cause of freedom and full and equal rights for women. With her passing, Egypt lost a stellar proponent of human rights and freedom, and I lost a dear, dear friend.

Another pioneer in the movement for women's rights was Suheir Qalamawi, a prominent scholar of Arabic who was among Egypt's most recognized academicians, writers, and feminists. During my graduate work at Cairo University, I was privileged to have been able to work with her directly; indeed, this courageous and brilliant woman was my mentor. Among the first five women to be permitted to enroll at Cairo University in 1928, she graduated in 1931 and went on to earn her baccalaureate and master's degrees. In 1941, she was among the first women to earn doctorates, under the tutelage of one of Egypt's most venerated writers and thinkers, Taha Hussein, who had been instrumental in supporting the women's initial admission to university. As scholar Margot Badran points out in *Feminists, Islam and Nation,* it is worth noting that her field of study, Arabic literature, was not an easy one for women to pursue, since rigorous instruction in Arabic

had for centuries been the preserve of men trained at Al-Azhar. A staunch proponent of women's rights, Dr. Suheir sought and won a seat in Parliament, a position from which she introduced and debated policy on behalf of women. She also organized numerous workshops designed to educate and encourage other women to participate in Egyptian politics. With her guidance, I learned far more than comparative literature.

Today, I fear that the women of Egypt are at risk for losing the legacy left us by Huda Sha'arawi, Ceza Nabarawi, Amina el-Said, Nabawiyah Musa, Suheir Qalamawi, and many, many other ordinary Egyptian women who were brave enough to speak and act for the good of their countrywomen. Thanks to their efforts, Egyptian women have made astonishing strides in the last hundred years: we have access to all levels of education—women are half the 1.6 million students in Egyptian universities. According to one United Nations report, female illiteracy fell from 84 percent in 1960 to 41 percent in 2005. We can vote: Abdel Nasser granted suffrage in 1956. We have a greater share in decision making than we had twenty years ago: Egypt has female ambassadors and ministers in the government; a woman heads the government broadcasting and television bureau. Indeed, we are represented in all professional fields, including, most recently, the judiciary.

It is undeniable that men, Muslim and non-Muslim, still control the majority of power and wealth in Egypt (indeed the entire world), a condition that leaves women to progress only as far as men permit. We must remember, however, that men are neither our masters nor our enemies. They are our partners. This is a truth that many men and women grasp and that others must be taught to accept. In my own life, I was fortunate to marry a man who regarded me as an equal. Anwar was a strong proponent of women's rights: in addition to the presidential decrees that reformed family law and brought more women into government, he implemented an ambitious effort to support family planning and population control. Whereas between 1970 and 1975, Egypt had a total fertility rate of 5.9, it is now 3.2, according to a United Nations Development Programme report. It is not yet at the replacement level of 2.1, albeit far closer. Although I am proud to say that I played a role in bringing this and other women's issues to the forefront, Anwar did not implement such sweeping changes simply

to appease me! He knew as well as I that women must participate fully in the life of our country.

It is worth remembering that such progressive thinking was hardly his birthright. Sadat grew up in rural Egypt, one of thirteen children born to a mother who, like most of the other women in her village, was illiterate. Unlettered though they were, these village women were strong and capable. Unlike their wealthier city dwelling sisters, they were not expected to cover their faces or live in seclusion. Of necessity, they worked side by side with men, and everyone understood that their participation in the life of the village was vital to its survival. What Anwar carried with him from Mit Abul Kum to the presidential villa was not the idea that women need not read and men rule the roost, but rather the conviction that men and women are interdependent. I relate this to make the point that possessing traditional values is not the same as being hidebound by tradition.

It is in this light that my country must see that the demands of women are not "feminine demands" at odds with our cultural ideals, but rather demands for Egypt and all of its people. Men *and* women want the right to work in order to secure their own future and the futures of their children. Men *and* women are concerned about unemployment, salaries, pensions, health care, political rights, and freedom of expression—indeed, all aspects of a democratic society. Just as our aspirations are shared, our success and failure are inextricably linked. Therefore, it is with great trepidation that I observe the current trend toward establishing certain women-only organizations. In the past, Egyptian women did not isolate themselves by forming exclusive cliques that promoted specific, parochial causes. They plunged into the rivers of nationalism that swept through the whole of Egypt. Egyptian women today seem to be trying to isolate themselves, wrapping themselves inside a feminine cocoon in order to live out their lives with the least amount of conflict. Professional groups and associations for female artists, writers, filmmakers, university graduates, and entrepreneurs are blossoming in Egypt, as they have elsewhere in the world. I do not agree with the gender exclusivity of such organizations. Although they are enhancing women's contributions in some fields, they are creating more problems. To achieve equitable and lasting progress for women in a conservative nation

like Egypt, men and women must work together in mutually supportive roles. I know this firsthand; the reform of Egypt's family law would never have passed without the support of men, especially those serving in our People's Assembly.

In this book, I have spoken often of my husband's legacy. As for me, I hope I will be remembered as a feminist, an Arab, and a Muslim woman dedicated to the struggle for women's rights. I do not want to be remembered as a radical, because I am not. True, I have always expressed my opinions, but I have never been extreme in my views—except when it comes to passivity. I hate watching and waiting as if an injustice can correct itself or an ill of society can discover its own cure. Conventional wisdom in Egypt seems to espouse the notion that a woman's kingdom (forgive the irony of that phrase) is the home—a flattering slogan, I concede, but one that threatens to induce women into a hypnotic state of unrealized potential and possibility. It is true that a woman's kingdom is her home; however, she should not be held prisoner in her own kingdom. Make no mistake, I strongly applaud and promote the role of women as mothers, but I will never concede that maternal roles are the sole domain of their capabilities. Despite the rights women have gained thus far, a passive woman is prone to becoming meek and servile, dominated to the extent that she unconsciously relinquishes her dignity, her independence, her confidence, her property, and everything else she considers important to her, which ultimately has grave reverberations in her own society. Unlike the pharaohs of ancient Egypt who were buried with their treasures and symbols of their life's achievements, we mothers do not take our successes and failures to our graves. Our children are our greatest legacy. What kind of future shall we bequeath to them?

Galal Amin

Egypt and the Market Culture

from

Whatever Happened to the Egyptians?

2000

A little more than half a century ago, the great British economic historian and sociologist Karl Polanyi published a book with the title *The Great Transformation*[1] which achieved great fame and continues to be widely quoted. By "the great transformation," Polanyi meant a particular change that came over Europe a little more than two centuries ago. This was neither the emergence of capitalism, nor the acceleration of manufacturing, nor the rapid advance of science and technology, nor the beginning of the Enlightenment, but the emergence of 'the market system.' By 'the market system' Polanyi did not of course mean the familiar phenomenon of people gathering on a regular basis, in a certain place, to exchange a few basic goods, as seen in the weekly market in villages and small towns all over the world, which must be as old as the division of labor and the system of exchange. What he meant was the moment around the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, when the market engulfed such things as agricultural land and human labor which had not been considered marketable commodities until then. Polanyi considered this to be the true beginning of the economic system that prevails today,

distinguishing it from any other economic system that Europe had known before the industrial revolution. Under this 'market system,' one thing after another came to be the object of a transaction of buying and selling, and hence to acquire monetary value. This trait, according to Polanyi, is of much greater significance than any trait that could distinguish capitalism from socialism, both capitalism and socialism being in fact two varieties of the 'market system.'

I personally find the idea fascinating and exceedingly fruitful, for it can throw strong light on some of the most important transformations in modern life, including those which have occurred in Egypt over the last fifty years. With the launching of Sadat's open-door policies in 1974, Egypt was bound to go through the same marketing fever that had affected everyone else. Thirty years ago, while spending a few months in Lebanon, I was struck by how much the city of Beirut looked a huge commercial market, two thirds of the ground floor area of all buildings were estimated to be dedicated to selling one thing or another. Over the last three decades I could see the same thing gradually happening in Cairo. Anyone who has managed to get hold of the ground floor of a building has turned it into a commercial enterprise of some sort, and every young man in possession of any amount of capital thinks up a 'project,' which invariably means setting up an enterprise for marketing something.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the rate of growth of the market system in Egypt, in the sense I have suggested, was exceedingly slow for two main reasons. At that time, the government provided many of the essential goods and services at prices which virtually everyone could afford, while the rate of inflation was still very modest. Both factors helped to reduce the pressure that might have pushed people to search for sources of additional income. When essentials are available at reasonable prices and there is little fear of a big rise in prices in the near future, the buying and selling fever tends to abate, and so does the urge to make a big fortune in the shortest possible time.

By the mid-1970s, however, the situation had changed radically. With the sudden rise in prices after the upheaval in the oil market in the early seventies, the gradual reduction of government intervention for the protection of lower-income groups, and the flow of unprecedented wealth into the country

from remittances, the market system heated up and the drive to realize a fortune by whatever means intensified. Things that had rarely been offered for sale or rent, as indeed they should never have been, came to be subject to negotiation. A good deal of public property became private, and hence subject to buying and selling. Much of what everyone had enjoyed freely, such as public parks, beaches, or the banks of the Nile, was now transformed into building sites, either for profit or for the exclusive benefit of a limited group of people. Everyone began to look for new ways of earning more and more money, either out of necessity or in response to newly whetted appetites. He who had an apartment that he could rent to an Arab or foreign tourist, or had a private car that he could turn into a taxi to drive after finishing work in his government post, did exactly that. A school teacher who could offer private lessons after school hours (or even during them) did not hesitate to do so. The government employee entrusted with providing a public service at no charge turned it into a private service which he sold only to those able to pay, including certain functions connected with some highly sensitive posts in the government that no one would previously have imagined could be subject to the 'market system.' Sporting clubs began to cede more and more of their land and buildings, that had previously been set aside for their members' use, to commercial projects that aimed at nothing but profit. This is to say nothing of television, of course, where the opportunities for realizing profit are limitless. This powerful device, originally invented as a means of transmitting ideas and information, was transformed into a first-rate selling device in which advertising agencies came to control not only the timing but the very content of the programs.

With the increased opportunities for making large windfall profits, resulting from the big rise in the rate of inflation, and the inevitable increase in the intensity of desire for such profits, new types of aggressive and criminal behavior hardly known in Egypt before started to make an appearance. One would now try to put his hand on a lucrative plot of land which really belonged to someone else, another to supplant the legal owners or occupiers of a flat which promised a handsome income if appropriately furnished and rented to foreigners. A teacher might force private tuition on his students, at exorbitant rates, when they might have preferred a

different tutor; a university professor might try to oust a colleague from teaching a particular course which offered rich rewards to the writer of its textbook, and so on.

As the years went by, I came to see how even the sacred month of Ramadan was gradually subjected to the rules of the market system, for it too was turned into an opportunity for intensive buying and selling. It is true that in my childhood, small lanterns were sold to children during Ramadan as one of the rituals of celebration, but these were only very simple, cheap toys, which the children used to carry as they gathered in the streets, singing the traditional Ramadan songs. Or, in other words, they were very inexpensive 'nouns' helping the children to perform a very enjoyable 'verb.' Today there are shops that sell nothing but Ramadan lanterns, in small and giant sizes, for the use of children as well as for the decoration of the entrances of big buildings or the lobbies of international hotels. They rarely carry candles, as was the case in my childhood, but are connected to electric wires or carry their own batteries. Thus the Ramadan lantern is rapidly coming to occupy the same position as the Christmas tree in the West, converted from a beautiful religious symbol to an expensive and elaborate ritual around which revolves a great commercial fanfare. Very soon we will see the Ramadan lantern transformed into one of the essential pillars of the holy month of fasting, without which fasting itself may become incomplete and unacceptable. Once this is done, the 'market system' will have won a complete victory over some of the most intimate aspects of the everyday life of Muslims, as it had already done in the Christian West.

Some people may regard all these transformations in our way of life as merely the inevitable consequences of the adoption over the last three decades of open-door policies, or as no more than the familiar features of the capitalist system to which Egypt was converted after discarding the 'socialism' of the 1960s. Others may see them only as symptoms of a continuous process of westernization. Although there is truth in all of this, it may also be true that something more ominous is taking place. I personally am inclined to think that Karl Polanyi was right in putting so much emphasis on the emergence and spread of 'the market culture.' If this is as applicable to Egypt as it is elsewhere, it would mean that we are now witnessing the gradual

encroachment of something much more sinister than open-door policies, capitalism, or westernization. It could be nothing less than a process of metamorphosis in which everything is gradually being turned into a commodity, the object of a commercial transaction, including man's very soul.

Note

1 K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (1944). Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.

Architecture
and the Arts

Bernard O'Kane

The Ayyubids and Early Mamluks

from

The Treasures of Islamic Art in the Museums of Cairo

2006

After the gradual weakening of the Saljuqs and their withdrawal from Syria, a power vacuum arose there. It was filled initially by Nur al-Din (r. 1147–74), a member of the Zangids who ruled over Mosul. Nur al-Din was principally occupied with fighting another newly arrived power in the Middle East, the Crusaders. Crusader pressure on the Fatimids enabled the Ayyubids to realise just how weak the Fatimids had become. Initially invited by the Fatimids to help ward off Crusader attacks, the Ayyuubids under Salah al-Din (Saladin) deposed the Fatimid caliph and initiated Ayyubid rule in Egypt in 1171. Salah al-Din remained the most powerful Ayyubid in his lifetime, enjoying victories over the Crusaders, but equally managing to keep his ambitious relatives in check, various members of whom were ruling over cities in Syria and Anatolia such as Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, and Diyarbakir.

The Ayyubids ruled over Syria and Egypt for less than a hundred years, a period which was characterized by internecine and Crusader warfare, plagues, famines, and not infrequent squandering of the public purse by rulers either dissolute or desperate to survive. Within these constraints,

the wonder is perhaps not that we have so few monuments and artifacts surviving from the Ayyubid period, but that there are so many. Although the constant warfare was a huge drain on resources, it did bring at least one huge benefit to the state: a ready supply of labor for building operations. The medieval traveler Ibn Jubayr noted that the citadel was being worked on by

> the foreign Rumi prisoners whose numbers were beyond computation. There was no cause for any but them to labor on this construction. The Sultan has constructions in progress in other places and on these too the foreigners are engaged so that those of the Muslims who might have been used in this public work are relieved of it all, no work of that nature falling on any of them.

The second major Ayyubid citadel at Cairo, that of al-Salih Najm al-Din on the island of Roda, was also aided by the work of foreign prisoners, as was his madrasa.

The Ayyubids restored the religious ideology of Egypt to that of its majority Sunni inhabitants. They also set about dismantling symbols of Fatimid power, using the palace in the center of the old city as a site for new constructions. One of these, a madrasa of the last Ayyubid ruler Najm al-Din, had a mausoleum added to it by his wife after his death, inaugurating a fashion for complexes that persisted for centuries. Najm al-Din had died in 1249 fighting the Crusaders; his death provoked a succession crisis that briefly resulted in the rule of his wife, but which was only resolved with the coming to power of his Turkish slave troops, the Mamluks.

The holdings of the museums of Cairo are rich in two media in which the Ayyubids specialized: metalwork and woodwork. The art of inlaying copper or gold and silver in bronze or brass was first perfected in Herat (in present-day Afghanistan) in the late twelfth century. Shortly after the sacking of Herat by the Mongols in 1221 we find inlaid metalwork being made in Mosul in Iraq, presumably by refugees from Iran. Signatures by artist from Mosul of objects that also specify that they were made

in Damascus or Cairo indicate that the Mosul craftsmen in turn brought the technique further west; a silver-inlaid candlestick in the Museum of Islamic Art is one of its masterpieces.

Much of the Ayyubid woodwork in the collections comes from the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i. At the time of its erection in 1211 its dome (15 meters in diameter) was the largest in Egypt and one of the largest in the Islamic world. Salah al-Din had already built a madrasa at the site,and had erected a superb carved wooden cenotaph over the grave of Imam al-Shafi'i. The imam was one of the founders of the four Sunni legal rites of Islam, and the Ayyubids may have wished to encourage pilgrimage there to supplant visitations to the tomb of 'Alid descendants, which the Fatimids had assiduously cultivated.

The Mamluks preserved many of the administrative features of their predecessors, but their ethnic separateness was maintained by imports of young Turkish slaves from the Caucasian and Central Asian steppes. These slaves would be manumitted and brought up as Muslims, and having severed all family ties would be, at least in theory, fiercely loyal to their masters. On the death of a sultan a nominal successor would be appointed while amirs jockeyed behind the scenes—or clashed on the streets of the city—to see who could muster the most support. This frequently resulted in a fast turnover of Mamluks' lengthy tenure of over two hundred and fifty years, during which time they were the principal power in the Middle East. The grandeur of Cairo under their rule is demonstrated not only by the magnificent buildings they have left behind, but also by the sheer size of the city, estimated at 150,000–200,000 in the early fifteenth century, even after its population had been reduced by fourteenth-century plagues. This may not sound large to modern ears, but it was three or four times the size of the biggest cities of contemporary Europe: London and Paris. Although sons of Mamluks in theory lost their military privileges, by the end of the Mamluk period they formed a coterie with serving amirs that competed for power with the sultan and which ultimately led to the Mamluks' defeat (in 1517) by the fastest rising power in the area, the Ottomans.

The Mamluks had a very hierarchical power structure, one reflection of this being their use of blazons (or heraldic symbols), indicating the position of an amir at court, such as pen-bearer, crossbow-bearer, arms-bearer, master of household effects, and so on. The Arabic word for it is *rank,* derived from the Persian word *rang,* meaning color, and indeed the color of the symbols, now washed out on the many buildings in which they occur, can be seen in all their glory on ceramics, metalwork, and enameled glass.

The early Mamluks were originally quartered in Cairo in the Ayyubid citadel on Roda Island, hence the name by which they are frequently known, the Bahri (riverine) Mamluks. The figure of Baybars (r. 1260–77) looms large in the early Mamluk period; he derived geat prestige from his defeat of the Mongols in Syria in 1260. The bulk of building activities in his reign was spent in constructing or repairing fortifications in Syria, the success of which may be estimated from the fact that the Mongols made no further incursions into Mamluk territory until after his death. Qalawun (1279–90) is another major figure, not only because of his victories against the Crusaders and his building activities in Cairo, but also because, contrary to the system, his descendants managed to rule after him for up to three generations.

The complex that Qalawun built typifies many of the underlying themes of the period. It was located in the center of Cairo and consisted of a hospital, madrasa, and mausoleum. The hospital was the ostensible raison d'etre of the complex, having been built as the result of a vow made by the sultan when he was treated at another hospital in Damascus. Mausoleums were occasionally frowned upon by the religious authorities, so building one as part of a religious and charitable complex was a good way to get round this difficulty. The concept of *baraka,* 'divine blessing,' played an important part in the number and location of mausoleums within complexes in Cairo. It was believed that prayers offered by passers-by in favor of the deceased could help in securing God's forgiveness for the deceased's sins. This explains the invariable sitting of mausoleums on that part of a complex which overlooked one, or if possible, two street facades. To encourage such actions, readers were often paid for by the endowment

of the building to sit in the windows and recite the Qur'an. In the case of Qalawun's complex, we know that a team of such readers read night and day in the windows of the mausoleum, and one can imagine them reading by the light of candlesticks and lamps like those which have been preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art. The mausoleum is richly decorated; its mihrab, with marble and mother-of-pearl mosaic, and colonnades of arches topped by scallop shells, inspired imitations in Cairo for more than a century. The plan of the mausoleum and its marble revetment may have been inspired by the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, in an attempt to underline Qalawun's claims to be the spiritual heir to the glory of the Umayyads.

Qalawun's son al-Nasir Muhammad was exceptional in enjoying three reigns (1293–94, 1299–1309, 1310–41). His time in power was characterized by a frenzy of building activity, particularly by his amirs. Piety was one of the most important motives for this, but another may have been security, as the foundations could be financed by endowments (*awqaf*, sing. *waqf*) given in perpetuity, and thus safeguarded from fear of confiscation, should—as frequently happened—the amir fall out of favor with the sultan. As family members were often designated as the administrators of these endowments, the *awqaf* also proved a useful way to circumvent Islamic inheritance laws, which might otherwise have dissipated the properties. The buildings also required rich furnishings, and many of these are still at the forefront of the museums' collections, in the form of minbars and Qur'an boxes and stands. The Qur'ans themselves, some of the largest and most sumptuously decorated in the history of Islamic art, are mostly in the collection of the National Library.

The most impressive of all Mamluk buildings in Cairo is that of Sultan Hassan, who ruled from 1347–51 and again from 1354–61, and who was assassinated at the age of twenty-five. In his fist reign Egypt was in the grip of the plague, which ironically may have helped to finance his complex, since the assets of those who died leaving no relatives went to the state. A nineteenth-century print by David Roberts shows the interior in its glory with some of the more than two hundred enameled lamps which were ordered specially for the building hanging from the ceiling. Several of these together with the original bronze chandeliers, are now preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art.

Textiles were of geat importance to society, both for furnishings and for clothes, the latter being a matter of enormous prestige. An old Arab proverb relates that, "a hungry man may appear in public, but not one improperly dressed." In late medieval and modern Arabic the word for a suit is *badla*, meaning a thing to be exchanged, implying that one normally had an extensive wardrobe of them. The turban was the most conspicuous part of a person's clothing. Its size indicated importance, and was often that on which most money was spent. Naturally, this attitude to clothes led to a reaction of those opposed to worldliness. The Sufis who practiced asceticism, were so called because of their woolen *(suf)* garments, a material (like cotton) worn only by the poor. The better-off wore linen, of which twenty-six different varieties are mentioned in the sources, presumably differing in fineness and durability. The most prestigious material was silk, of which even more varieties were known. It was manufactured in many centers around the Mediterranean, as well as in Persia. The medieval merchant and his customers were able to differentiate between very many types, further demonstrating the importance of textiles.

The living rooms of domestic architecture, whether the palaces of the amir or the houses of the middle class, would have had, rather than elaborate furniture, a wealth of textile. The floor was spread with carpets, or reed mats in poor households, and on top of them were mattresses and bolsters. The most luxurious mattresses were made of a material called *tabari*, a heavy silk with interwove gold, originally Iranian but probably also copied locally. Cushions were especially prominent in lists of household furnishings. This was undoubtedly because of the variety of color which they lent to the interior: an eleventh-century author wrote that a house full of cushions resembled a garden with flowers. Curtains usually took the place of wooden doors inside the house, and were also suspended in front of the niches on walls. They could be used to divide a room for privacy (for example, for women), or simply hung for decoration on the wall. The most popular were of linen, from the flax-growing town of Bahnasa south of Cairo. Other were of silk from the Islamic west (the Maghreb), and of various costly material from Iraq and Iran.

Kitchens in domestic architecture were relatively simple structures. They may have contained a small oven, but for baking bread the practice was to bring your own dough to the baker, whose oven was larger and hotter than domestic ones. Take-outs of hot food were also popular. Pairs (which would be easier to carry) of lunchboxes are regularly mentioned in brides' trousseaus, these being containers which nested on top of one another, and could be secured on top by a handle. The Museum has many in its collection.

Stables are rarely mentioned in the sources, except in the Mamluks' palaces, as only they were permitted to ride horses. The rest of the population commuted on donkeys, which were kept saddled and waiting for customers at the head of every lane. The Mamluks took great pride in their horsemanship, however, with many of their illustrated manuscripts showing details of the feats of skill they accomplished in the hippodrome. Horsemanship also featured in a festival that was held every year at the time of the pilgrimage to Mecca, one that celebrated the display of the *mahmal*, a palanquin atop a camel which symbolized the Mamluk's dominion of the holy cities in Arabia. Soldiers with lances rode before it, simulating battle for the amusement of the spectators. A military victory could also be the occasion for a holiday; the excitement of watching the procession of soldiers could be increased by the humiliation or the public execution of the defeated enemy. For all of these celebrations the shops and streets were bedecked with colorful hangings, and at night, torches, candles, and lamps of all kinds ensured that festivities continued at length.

Musicians and dancers were immensely popular, as can be seen from their appearance on many earlier luster ceramics in the Museum and on the Ayyubid candlestick. The right to have a band of drums and trumpets—a timbalery—was the prerogative of the Mamluk rulers and their chief amirs. The privilege of music could also be abused, however. On one occasion in the Citadel, the wives of Sultan Barquq complained that they could hear the cries of women being beaten by one of the amirs. Although reprimanded, on subsequent occasions the amir tried to indulge his sadistic pleasures by ordering his singing girls to play tambourines to drown the screams, a ruse which was quickly seen through. Notable musicians and singers performed mostly for families at times of weddings

and circumcisions, and occasionally for the sultan. The profession held its dangers, however. One singer of the late fifteenth century, Khadija Rihabiya, was ordered to be whipped by the town prefect because so many of the nobility had fallen in love with her; she died at the age of thirty after being ordered to renounce singing. Happier was the case of one Aziza, who died in 1500 aged eighty, having been the most famous singer of her day.

The cemeteries around Cairo played an important role in social life. Despite opposition from some religious scholars, visiting saints' graves to ask for their intercession was practiced widely, both by native Cairenes and by foreigners. Many pilgrimage guides were written for the cemeteries, describing the location of the graves, their efficacy in fulfilling prayers, or their power to cause curative miracles. Modern travelers are surprised to find so many of the living in the so-called 'City of the Dead,' but in fact the cemeteries were probably always, as a twelfth-century Spanish traveler relates, "built up with inhabited oratories and tombs which serve as refuges for foreigners, the learned, the devout and the poor." However, he also notes that its unpoliced state made it a haven for robbers. A more frequent concern of medieval authors was that it presented opportunities for unseemly contact between the sexes that were not possible within the city itself. All of this goes to show the continuing popularity of the practice of visiting the graves of saints, and helps explain the number of Mamluk foundations in the cemetery areas, many of which provided artifacts now in the museums.

Rather surprisingly, the taste for figural decoration that had dominated Fatimid pottery and Ayyubid and early Mamluk metalwork declined, probably on account of al-Nasir Muhammad's wish to be seen to be religiously more orthodox. It was replaced principally by inscriptions giving the name of the patron and as many well-wishing titles as could be squeezed into the space available. Owing to economic crises in the later Mamluk period, some of the metal objects had their silver or gold inlay removed and melted down, but where it has survived, as in a basin and ewer whose burial preserved them intact, the result is thrilling.

In the early Mamluk period the economy was at its height, with the lands south of the country producing gold and black slaves, and the Red Sea and the Mediterranean the conduit for a lucrative spice trade. These commodities were transported overland and then exported to Europe; in return the Mamluks imported wood and iron. The peace treaty concluded between the Mamluks and the Ilkhanids in 1322 reduced barriers to trade and ensured continuing revenue; it was with these riches that the sultan and his amirs sponsored the major works of art and architecture that are visible in Cairo today.

Michael Haag

The Cosmopolitan Capital

from

Vintage Alexandria

2008

Ancient Alexandria had been the culture and intellectual capital of the Hellenistic world, a world not of nations but universal and cosmopolitan, the common possession of all mankind. Alexandria's Mouseion, of which the Library was a part, and the towering Pharos lighthouse overlooking the Eastern Harbor, have remained symbols of enlightenment to this day. In 331 BC Alexander the Great himself laid down the plan of the city that was to bear his name. but as there was no chalk to mark the ground, he sprinkled grains of barley to indicate the alignment of its streets and where its markets and temples should be, and the circumference of its walls. Then suddenly huge flocks of birds appeared and to Alexander's alarm devoured all the grain. Take heart, his diviners urged him, interpreting the occurrence as a sign that the city would have not only abundant resources of its own but would be the nurse of men of innumerable nations. The modern cosmopolitan city was itself as the revival of that dream.

The refounding of Alexandria in the 1820s was by Muhammad Ali, an ambitious and westernizing Ottoman adventurer from Kavala in northern Greece who made himself master of Egypt in 1805. Almost all trace of the

once splendid ancient city had vanished. A village of five thousand people marked the site. Muhammad Ali brought the city back to life by digging the Mahmoudiya Canal, making Alexandria the seaport of the Nile. The canal stimulated the potential of the Nile Valley and the Delta, whose produce, especially sugar, wheat, and cotton, was brought to Alexandria where Muhammad Ali developed and enlarged the Western Harbor, which had been closed to Christian shipping, and opened it up for trade, and where he built dockyards and a fleet. On the headland of Ras el-Tin, the closest point to Europe, Muhammad Ali built a palace and nurtured his ambition to make Egypt prosperous and strong.

With the aim of attracting foreign and expertise, Muhammad Ali granted land for settlement to immigrant communities in the center of his new city. Among the very first were the Tossizza brothers, friends of Muhammad Ali whom he had know when he was a tobacco merchant in Kavala; Michael Tossizza became the first Greek consul in Alexandria and also the first president of the city's Greek community. He built his magnificent house at the center of the new Alexandria, on Muhammad Ali Square, where it eventually became the Bourse, the largest stock exchange in the East and the second largest cotton exchange in the world. The Tossizzas paved the way for those who followed, not only businessmen but also doctors, teachers, lawyers, engineers—qualified men who had studied at European universities—as well as small merchants, shopkeepers, builders, and artisans.

In addition to making grants of land, Muhammad Ali followed Ottoman practice in granting foreigners certain privileges know as the Capitulations (from the Latin *capitula,* meaning the heads or chapters of agreement). The Ottoman Empire had introduced the system in the sixteenth century to encourage trade with Europe by exempting foreign residents from the rigors of Islamic law and from local taxes, making them subject instead to their own consular authorities. In Egypt the system was reformed in 1875 by the creation of the Mixed Courts, 'mixed' because in these courts Egyptians, including the Egyptian government, could bring lawsuits against Europeans and vice versa. The Mixed Courts fell under Egyptian jurisdiction, but they were also reassuring to Europeans whose

cases were heard by panels of both Egyptian and international judges who dispensed justice in accordance with the Code Napoléon.

In the half century following its refounding, Alexandria's population grew from thirteen thousand in 1821 to two hundred thousand in 1871. In another fifty years, by the end of the first World War, Alexandria's population exceeded half a million and was approaching what it had been in Cleopatra's time.

Egyptians were always a majority in Alexandria, but they too were immigrants to the city. Some, who already enjoyed prosperity and position in Cairo or elsewhere in the country, were drawn to Alexandria by its further opportunities, while others were lured from the towns and villages by the prospect of good wages and social services such as medical care and schools. In addition there were immigrants from all around the Ottoman Empire. In a city that was a refuge and an opportunity for Muslims from the Balkans, Jews from North Africa, Greeks from Asia Minor, or Christians from Syria and Lebanon, there was little place for nationalism in the political sense as opposed to ethnic identity; even Egyptian nationality was not legally defined until 1926. Whatever people's origins, the city was their home. They were citizens of Alexandria.

The Greeks and the Italians were the largest European communities in Alexandria, and they gave the port city its distinctive Mediterranean atmosphere. The Greeks were often independently minded entrepreneurs who made their way in businesses large and small, whether in the cotton trade, in tobacco imports and cigarette exports, as manufacturers, or as grocers and café owners. But it was the Italian community that more than any other provided the engineers and architects who built Alexandria—among them Francesco Mancini, who laid out the spacious Muhammad Ali Square in the 1830s, the Almagia family, who in 1907 constructed the elegant Eastern Harbor Corniche, and Alessandro Loria, whose Moorish and Venetian-style buildings, adorned with mosaics and arabesques, lent Alexandria a carnival air. In its architecture, its gardens, its luxuriant vegetation, and its climate of wind and rain and fierce blue skies, Alexandria could easily have been an Italian city.

The communities, each headed by an elected president and executive committee, were the building blocks of Alexandria's social infrastructure. Each of the communities—the Greek, Italian, Armenian, Jewish,

Syro-Lebanese, French, and all the rest—played a vital role in creating the special fabric of Alexandria's cosmopolitan society. They established schools, hospitals, clubs, and welfare organizations and competed with one another to make the city more beautiful and enrich it culturally. Alexandria was not a melting pot; cultures remained distinct. Nor was it a city of exile for expatriates; people were rooted in the city. Alexandrians participated in their community while respecting the ways of others. By means of its communities Alexandria generated and sustained its cosmopolitan character from one generation to another.

People of all classes, religions, and ethnic backgrounds mingled in Alexandria, and generally there was harmony between them. The famous exception came in 1882 when Colonel Ahmed Orabi, the minister of war, led a revolt against his own government, which he opposed for its Ottoman and European leanings. Riots broke out in Alexandria, where over 150 Europeans were killed. This was met by the bombardment of Alexandria's harbor defenses by Britain's Royal Navy, and during further riots the center of the European city was burned to the ground. The British, who since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt eighty-odd years before, and especially since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, feared for their route to India. They landed forces in Egypt, Orabi was defeated, and the country, though nationally governed by Egyptians, remained under British control until 1922 when it was granted qualified sovereignty while complete independence came with the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, limited only by Britain's right to base its military in the country in the event of war. Agreement was reached the following year at the Convention of Montreux to end the Capitulations forthwith while allowing the Mixed Courts to continue for a further twelve years.

Alexandria became the first self-governing city in the Middle East, nearly sixty years before local government came to Cairo in 1949. Already in the 1830s several foreign consuls had created a board of works; then in 1869 a committee of merchants imposed a voluntary tax upon themselves to pave the city's streets. From this initiative emerged the municipal council founded in 1890, half its members appointed by the central government, half elected locally, which raised revenue by taxing merchants, property owners, and tenants alike. The municipality was responsible for drainage work, the

construction of the Corniche, landscaping the Municipal Gardens, and opening the Nouzha and Antoniadis gardens to the public, raising finance for the Greco-Roman Museum and for archaeological excavations, supporting theaters and literary reviews, and providing services to the poorer quarters.

Alexandria was as brilliant, sophisticated, and advanced as any city in the Mediterranean. It was the gateway into Egypt for the latest fashions, technology and science, culture and ideas. Doctors at the Greek Hospital helped find a vaccine against cholera; one of the earliest organ transplants was performed at the Jewish Hospital. The great houses of the city hosted exhibitions, lectures, concerts, and theatrical entertainments. The opera season was brightened by the stars of La Scala, and a succession of plays from Paris and London were performed by visiting companies. Sarah Bernhardt, Toscanini, and Pavlova appeared at theaters like the Zizinia, the Alhambra, and the Muhammad Ali. The Sporting Club hosted international tennis tournaments and the Municipal Stadium was one of the finest in the world. In 1912, less than a century after its refounding, Alexandria was among the four contenders to host the next Olympic Games.

Cynthia Myntti

The Builders and their Buildings

from

Paris Along the Nile

1999

To many architectural historians, the nineteenth century was a time of retrograde architectural revivalism. Even as the industrial revolution was modernizing Europe, builders stuck to traditional architectural forms, with flamboyant embellishments. To critics, it was a "fancy dress ball," "the bubonic plague of architectural ornamentation," or as an ultimate insult, "cartouche architecture": inflated, unrestrained, extravagant, ostentatious, and tawdry.

It was indeed an exuberant time. The Industrial Revolution created the need for factories, stores, offices, railway stations, and big hotels. It invented new materials to revolutionize construction: iron, steel, improved glass, and then reinforced concrete. Electricity extended the day both for work and pleasure, and made it possible to build tall buildings with lifts. At the same time, industrial wealth also spawned the new bourgeoisie with money to spend on land, houses, and decoration. Last and not unrelated, the nineteenth century witnessed the establishment of transcontinental empires.

Imperial rulers wanted to make their capital cities fitting representations of their expanding global power. So entire cities, not just buildings, were

transformed. Critics of Napoleon III, Baron Haussmann, and Charles Garnier (the architect of the Paris Opera, which opened in 1875) charged them with squanderous imperial grandiosity, yet their plans and their buildings made Paris one of the most beautiful cities in the world even now, one hundred years later. So too it might be said of Khedive Ismail and Ali Mubarak.

In any case, Paris was the city to be copied in the nineteenth century. In this period, for example, Americans brought back so many architectural ideas from Paris that, it was charged, they might soon be "talking French and shrugging their shoulders" in the streets of New York. Egypt's ruler had fallen under the same spell.

When Khedive Ismail and his Haussmann, Ali Mubarak, drew up plans for modern Cairo they knew they would have to rely on foreigners to implement their ideas, at least at the beginning. Ismail founded the School of Irrigation and Architecture in Abbasiya, which would eventually become Cairo University's Faculty of Engineering. He reestablished the School of Arts and Crafts in Bulaq for the training of technicians, later to become the Faculty of Engineering at Ain Shams University. But it would take time to produce a new generation of Egyptian architects. Indeed, well into the 1930s many of the architects practicing in Egypt were non-Egyptian. Some had no formal training in architecture; they were simply contractors or artisans in one or other of the building trades. Only after World War II and the establishment of the architectural syndicate was it necessary to have a degree to practice as an architect in Egypt.

Italians played a central role in building the new Cairo. Both professionals and landless laborers were drawn across the Mediterranean to the boom town that Cairo had become. Italian architects and technicians were employed in Egypt's Ministry of Public Works and also in private practice, where they contributed to the design and building of khedival palaces, public buildings, and the private residences of the growing expatriate community and the newly affluent Egyptian landed gentry. Francesco Battigelli, Carlo Prampolini, Pietro Avoscani, Carlo Virgilio Silvagni, Luigi Gavasi, Augusto Cesari, and Giuseppe Garozzo etched their names on Cairo buildings. Avoscani, for instance, built the Cairo Opera House as a copy of La Scala,

and, to meet the deadline of the opening of the Suez Canal, completed it in six months; it was, according to reports, "a miracle of activity and audacity." The Sicilian Giuseppe Garozzo and later his sons were involved with many of Cairo's major buildings including the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities, the palace at Abdin, the Shepheard's Hotel and the Cairo Fire Brigade Station in Ataba Square.

Many of the buildings designed and constructed by Italians in Cairo in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries drew upon the beauty and coherence of Italian Renaissance buildings: ground floors with heavy stone facing or its equivalent in plaster, the upper story with Tuscan columns or Ionic pilasters and pedimented windows. Others, such as Ernesto Verucci Bey and Mario Rossi, used Italian Gothic style, reminiscent of the Palazzo Ducale in Venice, in buildings such as Villa Tawfik in Zamalek, now a Helwan University building.

But it is also worth noting that Italians also participated in the renovation of many of the great Islamic monuments of Cairo, and a number used Islamic motifs in their later work. In this sense, the stylistic borrowing was reciprocal. The most famous of this group is Antonio Lasciac, actually from Trieste, who built many of downtown Cairo's most eclectic and beautiful buildings. His early buildings, such as the Squares and the Khedival Buildings of downtown Cairo, follow classical and baroque lines. But his later works, such as the Trieste Insurance Building and Bank Misr, show clear Islamic or neo-Moorish influences. Other Italians, such as Pantanelli and Alfonso Manescolo Bey, followed suit. Still others used Arabesque motifs in furniture building. Giuseppe Parvis, who helped create the Egyptian Pavilion at the 1867 Paris Exposition, and the Furino brothers, operating from a factory in Bulaq, developed a booming business in Arabesque wooden furniture catering to the local and foreign elites. Neo-Islamic themes dominate the architecture of Heliopolis, the early northern suburb planned by Baron Empain and designed by Ernest Jaspar, both Belgian.

The French baroque style, promulgated by the influential Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and applied to many Paris addresses of the nineteenth century, was used with equal panache in apartment buildings in Cairo, particularly in downtown, Garden City, and al-Daher. Delicate balconies with

extensive wrought iron work and ornate cantilevers, marble steps and entrances, molded window and door surrounds added the distinctive French touches. A student of Charles Garnier, Ambroise Baudry, practiced in Cairo beginning in 1870. The French architect Georges Parcq built many magnificent buildings in Cairo for more than twenty years beginning just before World War I. Two of his later projects in Giza are now the Mubarak Library and the French Embassy. Other architects from France and elsewhere likewise used the French baroque vocabulary in their buildings, among them Alexan Marcel, Leo Nafiliyan, Raoul Brandon, Antoine Backh, the Austrian Edward Matasek, and the Ottoman Armenian Garo Balian.

By the 1920s art deco and expressionist buildings appeared on the streets, designed by Egyptian and expatriate architects. Their names include Fahmi Riad, Edouard Luledjian, Nubar Kevorkian, Giuseppe Mazza, and Galligopoulo. Three Frenchmen, Leon Azema, Max Edrei, and Jacques Hardy, who were classmates at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, also contributed to this modern building vocabulary in Egypt. Some superb examples of the art deco style exist in Cairo, with dramatic beadwork around windows and angular forms defining cornices and balconies. By the 1930s, an eclectic fashion incorporated sphinxes, scarabs, cobras, and other pharaonic motifs.

As one moves away from the large buildings of downtown to the palaces and villas in outlying neighborhoods, the ornamentation becomes even more eclectic. These were the houses of the arrivistes of the early twentieth century, who used their residences to display their wealth. The Sakakini Palace in al-Daher offers a perfect example of this immoderate opulence. One imagines them poring over architectural pattern books like carpet samples as they decided on the embellishments—a medallion here, a garland there, a cornucopia, a statue, a pillar, a balustrade—sometimes in a riot of combinations. There was no worrying about finer details of coherence or taste. The European parallels to these unique creations were probably the ones that riled architectural historians and aesthetic purists.

Embellishments were especially easy to add in Cairo, being made largely of hollow plaster of Paris, an innovation brought to Cairo by Italians. In less hospitable climates of northern Europe, architectural ornamentation is usually an integral part of the building, that is, part of the stone masonry or

terra-cotta structure. Hollow plaster casts allowed architects and their clientele in Cairo to reproduce decorations cheaply and liberally, quite literally gluing them to the façade of a building. It seemed like a good idea at the time: the dry, warm climate of Egypt accommodated the plaster decoration for several decades, but their deterioration is now sadly evident.

Viola Shafik

Toward a 'National' Film Industry

from

Popular Egyptian Cinema

2007

In Egypt the process of nationalist unification and purification has been reflected in film stories and film plots but also became evident in the changing composition of the country's early film industry. Post-independence film historiography in the years following independence underscored national achievements at the expense of cineastes who were later not considered native Egyptians. In fact, this was a more complex issue than it seems to be at first sight (and also torments some European nations today who have a large immigrant population). For what is it that defines nationality: blood, birth, language, or culture, or all of them?

In Egypt, where the population was not only composed of a majority of Arabic speaking Muslims and Copts, but also of other tiny Christian Arab communities, Middle Eastern Jews, Sephardim, Ashkenazim, non-Arabic speaking Muslim Nubians, Arab-Muslim Bedouin tribes, Turks and Circassians, Armenians, and a range of Levantine communities such as Greeks and Italians who were partially Egyptianized *(mutamassirun)*, the issue gained more importance in 1929 with the introduction of the nationality law and subsequent attempts to Egyptianize the economy. It

seems that not all who were entitled to hold Egyptian nationality were indeed able to acquire it. It is reported that many members of the *mutamassirun*, but also of the poorer Arabized Jewish communities, were confronted with bureaucratic obstacles when applying for Egyptian nationality (Beinin 1998, 38). On the other hand, some 'native' minorities such as Syrian Christians and Jews had acquired earlier foreign nationalities profiting from the Capitulations, that is, the special legal rights for Europeans. This placed them under the protection of European powers who in turn considered them useful local helpmeets.

With national sentiments on the rise, the identification of the first really native 'Egyptian' films gained increasing importance for Egyptian post-independence film historiographers. Local critics, and accordingly many Western writers, mostly named *Layla/Layla*, which was produced and codirected by the actress 'Aziza Amir in 1927, as the first Egyptian full-length feature film. Ironically, *Layla* may not be regarded as a purely national production as well, for it was the Turkish director Wedad Orfi who persuaded 'Aziza Amir to produce the film. Later, after Orfi and Amir disagreed, Stéphane Rosti, an Italian-Austrian born in Egypt, was in charge of codirection. Subsequently he became a popular actor.

However, as Ahmad al-Hadari unearthed in 1989, the first full-length film produced in Egypt was *In Tut Ankh Amon's Country/Fi bilad Tut 'Ankh Amun* by Victor Rositto, shot in 1923. Its existence was at first obliterated, probably because of insufficient promotion and its focus on ancient Egypt, or because its director was not considered an ethnic Egyptian. The same applies to the full-length feature film *A Kiss in the Desert/Qubla fi-l-sahra'*, directed by the Chilean-Lebanese (or Palestinian) (cf. Bahgat 2005, 118) Ibrahim Lama, whose film appeared almost at the same time as *Layla*.

Ibrahim Lama and his brother Badr (their real names were Pietro and Abraham Lamas), who arrived in Alexandria in 1926, produced, directed, and acted in several full-length feature films. The Christian Lebanese actress Assia Daghir also settled in Egypt in 1922. Her first production *The Young Lady from the Desert/Ghadat al-sahra'* was screened in 1929 and starred herself and her niece Mary Queeny. Several other 'foreigners' were involved in directing too, most notably Togo Mizrahi,

a Jew who was born in Egypt but carried Italian nationality, and the German Fritz Kramp.

This is not to say that so-called native Egyptians did not contribute to the creation of a local film industry. Actors and actresses including Yusuf Wahbi, ʿAziza Amir, Amin ʿAtallah, and Fatima Rushdi soon discovered the media and joined in to shape it. They did not only act, but directed, produced, and even constructed studios as early as the late 1920s. Others, for example Muhammad Bayumi, who started shooting short films in the early 1920s and worked then as a professional director and cameraman (el-Kalioubi 1995, 44) and Muhammad Karim, who became one of the most distinguished directors during the 1930s and had started working in 1918 as an actor for an Italian production company, had no prior relation to the theater.

The majority of screen performers during this period were ʻnativeʼ Egyptians from different religious backgrounds: Christians such as popular comedian Nagib al-Rihani, but also Bishara Wakim, who often embodied the character of a funny Lebanese and appeared first in 1923 in Bayumi's short fiction *Master Barsum is Looking for a Job/al-Muʿallim Barsum yabhath ʿan wazifa* and Mary Munib, who started her career in cinema during the late 1920s and became a very popular comedian. The most famous Jewish artist was Layla Murad, who remained one of the most acclaimed singers of Egyptian cinema. She made her first appearance in 1938 in Muhammad Karim's *Long Live Love/Yahya al-hubb*, converted to Islam in 1946, and remained in Egypt until her death in 1995. Others who became involved from the 1940s onward—to name just a few—were the Jewish actresses Raqya Ibrahim, Camelia, and most importantly Nigma Ibrahim, who often embodied a gangster woman (*Raya and Sakina/Raya wa Sakina*, 1953), Greek actor Jorgos (Georges) Jordanidis, and Greek dancer Kitty.

Greek businessmen played a decisive role too. Two Greeks, Evangelos Avramusis and Paris Plenes,[1] founded in 1944 the Studio al-Ahram that presented ten films until 1948 (Khiryanudi 2003, 10). Several Egyptian directors, most notably Togo Mizrahi, directed films meant to be distributed exclusively in Greece or made two versions, in Arabic and Greek, of one and the same film. During the 1950s and until the nationalization of the Egyptian

film industry in 1963, 80 percent of all movie theaters were Greek-owned, something that changed of course with the subsequent disintegration of the Greek community (Khiryanudi 2003, 11). Kitty, who starred in, among others, *Isma'il Yasin's Ghost/'Afritat Isma'il Yasin* (1954) is said to have left Egypt in the 1960s (Khiryanudi 2003, 13).

Although early Egyptian cineastes came from such diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, they were unified, first, by the cosmopolitan and francophone elitist culture of the two Egyptian metropolises Alexandria and Cairo and, second, by the needs and rules of the local market, or in other words, by the preferences of the Egyptian audience. Thus, the subjects of Egyptian cinema were not as international or alienated as the origins of their producers may suggest. The love stories, for example, that were presented at that time were not always set in the surroundings of the Europeanized elite but also included local lower-class characters or were projected back into a glorious Arab Muslim past. The majority of comedies starring popular comedians, such as Nagib al-Rihani and 'Ali al-Kassar, had a strong popular orientation. In particular during the 1930s, these comedians presented rather stereotypical roles that they had previously played in theater, such as Nagib al-Rihani's Kish Kish Bek and Kassar's Nubian 'Uthman 'Abd al-Basit. Similar to the lesser known Jew, Shalom, these characters represented poor natives living in traditional surroundings who often landed in trouble, mainly because of their bad economic situation.

It is unclear to what extent Studio Misr was founded (in 1934) with the intention of creating a genuine national film industry and if it was meant to contribute to the Egyptianization of the economy, for it also employed a number of foreign professionals and specialists. At all events, it was subsequently considered to be a profoundly national enterprise because it was financed by Misr Bank, an institution which, in turn, was initiated by a group of Egyptian businessmen under the direction of Tal'at Harb, while Jewish Yusuf 'Aslan Qattawi became vice-president of the board (Beinin 1998, 45). Harb was subsequently sculptured into the direct ancestor of Nasserist etatism, with his statue decorating one of the most central squares in downtown Cairo today.

According to Robert Vitalis it would seem that Harb's 'patriotic intentions' were later over-interpreted, as the prevalent post-1952 discourse attributed the lack of proper capitalist development in Egypt to feudal structure and foreign imperialism, disregarding other factors (Vitalis 1995, 230).[2] 'Perhaps the most remarkable and therefore enduring myth of the Revolution is that in 1956 foreigners rather than Egyptians controlled the country's economy, or that after the 'Suez invasion' the regime reversed its policies toward foreign capital generally. The reality is that in sector after sector of the economy, power had shifted steadily in past decades from shareholders in Paris, Brussels and London to owners and managers in Cairo and Alexandria—that is to local capital" (Vitalis 1995, 216). This 'myth' certainly got prolonged and remains in circulation until today. One author even claims that the Egyptian economy between the two world wars was not monopolized just by foreigners, but first and foremost by Jews (!) (Bahgat 2005, 12).

In contrast, in his economic study Vitalis argues that minority investors or 'foreigners' did not necessarily have a 'separatist' agenda but acted as national capitalists (Vitalis 1995, 9) in addition to the fact that they had been already marginalized in that period: "the 1919 generation of Egyptian investors such as Abbud, Yahya, 'Afifi, Farghali, Andraos, the Abu Faths . . . came to displace the positions once occupied by minority resident owners and managers" (Vitalis 1995, 216). In general, the tendency to do without 'foreigners' and to reduce European intervention began to rise from the 1920s. In 1937 the Egyptian government abolished the Capitulations, that is, the special legal rights for Europeans. In 1942-43 Arabic was declared obligatory for the written communications of companies. One year later, a law was promulgated determining the ratio of employed Egyptians as 75 percent of all employees and 90 percent of all workers, and the share of Egyptian capital as 51 percent of all capital (Krämer 1982, 402). Moreover the 1956 Suez war was followed by the sequestration of French-, British-, and Jewish-owned firms, together with a departure from the government's earlier propensity for encouraging the private sector.

This did leave its traces on the film industry too. Togo Mizrahi, who was born into an affluence Jewish family in Alexandria and carried Italian nationality, shot his first film *Cocaine/Kokayin* in 1930 under a Muslim name

(Ahmad al-Mashriqi) and eventually became one of the most productive Egyptian directors and film producers of his time. Between 1939 and 1944 his company was second as regards rate of production, with an output of sixteen films, two less than Studio Misr (al-Sharqawi 1979, 73). In 1929 he founded a provisory studio in Alexandria for shooting his first film and later ran another one in Cairo. By 1945 he had completed almost forty films, primarily popular comedies and musicals. He created, among others, a farce film cycle with one of the most successful comedians, 'Ali al-Kassar, in the role of the *barbari* or Nubian 'Uthman. He also directed musicals starring Umm Kulthum, as well as singer Layla Murad, thus contributing decisively to the development of the Egyptian musical. In 1952, the year of the coup, he left Egypt to settle in Rome until his death in 1986. The reasons for his retreat remained unfathomable, as he was only in his forties when he stopped directing in 1946, and any explanations for this—including my own—seem highly contradictory.

Egyptian film critic Ahmad Ra'fat Bahgat—who stated in the introduction to his book that "Egypt turned between 1917 and 1948 into one of the most dangerous centers of Zionism" (Bahgat 2005, 3)—claims first of all that Mizrahi was a very clever businessman who was not willing to lose any money in the immediate postwar period, citing a statement by Mizrahi himself. This seems a strange argument indeed for a time in which production rates in Egypt were booming in an unprecedented way. Second, and more speculative is Bahgat's argument that after the proclamation of the state of Israel Mizrahi had fulfilled his Zionist task in Egypt, namely assisting the production and distribution of Zionist propaganda films in the country. The same applies to the evidence that Bahgat offers from the contemporary press as a sign of Mizrahi's transition to obscurity, namely news of prolonged journeys to Europe and several hospitalizations, one of them presumably in a psychiatric clinic, which he considers were supposed to hide the director's clandestine activities (Bahgat 2005, 60). This version again was contested by Mizrahi's nephew, who denied any hospitalization at that time.[3]

I am not in a position to verify Mizrahi's suspected Zionist activities, but when he left for Italy he is said to have dedicated himself to his hobbies, spending his time traveling around Europe, painting, and building a house

for himself in the countryside, an astonishing change for a formerly highly active and successful man. On the other hand economic reasons are somewhat more convincing, because as an entrepreneur and a royalist Mizrahi certainly had good reasons not to feel comfortable any more after 1948-49, given the occasional sequestration of Jewish property during that period, and even more after the deposition of the king in 1952. And indeed his company and private property were nationalized under Nasser, and his brothers and sisters also left to settle in Paris. Allegations of his being ill-treated or pressured by authorities cannot be verified though. This has been confirmed by his wife who claimed that he left for personal reasons only and stopped directing because he "had so many other interests."[4]

Notes

1 Greek names in this paragraph, including the author Khiryanudi (possibly Cherianudi), were checked by a Greek scholar but the originals may notwithstanding have been written differently.
2 Revolution is a misleading term, as the mass-supported protests against colonialism and the social system took place in 1919, while the overturning of the king in 1952 was rather a coup d'état undertaken by the Free Officers and was later labeled a 'revolution.'
3 Personal interview with Jacques Mizart, Paris, July 27, 2006.
4 Personal interview with Miriam Donato, Mizrahi's wife, Rome, November 18, 2001.

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Edward W. Said

Farewell to Tahia

from

Colors of Enchantment

2001

The first and only time I saw her dance on the stage was in 1950 at the summertime Badia's Casino, in Giza just below were the Sheraton stands today. A few days later I saw her at a vegetable stand in Zamalek, as provocative and beautiful as she had been a few nights earlier, except this time she was dressed in a smart lavender-colored suit with high heels. She looked at me straight in the eye but my 14-year-old flustered stare wilted under what seemed to me her brazen scrutiny, and I turned shyly away. I told my older cousin's wife, Aida, with shamefaced disappointment about my lacklustre performance with the great woman. "You should have winked at her," Aida said dismissively, as if such a possibility had been imaginable for someone as timid as I was.

Tahia Carioca was the most stunning and long-lived of the Arab world's Eastern dancers (belly dancers, as they are called today). Her career lasted for 60 years, from the first phase of her dancing life at Badia's Opera Square Casino in the early 1930s, through the reign of King Farouk, which ended in 1952, then into the revolutionary period of Gamal Abdel Nasser, followed by the eras of Anwar al-Sadat and Hosni Mubarak. All of them except

Mubarak imprisoned her one or more times for various, mostly political offenses. In addition to her dancing, she acted in hundreds of films and dozens of plays, had walked in street demonstrations, was a voluble, not to say aggressive member of the Actors' Syndicate, and in her last years had become a pious though routinely outspoken Muslim known to all her friends and admirers as al-Hagga. Aged 79, she died of a heart attack in a Cairo hospital on September 20, 1999.

About ten years ago I made a special pilgraimage to Cairo to meet and interview her, having in the meantime seen dozens of her films and one of her plays, the appallingly bad *Yahya al-Wafd* ("Long Live the Wafd"), written by her then husband and much younger costar, Fayez Halawa. He was an opportunist, she later told me, who robbed her of all her money, pictures, films, and memorabilia. Though she was robed in the black gown and head scarf of a devout Muslim woman, she radiated the verve and wit that had always informed her presence as a dancer, actress, and public personality. I published an appreciative essay on her in the *London Review of Books* that tried to render justice to her extraordinary career as a dancer and cultural symbol not just in Egypt, which was where she did all her work really, but throughout the Arab world. Through the cinema and later television, Tahia was known to every Arab partly because of her stunning virtuosity as a great dancer—no one ever approached her unrivalled mastery of the genre—and her colorful, thoroughly Egyptian playfulness, i.e., the wordplay, gestures, ironic flirtatiousness synonymous with the country's sparkling and engaging reputation as the Arab world's capital when it comes to such matters as pleasure, the arts of desire, and an unparalleled capacity for banter and sociability.

Most Eastern Arabs, I believe, would concede impressionistically that the dour Syrians and Jordanians, the quick-witted Lebanese, the roughhewn Gulf Arabs, the ever-so-serious Iraqis never have stood a chance next to the entertainers, clowns, singers, and dancers that Egypt and its people have provided on so vast a scale for the past several centuries. Even the most damaging political accusations against Egypt's governments by Palestinians or Iraqis are levelled grudgingly, always with a trace of how likeable and charming Egypt—especially its clipped, lilting dialect—as a whole is. And in that glittering panoply of stars and elemental joie de vivre Tahia stood

quite alone because, if not despite, her flaws and often puzzling waywardness. A left-wing radical in some things, she was also a time-server and opportunist in others; even her late return to Islam coexisted incongruously with her admitted fourteen husbands (there may have been a few more) and her carefully cultivated and implied reputation for debauchery.

So much has already been written on her that I'd like to mention only three things about her that seem to be fittingly recalled now that she has passed from the scene. The first is her essential untranslatability, the fact that despite her enormous fame to and for Arabs, she remained largely unknown outside the Arab world. The only other entertainer on her level was Umm Kulthum, the great Qur'anic reciter and romantic singer whose records and videos (she died in 1975) continue to have a worldwide audience today, possibly even greater than she had when she was alive, and her Thursday evening broadcasts from a Cairo theater were transmitted everywhere between the Atlantic and the Indian oceans. Everyone who enjoys Indian, Caribbean, and "world" music knows and reverently appreciates Umm Kulthum. Having been fed a diet of her music at far too young an age, I found her forty-plus minute songs insufferable and never developed the taste for her that my children, who know her only through recordings, have for her. But for those who like and believe in such cultural typing she also stood for something quintessentially Arab and Muslim—the long, languorous, repetitious line, the slow tempi, the strangely dragging rhythms, the ponderous monophony, the eerily lachrymose or devotional lyrics, etc.—which I could sometimes find pleasure in but never quite came to terms with. Her secret power has eluded me, but among Arabs I seem to be quite alone in this feeling.

By comparison with her Tahia is scarcely known and, even when an old film is seen, it somehow doesn't catch the Western audience's attention (I except from this other belly dancers, all of whom today seem to be non-Arab—lots of Russians, Americans, Ukrainians, Armenians, and French—who appear to regard her as their major inspiration). Belly dancing in many ways is the opposite of ballet, its Western equivalent as an art form. Ballet is all about elevation, lightness, the defiance of the body's weight. Eastern dancing as Tahia practiced it shows the dancer planting herself more and

more solidly in the earth, digging into it almost, scarcely moving, certainly never expressing anything like the nimble semblance of weightlessness that a great ballet dancer, male or female, tries to convey. Tahia's dancing vertically suggested a sequence of horizontal pleasures, but also paradoxically conveyed the kind of elusiveness and grace that cannot be pinned down on a flat surface. What she did was obviously performed inside an Arab and Islamic setting, but was also quite at odds, even in a constant sort of tension with it.

She belonged to the tradition of the *'alima*, the learned woman spoken about by great observers of modern Egypt like Flaubert and Edward Lane, that is, a courtesan who was extremely literate as well as lithe and profligate with her bodily charms. One never felt her to be part of an ensemble, say as in *kathak* dancing (a North Indian form of dance and music), but rather as a solitary, somewhat perilous figure moving to attract and at the same time repel—by virtue of the sheer promiscuity she could communicate—men as well as women. You could not take Tahia out of a Cairo nightclub, stage, or wedding feast (or *zaffa*, as it is called). She is entirely local, untranslatable, commercially unviable except in those places, for the short time (twenty to twenty-five minutes at most) her performance would normally last. Every culture has its closed-off areas, and in spite of her overpowering and well-distributed image, Tahia Carioca inhabited, indeed was, one of them.

The second thing about her that strikes me now that she has died is how untidy and shiftless her life seems to have been. I suppose this is true of performers in general, who really exist before us for the brief time they are on stage and then disappear. Audio recordings and film have given a kind of permanence to great displays of virtuosity, for instance, but somehow one feels that mechanical reproduction cannot ever have the edge and excitement of what is intended to happen once and then end. Glenn Gould spent the last sixteen years of his life trying to disprove this, even to the extent of pretending that a listener or viewer equipped with super refined VCR or amplifier could "creatively" participate in the recorded artist's performance. Thus the idea of playback was supposed to mitigate the rarity and perishability of live artistic energy.

In Tahia's case, all of her films, as a case in point, are probably available in video form, some of them available on street corners throughout the Arab

world. But what about her thousands of other performances, the ones that were not recorded—plays, nightclubs, ceremonies, and the like—plus, of course, her uncountable appearances at soirées, dinners, all-night sessions with fellow actors and actresses. At times she seemed to be a revolutionary and even a Marxist; at other times, she went the other way, kowtowing to the establishment, as she did in one of her plays in which she made uproarious fun of the Soviet experts in Egypt because of Nasser's policy of taking Egypt into that camp.

Perhaps it is too much to say of her that she was a subversive figure, intransigent by virtue of her imperious way with herself and her surroundings, but I think that her meandering, careless way with her many male relationships, her art, her profligacy as an actress who nonetheless seemed to have nothing left of her scripts, her contracts (if she had any to begin with), her stills, costumes, and all the rest, suggests how far she always was from anything that resembled domesticity or ordinary commercial or bourgeois life or even the comfort of the kind so many of her peers seem to have cared about. I recall the impression that she made on me a decade ago when I spent the afternoon at her nondescript apartment, that she was a great Nanaesque figure who had had and then dismissed her appetites, and could sit back, enjoy a coffee and smoke with a perfect stranger, reminiscing, making up stories, reciting set pieces ("when I danced, I felt I was entering the temple of art," she said to me tendentiously and with a great deal of mock seriousness), relaxing, and being evasive at the same time. What a woman!

Lastly, Tahia's life and death symbolise the enormous amount of our life in that part of the world that simply goes unrecorded and unpreserved, despite the videos that will undoubtedly proliferate now, the retrospectives of her films, the memorial occasions when she will be eulogized as her great rival, Samia Gamal, whose public funeral procession was banned, could not be. There exists no complete record of Tahia's films, no bibliography, no proper biography—and there probably never will be. All the Arab countries that I know do not have proper state archives, public record offices, or official libraries any more than they have decent control over their monuments, antiquities, the history of their cities, individual works of architectural art like mosques, palaces, schools. This realization does not give rise to anything

like the moralistic feeling provoked by Shelley's witness to Ozymandias's ruin, but a sense of a sprawling, teeming history off the page, out of sight and hearing, beyond reach, largely irrecoverable. Tahia seems to me to embody that beyond-the-boundary life for Arabs today. Our history is written mostly by foreigners, visiting scholars, and intelligence agents, while we do the living, relying on personal and disorganized collective memory, gossip almost, plus the embrace of a family or knowable community to carry us forward in time. The great thing about Tahia was that her sensuality or rather the flicker of it that one recalls was so unneurotic, so attuned to an audience whose gaze in all its raw or, in the case of dance connoisseurs, refined lust was as transient and as unthreatening as she was. Enjoyment for now, and then, nothing. I wonder what kind of legacy, what kind of posthumous life, she will have.

Margo Veillon

Letter to Doris
30 April 1960

from

Nubia

1995

My dear Doris,*

I have just spent two days clearing my studio after returning from my travels. Within all the chaos of travelling, it is essential that my eyes remain alert and able to take in everything I see around me. Problems in painting abound, and yet, in spite of everything, painting actually *happens*—before you, you have the subjects, the 'phenomena,' the visions; they are outside of you and you receive them, absorb them; then, somehow, the work, the transposition happens despite the fatigue, hordes of mosquitoes, and (what I find particularly wearing) all the horrible little complications and misunderstandings with people around you. Fortunately, memory allows for the occasional clean sweep, leaving you fresh and receptive to new sensations.

Nubia, a land condemned to die, offers itself to our view from the boat that we have been on for twelve days so far. Before us lies a sequence of dry,

* Doris Wild, the Swiss art historian and a close friend of Margo's.

harsh ripples in the desert sand and black mountains. The houses built upon this land are a perfect style, totally adapted to their surroundings and with a rich variety of decoration on their windows and facades. One could spend forever studying these designs and learn more than one would ever need to know about ornament.

I do not know how to begin telling you about the interiors of these houses. All of nature's jewels seem to be there in an extraordinary display; everything is so expressive. There is nothing as beautiful and so in harmony.

But beautiful though things are, life in these villages is like being exiled by the gods—the women are there sometimes for two or three years without their husbands. They are smiling but can become quite hysterical, excluded from the normal life that we know.

And yet what beauty lies in the tiny, fierce orange grains sparkling in the hot sand and in the huge, strangely shaped stones. And further, beyond the banks of the Nile lurks the great desert. . . .

A feeling of anxiety takes hold of you when you see things of such outstanding beauty. You become conscious of the artist's obsession to eternalize and feel the need to put all that you see down on canvas or paper. Occasionally, and this is almost painfully beautiful to witness, the Nile becomes a long, flat mirror; the reflection upon its surface has a completely abstract quality and the light on the water reflecting the sky is extraordinary. One single ripple will carry streaks of an intense cobalt blue and of yellow—or rather gold, bronze or creamy yellow—all sparkling with lilac and mauve. From time to time in this seemingly flat landscape there will appear a black mountain enveloped in sand.

According to the level of the water, the small islands resting on the Nile will disappear and reappear. The river is running high at the moment, so these stretches of plantation are all submerged in water. There is an enormous variety of birds on this stretch of water: pelicans, ibises, herons, wild ducks and swans. My God, if only the world could be created over again with creatures other than cruel human beings.

Apart from the beauty revealed in the landscape unfurling before one's eyes, I have also to mention the beauty of Nubian women. Their jewellery is so beautifully arranged around their necks while their faces are framed

within a thick black double set of earrings, which they all wear. Their beauty, however, can only be witnessed fleetingly as they tend to hide in their homes, coming out on occasion and giggling childishly. Their voices seem to sing yet they are shrill.

Everything appears to be in harmony here; it all follows the same rhythm; and artifice has not spoilt anything as it has with city-dwellers. So everything is presented in its pure form and each element becomes a pictorial 'source' for me.

Recently we went by chance to a village and to the house of the chauffeur of Dr. Naumare, a professor at the American University. He was a perfect gentleman, extremely hospitable and made us feel completely at ease in his home. He showed us the various rooms in his house, each more beautiful than the one before, and each one exquisitely decorated. Walls were painted and adorned with an array of baskets, rugs, paper cuttings, all of varied symmetry.

In other villages I have been to, each one giving its own particular way of ornamentation, I have seen rooms decorated with little plates made of packets of cigarettes, and newspapers transformed into rugs. The overall effect is stunning. On a wall in the square of one of the villages a young girl had cut out in sheets of varied coloured plastic material a series of people and animals. I saw this one morning. I was completely taken aback by this display of colours and decorative instinct. The material the girl had used gave a surprisingly impressive result—surfaces of colour that seemed to be dancing on the stillness of the dark grey wall.

I hardly looked at the temple at Abu Simbel . . . I couldn't take my eyes away from the landscape around it. The day after visiting Abu Simbel we went for a long walk on the mountain. So many colours and so many contrasts in colour were revealed to me there: violet, green shades or red and yellow of a multitude of depths and densities.

The Nile today is very still and dark. Where there is a mist floating upon the water soft shades of green bring the river to life. It is wonderful to sit and watch the water as the mist lifts off and drifts away. I was in the middle of putting this perfect landscape onto paper one day when I noticed a group of Nubian children nearby laughing heartily, their frizzy hair blowing

in all directions in the wind. They stayed for only a very short while—a fleeting moment in the diminishing light of day. Which brings to mind the group of women I saw not so long ago in the village of Korosko—three women in black wearing turquoise blue veils standing against a white wall; again seen in the dimness after sunset . . . .

Azza Fahmy

Jewelry for the Zar Ceremony

from

Enchanted Jewelry of Egypt

2007

The belief in the existence of forces of evil in the world is as old as humanity itself. In an attempt to ward off such evil spirits, human societies invented their own rituals to protect and rid themselves of such spirits. Indeed, it was believed that physical ailments and psychological disturbances besetting people were the doing of evil spirits. Despite the tremendous progress in the fields of medicine and psychology, there are still physical and psychological symptoms that remain unexplained. In such cases, if the patient does not find a cure, or despairs of finding one, he or she will sometimes resort to those age-old inherited rituals in the hope of finding a solution. The afflicted may even come to believe that there would be no possible cure without them. Among such rituals in Egypt, there is the *zar* ceremony, which is still practiced, although it is slowly disappearing.

The word *zar* is the past tense of the Arabic verb for 'to visit,' in reference to visits by the spirits to human beings, it is the name given to a ceremony held to cure someone of recurring symptoms believed to be caused by intermittent visits from spirits. The ceremony is typically practiced among women of the *sha'bi* [lower] classes, who are subjected to many social and

economic pressures. The *zar* may be considered a 'psychotherapy' ritual that relieves those tensions through a kind of rhythmic movement and dance.

The *zar* is, in a way, a form of folk dancing where the patient moves her limbs, her head, her torso, and hips in a rhythmic, violent swaying movement, right and left, and up and down, to the sound of a loud and powerful beat from drums and tambours. The violent movements climax in a swoon; when the patient awakens, she feels relaxed and cured of her nervous state.

This folk ritual was not part of Egyptian custom, and it was not mentioned by Edward Lane in his nineteenth-century book, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians,* nor was it recorded in the famous *Description de l'Egypte* compiled by the members of Napoleon's military and scientific expedition to Egypt. The *zar* is believed by Adil al-'Ulaymi, author of *Zar and the Ritual Theatrical Show* (Egyptian Book Organization, 1993) to be of Africa origin, brought to Egypt by female slaves from Ethiopia and by the wives of Egyptian soldiers after the conquest of Sudan in 1830.

Popular belief has it that every place is inhabited by a spirit of its own; the Egyptians call them *asyad* ('masters') or *al-gin* ('djinn'), and never utter the word 'spirits,' because spirits are the souls of dearly departed relatives and friends who only come to them in their dreams. They believe that *djinn* and masters live as we do but in a parallel, unseen world, and that they also eat, drink, marry, and beget children. They believe them capable of harming humans, and that they have to be placated to stop them from doing harm, or so that they may grant the wishes of humans. To placate those masters and please them, they first have to be called forth by means of the *zar* ceremony, then their demands must be satisfied. Most participants in the *zar* are women; rarely do men attend, except in their capacity as professional musicians.

Zar ceremonies are held in different places, wherever the masters are believed to be. They are held by the Nile for the masters of the Nile, at the foot of a mountain in Upper Egypt for the masters of the mountain, and in private homes for the masters of the houses.

The ceremony is led by a woman known as the *kudya,* a word of Amharic origin meaning 'drummer'; she is also sometimes called the *shaykha* ('the old woman') or *rayyesa* ('chief'). The role is almost always held by a woman,

since the *zar* offers women a means of releasing their stress, while the men usually hold a *dhikr,* in which they repeatedly invoke the name of God.

Zar ceremonies have their own specialized musicians, and there are three famous troupes in Egypt. There is a Sudanese troupe and the Abu al-Gheit troupe. Their drummers and tambour players are men; they wear their hair long with a green fez on their head and dress in white. Each spirit, or 'master,' has his own tone, known as the 'beat of master,' and will only appear when it is played. The third troupe is called 'Sa'idi' (from Upper Egypt), in which all the musicians are women.

The *zar* ceremony requires a number of essential props that have to be present, most important being the 'seat.' The *kudya* arranges the seat in the center of the place where the ceremony is held. It is a large, round tray covered with a scarf. On it, she places quantities of peanuts, popcorn, chickpeas, dates, and henna. In the center of the tray, she places a dish and in it the silver or gold jewelry of the woman for whom the *zar* is being conducted; she is called 'the bride.' It is believed that the masters watch the ceremony from that central seat. A buffet is also prepared in a corner, laden with the food requested by the masters: cheese, olives, beer, and fruits. Candles are an important factor in the *zar* ceremony, since the 'bride's' celebration must be held by candlelight, even if electric light is available. Moreover, several images of the Virgin Mary, of Christ, and of St. George on his horse with sword in hand, are part of the props. These Christian images may have become a part of the ceremony because of the origin of the *zar*, from southern Sudan and Ethiopia, where the majority of the population is Christian.

The *kudya* wears numerous necklaces of strung beads with a number of amulets hanging in their midst, engraved with the names of Allah, verses from the Qur'an, and prayers to protect her from evil. She also wears round 'medals' with portraits that are, supposedly, those of the 'masters' as the *kudya* imagines them to be. The most famous medal is made of silver in the form of a circle with a drawing of the *djinn* 'Yaura' wearing a fez. The design reflects the popular imagined image of the *djinn* who is made to look like a dignitary (a bey or a pasha). The *kudya* holds a rattle and a wand with jinglets or grelots. The 'bride' carries a sword or a dagger that she brandishes as

she sways, as if she were fighting; she also wears a number of prayer beads and crosses.

Most of the *zar* jewelry is made of low-carat silver and, sometimes, of gold among the richer classes. Most have one characteristic in common: jinglets or grelots that resound with every movement to push away the *djinn.*

Arabic Literature

Taha Hussein

Love Story

from

The Days

1997

Life in Paris was a bitter-sweet business, hardgoing and good-going, together. It is true there was no ease of substance, nor ease of mind. Yet I tasted there so sweet and unforgettable a grace in my heart such as I had never known before. My whole being was content. Things material were a struggle but I could somehow take them with courage and forbearance. My stipend did not exceed eight hundred francs and two thirds of it I spent in the first or second days of every month on house-rent, food and drink. A half of the remaining third went on the wages of the woman who accompanied me to the Sorbonne, morning and evening, where I attended various courses in history. The same woman also read to me during the day from the books, as God willed, at least when I did not have for reader the voice of sweetness that had devoted whole daylight hours for me on the French classics. The rest of my stipend, one sixth, was all that remained for my daily needs. A clothing item I had to leave with God: my salary would not go further.

During my first year in Paris I never left the house except to go to the Sorbonne. It was like being a prisoner. I do not remember having ever gone to one of the Paris suburbs on a rest day, where my companions used to spend

their Sundays. Nor did I go, as far as I can recall, to any of the cafés in the Latin Quarter, which they used to frequent from time to time in their enthusiasm and which, indeed, most Egyptian students visited more often than they went to the University. I kept at home on holidays, sometimes staying by myself in my room the whole day, unless my sweet-voiced one came for an hour or so to sit with me.

I used to listen to the theatre announcements and notices from musical institutes and amusement halls. At times I badly wanted to go to some of these performances to hear some story or other. But I schooled myself to contentment. How was I to do otherwise, since I could not go anywhere alone and could not have an escort, since I did not want to give anyone trouble and for reasons of the cost. The remembrance of Abū-l-'Alā' was always with me, except when I was diverted from him during class hours and when I was reading. That saying of his I always recalled at the end of one of his books, how he was, as he said, a man tied to others. I saw myself always under the will of others, bearing all kinds of trouble and grief by dint of being bounden to them—troubles and griefs I could not any way elude, being forced against my will to bear them. My only options were, either to accept from others what I so disliked by way of help I wanted, or refuse it and consign myself to utter helplessness and forego altogether my life in Paris, or anywhere, for that matter. How could I go for my Sorbonne studies dependent? At times she was friendly, at others churlish. She would sometimes accompany me all the way to the University without saying a word, giving me her arm and going along in silence, as if she were dragging some object that could neither speak nor think—a chattel. When she reached the hall of study she would set me down at a table and go off outside until the professor finished the class. Then she would pick me up and cart me home again. Getting me into the room and closing the door on me, she would say in a brusque voice: "See you tomorrow, such and such a time."

At times she would excuse herself from her job and find me another woman to take her place. A chatterbox, she was, who wearied me with her incessant conversation more than the other with her taciturn silence.

My helplessness was not confined, though, to going and coming from the University. It was so all inclusive, involving the most necessary things. I was

embarrassed every way and hated to have people laugh at me, or pity me, or sympathise . I made it a condition in the house I occupied, not to take my food with the people of the house, but to be left alone for my meals. So that is how it was. When food was put before me and I was alone, I could manage as I would, well or less well, and if they put before me food I could not well handle I felt it and suffered instead the hunger that ensued.

For some months things went on in this way. But God was good to me afterwards in that He gave me some one to prepare my food and teach me how to do it, and myself, justice. I wore European dress, quickly learning to don and doff it readily, except for one item which, for long years, I could never do well, namely that stupid tie which people wear round their necks with a knot that has to be just right—not too small and not too big. God did not vouchsafe me a knowledge of this piece of attire. As long as we lived in Montpellier, my brother used to tie mine for me.

When we separated and my confusion persisted, my *Dār al-ʿUlūmī* friend found the answer by buying ties for me which were already knotted. These were no trouble, being easily put on and fastened at the back, with none of the business of getting the tying right. The trouble, though, was that I had to disregard altogether whether these ties suited what else I was wearing. At times I had one tie I picked out and wore steadily for weeks on end, until one of my friends observed that it clashed with my suit. Then my friend would choose another better suited. But he did not explain to me what point there was to all this stupid tie business.

Thus the first year, perhaps longer, went by, the material side of life troublesome enough, uneven and complicated, and so oftentimes hard to take. It passed by, however, very rapidly and the days did not drag. I did not give the troubles much thought. My studies filled my mind and I had a feeling of making progress and of coping with French intelligibly. Reading texts in history, literature and philosophy came readily and I found no bother in comprehension. I had decisively passed the puzzled stage. What had been strenuous became viable.

My intellectual life, though, was no less complex and taxing than my economic situation. As soon as I embarked on historical and literary studies at the Sorbonne, I realized how ill-prepared I was for them. I was not

absorbing and grasping them as I should. My long apprenticeship in the Azhar and the University had not equipped me for them.

But I had great hopes. It was up to me to shoulder what they required. The primary thing was really to fit myself for the lectures delivered in the University, by reading up in the shortest time I could all that French students had spent years on in the secondary schools. When I was back at home, I must become a secondary pupil, while at the same time being an undergraduate in the Sorbonne.

I quickly consulted the syllabus of the French secondary schools and extracted from it all I needed and resolve to study the history, geography and philosophy that came in it, with the help of those abridged summaries that are available for both ancient and modern works of foreign, European literature. All this I set about with a determination that brooked no weakness, refusing to be deterred or distracted from my resolve. In a short time, I was able to acquire the degree of knowledge in these fields that a pupil would have had who had taken the secondary certificate with flying colours.

So my classes at the Sorbonne went better and I began to grasp and absorb the studies there like my fellow students who were French. I chose a teacher from the secondary schools to teach me the French language systematically. It was not enough to have a hearing competence in it, or a conversational ability. I had to be able to write it in a way that would not seem odd to the reader, and to master the idiomatic usages of the language and its finer points.

I had in mind how the Sorbonne professors would be giving me written assignments, as with other students. There would be no question but that I would, therefore, have to prepare these compositions, when indicated, in a manner that would not expose me to ridicule and contempt. So often the professors made scorn of their pupils if their assignment fell short in any respect. They would read some of these aloud choosing the ones most open to criticism, on which they would embark with sarcasm. This was their way of alerting students to take due care over what they wrote. These harsh professorial witticisms at the expense of delinquent writers made the other students laugh and this could be extremely disconcerting.

I hated to be exposed to such treatment. But one day such a catastrophe happened. Along with other students, the professor of the history of the French Revolution gave me a written assignment on the subject of party political life in France after the fall of Napoleon. I set about this, studying, as far as I was able, the books to which the professor directed us, giving the subject what thought I could. I then wrote it out and handed in the paper by the day appointed. The day came for the criticism. The professor set about criticizing the assignments submitted to him, in jocular vein, showing pupils up and piling on the sarcasm, or sometimes the rebuke. When he mentioned my name, he merely observed in a single, bitter, devastating phrase which stayed in my mind: "Superficial, not worth comment." My outraged feelings at this remark rankled all the rest of the day and when night fell I was sleepless. I sensed that I was not yet equipped adequately to be a Sorbonne student. I applied myself even harder to French, setting myself a rigorous, taxing regimen of study, to the near exclusion of other studies, abandoning any participation in written assignments until I had perfected the necessary tool for such writing.

It was while I was traversing this heavy period of testing in my material and intellectual affairs, striving my utmost but overcome from time to time by the despair which beset me, that a door of hope opened such as I had never thought could happen. She had a slight indisposition—the girl with the sweet voice, the voice which was my sole delight in the harshness of life. I went to visit her, and as we chatted, without knowing how the conversation took this turn, I heard myself saying: "I love you" in a voice which I wanted to disown before she could reject me. Then I heard her saying in replay that she did not love me. I said: "Well, never mind." I just loved her and did not look for an echo or a response.

So she did not love me. The conversation turned elsewhere. After an hour I left. But the thought had planted itself in my mind that life from that day would take a new course.

There was no doubting the fact that for a long time I had lived for that sweet voice, and for its owner. Otherwise, why should I have been in such a panic about being obliged to return to Egypt? Or why my transports of delight at those letters I received? Or why had I so ardently desired to return

to France for the sound of that voice again? How eager I had been in Paris to hear that voice again and to have her greeting me on my morning way to the Sorbonne and to have those precious readings in the evening, when the house folk had retired and the French masters were brought out.

But my love was bashful, afraid to believe in itself. I hid my feelings as deeply as I could within myself, hating to turn them over even in my own mind. I told myself that for sure I was not meant for such things. Nor were they such as could really be mine. What had I to do with love, or love with me?

I put myself under a firm resolve my life would have to be like that of my great exemplar, whose days, long centuries ago, had been spent absorbed in study in a house in Ma'arat al-Nu'mān, undistracted by that one thing, denying himself the normal felicities God grants to human kind.

Thus I wrapped myself up in my thoughts, despairing of myself and eventualities before me, yet gratified to be permitted to hear that voice, to converse with her when I might, esteeming this the utmost benediction I could reach, aspiring no further, yet grudging the fact that life and impeding circumstance were debarring me from more.

But that passing indisposition that happened to my dear one, her voice sounding weak and tired, my sensitivity at pain and distress which I so much hated to see—all this pre-occupied my mind and heart and made me forget a proper reserve and restraint. Then that word I wanted to deny had slipped from my tongue. Not surprisingly afterwards, when I heard her disheartening reply, I had not registered any special dejection. For I had not anticipated anything else. I had, as it were, come to live with discouragement and despondency and fortified myself against them by setting academic goals and studying ferociously.

I had left her that day both pleased and angry with myself—pleased for having said what somehow had to come out and angry because in this way and by that word I had exposed myself to great calamity—that she whom I loved might simply take pity on me, be sorry for me, feel badly about me. Who knows, perhaps she would want to leave me altogether, and ring down a curtain between us, depriving me of those sweet occasions when we met together and the intellectual emotional delectation we had reading together in French literature.

Who knows, perhaps that one word I had uttered unguardedly and unintentionally would throw me back into the dark gloom from which I thought I had emerged. Perhaps it would result, sooner or later, in my having to leave that house and look out for another abode, where I could not meet her, nor have the sound of her voice and so forfeit all the pleasure and the solace they gave me. Such dark, foreboding thoughts ran through my mind, bitter and angry and soul-destroying.

For some days I was in this state of anger and yet wistful hope. I did almost no study and had little relish for life.

But when the flush of the occasion had passed, I met her again and she was her usual self. Nothing had changed: she did not hesitate to receive me. Nor did I sense any hostility or repulsion. On the contrary, she greeted me as ever, in her usual, friendly, kindly manner, resuming the readings as before, explaining what was obscure to me, as she always did. I began to feel once more at ease again and even to enjoy a gentle sense of real tranquility of mind. Days went by. Feelings that had surfaced so suddenly from the deep of my heart for their brief hour and then been thrust back whence they had come so disconcertingly, dared once more to show themselves, if only guardedly, hesitantly. Furtive intruders, they did not breathe their presence to her, hardly even to me, when we met each other. But they were deep within me. At nightfall, when I was left alone and thinking of sleep, they stole out of their hiding place. I lay awake with them till dawn when I finally lapsed into a brief slumber.

It was not long before the people of the house began to notice the effects of my sleeplessness. And the girl, too. When they questioned me about it I gave them an evasive answer. When they wanted to send me to the doctors, I would not hear of it, insisting that there was nothing wrong with me.

All the same, the ill effects could not be hid. One day the girl asked me, while we were reading privately together, and when I would not answer plainly and she pressed me further, I had perforce to tell her the whole story. She listened and fell silent. Then she began to read again. When we were through and she was making to go, she said to me gently: “Well, what do you want?” “I don’t want anything,” I said.

She went on: "I have thought over what you have told me—thought long over it. But I've come to no conclusion. The summer is almost upon us and we shall separate. Be patient after we have parted: we'll still send each other letters and if, in my letters, I invite you to spend the rest of the summer with us, then it will mean that I have given you the answer you seek. If you don't have any invitation by the end of the summer, you must understand that our friendship is just that, a friendship and nothing more."

I had never been made happier than by that conversation. The way I showed how happy I was?—I just bowed my head and made no audible reply.

Summer came on and with it our parting. She went to a village in the far south of France, while I stayed in Paris. Letters passed between us. However, before she left she commissioned a friend of hers to take down my letters and to read hers to me, so that none of my pals would get wind of anything.

A month went by and at the end of it a letter reached me which contained the invitation I had been looking for to spend the rest of the summer with her and her family. Thus my hopes were realized—or almost so. I announced to my Egyptian companions that I was leaving Paris to spend the summer with the family. Out of their concern for me they tried dissuasion.

But I was insistent. One evening my *Dār al-'Ulūmī* friend took me and put me on the train, asking people in the compartment to look after me. He left and I was all alone a whole night in the train. Whether it seemed short or long, who shall say? I had only one thought in my mind during the journey—my meeting, when morning came and the train reached its destination. Sure enough, there was that voice again, friendly and endearing. To hear its tender accents was to feel that henceforward everything would be a new creation.

Translated by Kenneth Cragg

Tawfiq al-Hakim

Miracles for Sale

from

The Essential Tawfiq al-Hakim

2008

The priest woke early as was his wont, preceded only by the birds in their nests, and began his prayers, his devotions, and his work for his dioceses in that Eastern land whose spiritual light he was and where he was held in such high esteem by men of religion and in such reverence by the people. Before his door there grew a small palm tree planted by his own hands; he always watered it before sunrise, contemplating the sun as its rim, red as a date, burst forth from the horizon to shed its rays on the dewy leaves, wrapping their falling drops of silver in skeins of gold.

As the priest finished watering the palm tree that morning and was about to return inside, he found himself faced by a crowd of sad and worried-looking people, one of whom plucked up the courage to address him in beseeching tones:

"Father! Save us! No one but you can save us! My wife is on her deathbed and she is asking for your blessing before she breathes her last."

"Where is she?"

"In a village near by. The mounts are ready," replied the man, pointing to two saddled donkeys standing there waiting for them.

"I am willing to go, my sons," said the priest. "Wait a while so that I may arrange my affairs and tell my brethren and then return to you."

"There's no time!" they all said in one voice. "The woman is dying. We may well reach her too late. Come with us right away if you would be a true benefactor to us and a merciful savior to the dying woman. It is not far and we shall be there and back before the sun reaches its zenith at noon."

"Well, then, let us go at once!" The priest agreed with enthusiastic fervor. He went up to the two donkeys, followed by the crowd. Mounting him on one of them while the husband of the dying woman mounted the other, they raced off.

For hours on end they pounded the ground with the priest asking were they were bound for and the men goading on the donkey, saying, "We're almost there!" It wasn't till noon that the village came into sight. They entered it to the accompaniment of barking dogs and the welcome of its inhabitants, and they all made their way to the village hall. They led the priest to a large room where he found a woman stretched out on a bed, her eyes staring up at the ceiling. He called to her, but no reply came from her, for she was at death's door. So he began to call down blessings upon her, and scarcely had he finished when she heaved a great sigh and fell into a deep fit of sobbing, so that the priest thought she was about to give up the ghost.

Instead her eyelids fluttered open. Her gaze cleared, and she turned and murmured:

"Where am I?"

"You are in your house," answered the astonished priest.

"Get me a drink of water."

"Bring the pitcher!" shouted her relatives around her. "Bring the water jar!"

They raced off and brought back a jug of water from which the woman took a long drink. Then she belched heartily and said:

"Isn't there any food? I'm hungry!"

Everyone in the house set about bringing her food. Under the astonished gaze of those around her the woman began devouring the food; then she got up from her bed and proceeded to walk about the house completely fit and well again. At this the people prostrated themselves before the priest, covering his hand and feet in kisses and shouting, "O Saint of God! Your blessing has

alighted on the house and brought the dead woman back to life! What can we possibly give you as a token of the thanks we owe you, as an acknowledgment of our gratitude?"

"I have done nothing that deserves reward or thanks," replied the priest, still bewildered by the incident. "It is God's power that has done it."

"Call it what you will," said the master of the house, "it is at all events a miracle which God wished to be accomplished through your hands, O Saint of God. You have alighted at our lowly abode, and this brings both great honor and good fortune to us. You must let us undertake the obligations of hospitality in such manner as our circumstances allow."

He ordered a quiet room to be made ready for his guest and there be lodged him. Whenever the priest asked leave to depart the master of the house swore by all that was most holy to him that he would not allow his auspicious guest to go before three days were up—the very least hospitality which should be accorded to someone who had saved his wife's life. During this time she showed him much attention and honor. When the period of hospitality came to an end he saddled a mount and loaded it up with presents of home-made bread, lentils, and chickens; in addition he pressed five pounds for the church funds in the priest's hand. Hardly had he escorted him to the door and helped him on to the donkey than a man appeared, puffing and out of breath, who threw himself down beside the priest.

"Father," he pleaded, "the story of your miracle has reached all the villages around. I have an uncle who is like a father to me and who is at death's door. He is hoping to have your blessing, so let not his soul depart from him before his hope is fulfilled!"

"But, my son, I am all ready to return home," the priest replied uncertainly.

"This is something that won't take any time—I shall not let you go till you've been with me to see my uncle!" The man seized the donkey's reins and led him off.

"And where is this uncle of yours?" asked the priest.

"Very near here—a few minutes' distance."

The priest saw nothing for it but to comply. They journeyed for an hour before they reached the next village. There he saw a house like the first one with a dying man on a bed, his family around him veering between hope and

despair. No sooner had the priest approached and called down his blessing on the patient than the miracle occurred: the dying man rose to his feet calling for food and water. The people, astounded at what had occurred, swore by everything most dear that they must discharge the duties of hospitality toward this holy man—a stay of three full days.

The period of hospitality passed with the priest enjoying every honor and attention. Then, as they were escorting him to the gates of the village loaded down with gifts, a man from a third village came along and asked him to come and visit it, even if only for a little while, and give it the blessing of one whose fame had spread throughout all the district.

The priest was quite unable to escape from the man, who led the donkey off by its bit and brought the priest to a house in his village. There they found a young man who was a cripple; hardly had the priest touched him than he was up and about on his two feet, among the cheers and jubilation of young and old. All the people swore that the duties of hospitality must be accorded to the miracle-maker, which they duly did in fine style; three nights no less, just as the others had done. When this time was up they went to their guest and added yet more presents to those he already had, until his donkey was almost collapsing under them. They also presented him with a more generous gift of money than he had received in the former villages so that he had by now collected close on twenty pounds. He put them in a purse which he hid under his clothes. He then mounted the donkey and asked his hosts to act as an escort for him to his village, so they all set off with him, walking behind his donkey.

"Our hearts shall be your protection, our lives your ransom," they said. "We shall not leave you till we have handed you over to your own people: you are as precious to us as gold."

"I am causing you some inconvenience," said the priest. "However, the way is not safe and, as you know, gangs are rife in the provinces."

"Truly," they replied, "hereabouts they kidnap men in broad daylight."

"Even the government is powerless to remove this widespread evil," said the priest. "I was told that gangs of kidnappers waylay buses on country roads, run their eyes over the passengers, and carry off with them anyone at all prosperous-looking so that they can afterwards demand a large ransom from

his relatives. Sometimes it happens with security men actually in the buses. I heard that once two policemen were among the passengers on one of these buses when it was stopped by the gang; when the selected passenger appealed for help to the two policemen they were so scared of the robbers that all they said to the kidnapped man was: 'Away with you—and let's get going!'"

The people laughed and said to the priest, "Do not be afraid! So long as you are with us you will dismount only when you arrive safely back in your village."

"I know how gallant you are! You have overwhelmed me with honor and generosity!"

"Don't say such a thing—you are very precious to us!" They went on walking behind the priest, extolling his virtues and describing in detail his miracles. He listened to their words, and thought about all that had occurred. Finally he exclaimed, "Truly, it is remarkable the things that have happened to me in these last few days! Is it possible that these miracles are due sloely to my blessing?"

"And do you doubt it?"

"I am not a prophet that I should accomplish all that in seven days. Rather is it you who have made me do these miracles!"

"We?" they all said in one voice. "What do you mean?"

"Yes, you are the prime source."

"Who told you this?" they murmured, exchanging glances.

"It is your faith," continued the priest with conviction. "Faith has made you achieve all this. You do not know the power that lies in the soul of the believer. Faith is a power, my sons! Faith is a power! Miracles are buried deep within your hearts, like water inside rock, and only faith can cause them to burst forth!" He continued talking in this vein while the people behind him shook their heads. He became more and more impassioned and did not notice that they had begun to slink off, one after the other. It was only when he reached the boundaries of his village that he came back to earth, turned round to thank his escort, and was rendered speechless with astonishment at finding himself alone.

His surprise did not last long, for he immediately found his family, his brother priests and superior rushing toward him, hugging him and kissing

his hand, as tears of joy and emotion flowed down their cheeks. One of them embraced him, saying, "You have returned safely to us at last! They kept their promises. Let them have the money so long as they have given you back, father! To us, father, you are more priceless than any money!"

The priest, catching the word 'money,' exclaimed: "What money?"

"The money we paid to the gang."

"What gang?"

"The one that kidnapped you. At first they wouldn't be satisfied with less than a thousand pounds, saying that you were worth your weight in gold. We pleaded with them to take half and eventually they accepted, and so we paid them a ransom of five hundred pounds from the Church funds."

"Five hundred pounds!" shouted the priest. "You paid that for me!—They told you I'd been kidnapped?"

"Yes, three days after you disappeared some people came to us and said that a gang kidnapped you one morning as you were watering the palm tree by your door. They swore you were doomed unless your ransom was paid to them—if we paid you'd be handed over safe and sound."

The priest considered these words, recalling to himself all that had occurred.

"Indeed, that explains it," he said, as though talking to himself. "Those dead people, the sick, and the cripples who jumped up at my blessing! What mastery!"

His relatives again came forward, examining his body and clothes as they said joyfully, "Nothing is of any consequence, father, except your safety. We hope they didn't treat you badly during your captivity. What did they do to you?"

In bewilderment he answered: "They made me work miracles—miracles that have cost the Church dear!"

Translated by Denys Johnson-Davies

Yahya Hakki

Story in the Form of a Petition

from

The Lamp of Umm Hashim and other Stories

2004

Petition:

We have heard that you have forwarded, are about to forward, or will forward—and true knowledge abides in God alone—to the various countries a detailed list of losses in lives and property sustained by our beloved Egypt by reason of the war. I am sure that the name of my dear, good-hearted, and unfortunate friend, Fahmi Tawakkul Saafan, is not cited in this list, for, overcome by shyness, he would have preferred to remain silent. Were it not for my love for him and the knowledge that he has been unfairly treated, I would not trouble you with this pertition, in which I ask that you include his name in the list, and that you register under the section of property, the following losses:

LE150 in bank notes

LE50—a gold cigarette case (not counting the value of the Lucky Strike in it)

LE25—A Dunhill lighter

LE50—A fourth-hand Ballila car (I am unable to estimate the age of the tires, not being an expert in antiques)

I also trust that under the section of lives lost you will place the name of my friend. Though actually still alive, he's like a dead man among the living, like a man clutching in his hand a clothing coupon for one austerity shroud.

Subject:

Fahmi Tawakkul Saafan and I were fellow students. Sitting next to each other, we became bosom friends. Later we separated, because after the Primary certificate he was forced to give up his studies owing to lack of funds; he then went off to his village, after which he returned and opened a small shop for shoe-shines in the American style. Having sufficient money, I was able to continue with my education, and then I got a job as messenger in the Post Office. The job requiring that I had my shoes cleaned every day and resoled every two weeks, the link of friendship between us was restored. I would find him sitting at a small table, behind him a raucous radio, and on his right a sewing-machine, the noise of which was interrupted by the blows of a hammer driving nails into heels and soles. He began trading in leather, and it was then that the war broke out and the money began to roll in. The thermometer by which I measured the rise in his fortunes was the cigarette he smoked: a Laziz or a Feel, then it became a Maadan or a Flag, then a Mumtaz or a Wasp. When I found him offering me a Chesterfield from a cigarette case, I knew that he had become one of the war's nouveaux riches.

I was not surprised when I found he had bought a Ballila car, which he used to drive himself, and in which he drove to the cabaret of Lawahiz, the glamorous dancer. Falling madly in love with her and neglecting his work, he finally arrived at the best possible solution to save himself the trouble of going to the cabaret every day—this he achieved by transferring the cabaret to his bedroom: in short, he married Lawahiz, a girl possessed of a face that, when unwashed, was a masterpiece of beauty and a body that, when washed, would seduce a monk. So you see, love, besides being blind and deaf, is sometimes stricken by a cold in the nose. Said my friend: "My house became a hell . . . . The whole day long she was in her nightgown but when evening came, she dressed up, whether we were going out or not.

Night was turned into day. Yawning hard, I would make a breakfast of cooked food, while lunch would consist of tea with milk.

"Hardly had she entered my house than the old servant woman, who had cooked and washed for me ever since I'd come to Cairo, took herself off. Lawahiz asked—or rather ordered—me to look for another servant. No sooner, however, had I brought a servant than she threw her out, saying she knew all about her bad character (later I discovered that she spoke from first-hand knowledge, both girls having graduated from the same domestic agency). I brought along numerous others, until I had paid the agency, in a few days, more than the wages of a servant for a whole year. In the end the doorkeeper put me on to Naima, a timid young girl with two long plaits, as clean as if she'd just come out of a bath, as well as being brought up as though she'd come from Istanbul. Lawahiz was pleased with her; she was no doubt reassured by the pigtails, which told her that Naima was not a spoiled modern servant. Naima was happy to be with us and was satisfied with her bed in the basement. But I became scared when I saw Nai'ma beginning to show affection for me: she would get my clothes ready, clean them with great pleasure, and give me the very best food, meat and fruits, glancing at me as if to say: 'Never mind—hard luck!'

"I realized how imminent the occurrence of some fresh catastrophe was, for I felt that my wife had begun to look at Naima with that eye that God has given to every woman at the back of her head. Ah! My friend, you don't know—as I do—the detraction of how many homes has begun with that sympathy generated between a persecuted husband and a kind-hearted servant. Thus it was with no rejoicing that I saw the seeds of jealousy take root in Lawahiz's heart. It is said that the manifestation of jealousy is evidence of love, but I don't believe the ravings of philosophers when they talk of jealousy, for jealousy is one thing and *love* something else. In my opinion jealousy more closely resembles those lofty emotions that stir a cat, in body, hair, paw, and claw, when it is about to eat up a mouse and finds in front of it another cat. Afraid that Naima would be thrown out and that we would return to our state of anarchy, I spent my nights in thought until the Devil inspired me with a cunning plan.

"I got up early and went round the domestic agencies in search of a chauffeur, for I had pretended to my wife that my eyes were so tired, my nerves so frayed, that I was frightened I might run someone over in crowded Farouk Street. I was offered an old driver, unassuming and honest, whom I refused; in the imploring eyes of another I discerned fear and humility, so him too I rejected, in spite of the modest wage he was asking. I refused many others, until I discovered just what I wanted: a tall, dark, broad-shouldered young man, with gray trousers, a canary yellow waistcoat, a red tie, and hair on which has been smeared a whole pot of brilliantine. He looked at me with an impudent gaze, and when he smiled, one could see that he had large, shining teeth. I was further delighted when on asking his name, he answered, "At your service—Anwar." I found that his name had an attractive ring about it. I engaged him right away, handed over my car to him, and prepared him a bed in a room in the basement, right opposite Naima's.

"That night I slept happy in the thought that I had escaped from a catastrophe, that Naima's affections would be transferred from me to this Rudolf Valentino.

"A few days later, on returning home, I found neither Mr. Anwar nor the car. My plan had worked in the main though not in the details. Anwar certainly *had* fallen under a strong passion that had driven him to elope with his beloved. But it was not Naima who had fled with him, but my dear wife, Lawahiz. It was thus, also, that my money and my car took wings. No doubt the cigarette case and the lighter were her first presents to him."

In view of the above I humbly submit this my petition, trusting that you will give my friend's case your kind consideration.

Signed
Yahya Hakki

Translated by Denys Johnson-Davies

Naguib Mahfouz

The Father

from

Palace Walk

1989

The dining room was on the top floor along with the parents' bedroom. On this story were also located a sitting room and a fourth chamber, which was empty except for a few toys Kamal played with when he had time.

The cloth had been spread on the low table and the cushions arranged around it. The head of the household came and sat down cross-legged in the principal place. The three brothers filed in. Yasin sat on his father's right, Fahmy at his left, and Kamal opposite him. The brothers took their places politely and deferentially, with their heads bowed as though at Friday prayers. There was no distinction in this between the secretary from al-Nahhasin School, the law student, and the pupil from Khalil Agha. No one dared look directly at their father's face. When they were in his presence they would not even look at each other, for fear of being overcome by a smile. The guilty party would expose himself to a dreadful scolding.

Breakfast was the only time of day they were together with their father. When they came home in the afternoon, he would already have left for his shop after taking his lunch and a nap. He would not return again until after

midnight. Sitting with him, even for such a short period, was extremely taxing for them. They were forced to observe military discipline all the time. Their fear itself made them more nervous and prone to the very errors they were trying so hard to avoid. The meal, moreover, was consumed in an atmosphere that kept them from relishing or enjoying the food. It was common for their father to inspect the boys during the short interval before the mother brought the tray of food. He examined them with a critical eye until he could discover some failing, however trivial, in a son's appearance or a spot on his clothes. Then a torrent of censure and abuse would pour forth.

He might ask Kamal gruffly, "Have you washed your hands?" If Kamal answered in the affirmative, he would order him, "Show me!" Terrified, the boy would spread his palms out. Instead of commending him for cleanliness, the father would threaten him. "If you ever forget to wash them before eating, I'll cut them off to spare you the trouble of looking after them." Sometimes he would ask Fahmy, "Is that son of a bitch studying his lessons or not?" Fahmy knew whom he meant, for "son of a bitch" was the epithet their father reserved for Kamal.

Fahmy's answer was that Kamal memorized his lessons very well. The truth was that the boy had to be clever to escape his father's fury. His quick mind spared him the need to be serious and diligent, although his superior achievement implied he was both. The father demanded blind obedience from his sons, and that was hard to bear for a boy who loved playing more than eating.

Remembering Kamal's playfulness, al-Sayyid Ahmed commented angrily, "Manners are better than learning." Then turning toward Kamal, he continued sharply: "Hear that, you son of a bitch."

The mother carried in the large tray of food and placed it on the cloth. She withdrew to the side of the room near a table on which stood a water jug. She waited there, ready to obey any command. In the center of the gleaming copper tray was a large oval dish filled with fried beans and eggs. On one side hot loaves of flat bread were piled. On the other side were arranged small plates with cheese, pickled lemons and peppers, as well as salt and cayenne and black pepper. The brothers' bellies were aflame with hunger but they restrained themselves and pretended not to see the delightful array, as though

it meant nothing to them, until their father put out his hand to take a piece of bread. He split it open while muttering, "Eat." Their hands reached for the bread in order of seniority: Yasin, Fahmy, and then Kamal. They set about eating without forgetting their manners or reserve.

Their father devoured his food quickly and in great quantities as though his jaws were a mechanical shredding device working non-stop at full speed. He lumped together into one giant mouthful a wide selection of the available dishes—beans, eggs, cheese, pepper and lemon pickles—which he proceeded to pulverize with dispatch while his fingers prepared the next helping. His sons ate with deliberation and care, no matter what it cost them and how incompatible it was with their fiery temperaments. They were painfully aware of the severe remark or harsh look they would receive should one of them be remiss or weak and forget himself and thus neglect the obligatory patience and manners.

Kamal was the most uneasy, because he feared his father the most. The worst punishment either of his two brothers would receive was a rebuke or a scolding. The least he could expect was a kick or a slap. For this reason, he consumed his food cautiously and nervously, stealing a glance from time to time at what was left. The food's quick disappearance added to his anxiety. He waited apprehensively for a sign that his father was finished eating. Then he would have a chance to fill his belly. Kamal knew that although his father devoured his food quickly, taking huge helpings selected from many different dishes, the ultimate threat to the food, and therefore, to him, came from his two brothers. His father ate quickly and got full quickly. His two brothers only began the battle in earnest once their father left the table. They did not give up until the plates were empty of anything edible.

Therefore, no sooner had his father risen and departed than Kamal rolled up his sleeves and attacked the food like a madman. He employed both his hands, one for the large dish and the other for the small ones. All the same, his endeavor seemed futile, given his brothers' energetic efforts. So Kamal fell back on a trick he resorted to when his welfare was threatened in circumstances like these. He deliberately sneezed on the food. His two brothers recoiled, looking at him furiously, but left the table,

convulsed with laughter. Kamal's dream for the morning was realized. He found himself alone at the table.

The father returned to his room after washing his hands. Amina followed him there, bringing a cup containing three raw eggs mixed with a little milk, which she handed to him. After swallowing the concoction, he sat down to sip his morning coffee. The rich egg drink was the finale of his breakfast, It was one of a number of tonics he used regularly after meal or between them—like cod-liver oil and sugared walnuts, almonds, and hazelnuts—to safeguard the health of his huge body. They helped compensate for the wear and tear occasioned by his passions. He also limited his diet to meat and varieties of food known for their richness. Indeed, he scorned light and even normal meals as a waste of time not befitting a man of his stature.

Hashish had been prescribed for him to stimulate his appetite, in addition to its other benefits. Although he had tried it, he had never been comfortable with it and had abandoned it without regret. He disliked it because it induced in him a stupor, both somber and still, and a predisposition toward silence as well as a feeling of isolation even when he was with his best friends. He disliked these symptoms that were in rude contrast to his normal disposition aflame with youthful outbursts of mirth, elated excitement, intimate delights, and bouts of jesting and laughter. For fear of losing the qualities required of an exceptionally virile lover, he dosed himself with an expensive narcotic for which Muhammad Ajami, the couscous vendor by the façade of the seminary of al-Salih Ayyub in the vicinity of the Goldsmiths Bazaar, was renowned. The vendor prepared it as a special favor for his most honored client among the merchants and local notables. Al-Sayyid Ahmad was not addicted to the drug, but he would take some from time to time whenever he encountered a new love, particularly if the object of his passion was a woman experienced with men and their ways.

He finished sipping his coffee. He got up to look in the mirror and began putting on the garments Amina handed to him one at a time. He cast a searching look at his attire. He combed his hair, which hung down on both sides of his head. Then he smoothed and twisted his mustache. He scrutinized the appearance of his face and turned slowly to the right to inspect the left side and then to the left to study the right. When at last he was satisfied with

what he saw, he stretched out his hand to his wife for the bottle of cologne Uncle Hasanayn, the barber, prepared for him. He cleansed his hands and face and moistened the chest of his caftan and his handkerchief with it. Then he put on his fez, took his walking stick, and left the room, spreading a pleasant fragrance before and after him. The whole family knew the scent, distilled from assorted flowers. Whenever they inhaled it, the image of the head of the house with his resolute, solemn face would come to mind. It would inspire in the heart, along with love, both awe and fear. At this hour of the morning, however, the fragrance was an announcement of their father's departure. Everyone greeted it with a relief that was innocent rather than reprehensible, like a prisoner's satisfaction on hearing the clatter of chains being unfastened from his hands and feet. Each knew he would shortly regain his liberty to talk, laugh, sing, and do many other things free from danger.

Yasin and Fahmy had finished putting on their clothes. Kamal rushed to the father's room, immediately after he left, to satisfy a desire to imitate his father's gesture that he had stealthily observed from the edge of the door, which was ajar. He stood in front of the mirror looking at himself with care and pleasure. Then he barked in a commanding tone of voice to his mother, "The cologne, Amina." He knew she would not honor this demand but proceeded to wipe his hands on his face, jacket, and short pants, as if moistening them with cologne. Although his mother was struggling not to laugh, he zealously kept up the pretense of being in deadly earnest. He proceeded to review his face in the mirror from the right side to the left. He went on to smooth his imaginary mustache and twist its ends. After that he turned away from the mirror and belched. He looked at his mother and, when he got no response from her except laughter, remonstrated with her: "You're supposed to wish me health and strength."

The woman laughingly mumbled, "Health and strength, sir." Then he left the room mimicking his father's gait and holding his hand as though leaning on a stick.

The mother and her two girls went at once to the balcony. They stood at the window overlooking al-Nahhasin Street to observe through the holes of its wooden grille the men of the family on the street. The father could be seen moving in a slow and dignified fashion. He projected an aura of grandeur

and good looks, raising his hands in greeting from time to time. Uncle Hasanayn, the barber, Hajj Darwish, who sold beans, al-Fuli, the milkman, and al-Bayumi, the drinks vendor, all rose to greet him. The women watched him with eyes filled with love and pride. Fahmy followed behind him with hasty steps and then Yasin with the body of a bull and the elegance of a peacock. Finally Kamal made his appearance. He had scarcely taken two steps when he turned around and looked up at the window where he knew his mother and sisters were concealed. He smiled and then went on his way, clutching his book bag under his arm and searching the ground for a pebble to kick.

This moment was one of the happiest of the mother's day. All the same, her anxiety that her men might be harmed by the evil eye knew no limits. She continued reciting the Qur'anic verse "And from the mischief of the envious person in his envy" (113:5) until they were out of sight.

Translated by William M. Hutchins and Olive E. Kenny

Gamal al-Ghitani

Naguib Mahfouz's Childhood

from

The Mahfouz Dialogs

2007

Childhood

When I travel in memory to the most distant beginnings of my life, to my earliest childhood, I remember our house in al-Gamaliya as almost empty. My father had had six children before me, who had followed one another in quick succession, four girls and two boys, after which my mother had no more children for nine years. Then I came along. When I reached the age of five, the difference between me and my next oldest brother was fifteen years. All the girls but one, of whose life in that house I remember nothing, had gotten married. My two brothers also had married, and one of them had entered the military college and gone off to serve in Sudan. This is why I remember only my father and my mother in the house. I can't remember that any other person shared the house with us unless they were guests, such as my aunt on my father's side and her daughter, or people from outside the family. For most of my life in that house I was like an only child, though of course we would visit my siblings in their homes; this is why, if I try to recall my memories of the latter, I remember them in their houses and not in ours. My relationship with them was that of a child

with adults, its foundation politeness and good manners. I didn't know them as siblings whose daily lives I shared, with whom I played or laughed. Consequently, the sibling relationship is one of those that I have followed with interest throughout my life.

This is why you will notice that I am always picturing brotherly relationships among siblings in my works: it is a result of my being deprived of such relationships, which appear in *The Cairo Trilogy*, in *The Beginning and the End* (*Bidaya wa-nihaya*), and in *Khan al-Khalili*. I never experienced that kind of relationship in my real life. I always regarded it as something forbidden or unknown. I wanted to have that same relationship with my friends—that of brotherliness.

Play

Naturally, the house is always linked in my mind with play, especially the roof where there was lots of space for playing. There was the family's stock of household provisions; there were duck, chickens, geese, and little chicks. Planted in flowerpots were hyacinth, bean, and basil. And then there was the wide sky. We lived in a freestanding house—what they used to call in the common parlance, 'a house with its own door,' or what in modern terms we might call a 'vertical' house, each story consisting of a small and a large room, with the roof space on top. There you would find a summer room, where we slept on hot days. The house added its necessary components as it went up, meaning that on the bottom floor was the reception room, on the second a dining room, and so on, maybe because the area of the plot was so small. We used to play in the street too, with the sons and daughters of the neighbors. The house stood opposite the Gamaliya police station and looked out over Bayt al-Qadi Square, but we belonged to the quarter of Qirmiz Road.

Author's Note: The house that witnessed the birth of our great writer was demolished and its place is now occupied by a modern three-story house with a café on the ground floor. The Qirmiz Road quarter remains as it was, and the passageway which extends under one of the historic mosques is still there.

In those days, the quarter was a strange world, one where all classes of Egyptian society were represented. There was, for example, a tenement in which simple people lived, of whom I can recall a police private, a minor official in the water company, a poor woman who went about selling radishes or pumpkin seeds, and her blind husband. They had a room in the tenement. Directly in front of the tenement you would find a small house that was inhabited by a woman who was one of the first to receive an education and take a salaried job. Then you would find the houses of major families of notables, such as those of the Sukkari, the Muhaylimi, and the Sisi families, and ancient houses whose owners were merchants or lived off the return on an endowment. You used to find the richest categories of society, then the middle class, and then the poor. I don't know what the quarter looks like now, but maybe you know it because you lived in the area until the seventies. Everyone mingled in Ramadan. The rich houses opened what were called manadir for the poor, where anyone from the quarter could come in and eat, even strangers. I witnessed the disappearance of the social structure of the Egyptian *hara*, or semi-enclosed city neighborhood, in the thirties. The rich families moved out to West 'Abbasiya while the middle-class families, to which I belonged, moved to East 'Abbasiya.

There was a hostelry for dervishes in the quarter too, with people from Persia and Turkey whom we would see from a distance. Certain outstanding social features of the neighborhood have stuck in my memory, the most prominent of which perhaps is the *futuwwat*, or the gangs and their bosses, whose presence was recognized by the government itself. We used to wake up to the hullabaloo in Bayt al-Qadi when quarrels broke out among them, and they played a major role in the 1919 Revolution. I saw the *futuwwat* with my own eyes when they sacked and occupied the Gamaliya police station. As I told you, there was a room on the roof, and it had a window that looked out over the square. From that window, when I was a child, I saw all the demonstrations that passed in front of Bayt al-Qadi.

Author's Note: The passageway, the dervish hostel, the futuwwat*, and the ruined lot, were fixed landmarks for Naguib Mahfouz, and when he speaks to us of the Persians and the Turks we should no doubt recall those mysterious chants in* The

Harafish *that emanated from behind the hostel's walls. Some of what our writer saw from the window during his early childhood of the takeover of the Gamaliya police station by the futuwwat and the demonstrations he recalled in* Fountain and Tomb. *Let us look at Story 12:2.*

What is happening to the world?

Floods sweep over it, earthquakes shake it, fire burns its skirts, slogans explode from its throat.

Thousands—more than ever before—burst the great square, and their screams as they threaten with clenched fists rattle the walls of our alley and deafen our ears. Now even women ride in the rows of carts and take part in the frenzy . . .

Over the wall along our roof, I watch and ask myself what is happening to the world . . .

Speeches, electric and passionate, smash through the air and pour down a deluge of new words: Saad Zaghloul, Malta, the Sultan, the Crescent and the Cross, the Nation, sudden death . . . .

Flags wave above shops, posters of Saad Zaghloul plaster walls, the imam of the mosque appears in the minaret to call and preach. And I tell myself that what is happening is strange but exciting and entertaining, truly magnificent.

Except that I witness a chase.

People rush into our street, throw rocks, and flatten themselves against our alley walls for protection.

Horsemen with tall hats and thick mustaches crash down our alley. Fierce, frightful voices ring out, then screams. Someone yanks me away from my lookout and pushes me into the house where terrified faces peer out at me and say, "It is death."

We strain our ears behind closed shutters but hear only voices in strife, footsteps, neighs, the buzz of bullets, a scream of agony, raging chants.

This lasts several minutes, then silence falls on the alley.

The uproar starts again, now at a distance . . . then total silence. And I tell myself that what is happening is strange and terrifying and dreadful.

I know only a little about the new words Saad Zaghloul, Malta, the Sultan, and the Nation, but I know a lot about the British cavalry, bullets, and death.

Um Abdu, extremely wrought up, comes to tell tales of heroes and martyrs. She eulogizes Ilwa the baker's apprentice and swears the soldiers' horses became headstrong and uncomfortable in front of the *takiya* and threw their riders to the ground . . .

And I tell myself that what is happening is an exciting and unbelievable dream.

Here the story ends and Naguib Mahfouz continues his memories.

Lost in Time

Among the other characters whom I shall never forget were the women who used to visit our house to make amulets and perform spells. I used to watch them when they came to my mother, with whom they would sit and talk. Another landmark of my childhood was the *kuttab*. The educational system then in place required that we go to the *kuttab* first, then enter First Elementary. The *kuttab* taught us how to be naughty, but it also taught us the principles of religion and the principles of reading and writing. It was mixed. The *kuttab*'s premises were situated in Kababgi Alley, close to Qirmiz Road; I don't know what they house now. Perhaps you knew it. I went when I was four years old, but the strange thing is that I started seeing things outside the quarter at that early age. Do you remember that I told you before of my mother's passion for the ancient monuments? We would often go to the Egyptian Museum or the pyramids, where the Sphinx was. I don't know how to explain her fondness for them even now! We used to go out on our own or sometimes with my mother, who would pull me along by the hand, and we would visit the Egyptian Museum, especially the mummy room. We went there a lot. My mother enjoyed a relative freedom, unlike Amina in *The Cairo Trilogy*, who wasn't allowed to go out without the permission of Ahmad

ʻAbd al-Jawad. Where, then, you will ask me, did I get the inspiration for the character of ʻAbd al-Jawad?

I remember a family that used to live opposite us. The house was always closed, the windows were never opened, and the only person who ever came out of it was its master, a Levantine called Shaykh Radwan, a man of imposing appearance. My mother would take me to visit this family and I would see that the man's wife was forbidden to go outside. We used to visit them but she never visited us. She used to implore my mother to come and see her. I had lots of friends among the children and later on, when we moved to al-ʻAbbasiya and I was twelve, I kept up contact with them. Then I lost sight of them all in the rush of life—all the friends of my early childhood, with the exception of one, whom I ran into twenty or twenty-five years ago in al-Gaysh Square when I was on my way to ʻUrabi's café. Many long years had passed during which we hadn't seen each other, but we recognized one another. Then he disappeared and I never saw him again.

My mother would always take me with her because there was just me. She would take me with her on her visits to relatives and neighbors, and that is how I saw many of the districts of Cairo, such as Shubra and al-ʻAbbasiya. Many of the areas that are now located in the center of Cairo were gardens and fields then.

The Father

At home, my father would speak constantly of Saʻd Zaghlul, Muhammad Farid, and Mustafa Kamil, and follow their news with great concern. Whenever my father mentioned the name of one of these men it was as though he were speaking of genuine holy relics. He would discuss household matters in the same breath as those of the nation, as though they were one and the same. Every event in our daily lives, great or small, was associated with some public matter. Thus such and such an event happened because Saʻd had said so and so, or because the Palace . . . or because the British . . . . My father spoke of them excitedly, as though he were talking of personal enemies or friends. My father was a government employee, and when he reached the age at which he was supposed to retire, he resigned. He worked for the government under an ancient system which is entirely unfamiliar to us now. After he retired, he

worked with an old friend of his who was a merchant. His friend was a big merchant and used to travel all the time to Port Said.

Author's Note: We note here that Ahmad 'Abd al-Jawad in The Cairo Trilogy *traveled once outside Cairo, to Port Said, for trade. It was during this visit that Amina disobeyed his instructions not to leave the house and suffered the consequences.*

The house gave the impression that no one with any connection to art could possibly emerge from it. The only culture to be found in the house was of a religious nature, and the only thing to connect it to public life was of a political order. My father was a friend of al-Muwaylihi's and the latter had given him a copy of his book *The Tale of 'Isa ibn Hisham (Hadith 'Isa ibn Hisham)*, a copy that I remember very well.

Author's Note: Naguib Mahfouz reminded me here of certain traces of his father in The Cairo Trilogy *but there are other, even clearer ones in Fountain and Tomb, namely in stories 14, 15, 18, 19, and 23. Let us review Story 23:3.*

> One morning I awaken with sudden harshness. A dark grip grabs and jerks me from the land of dreams. A flood of jangling noise engulfs me. My hair stands on end with horror: voices wail from the hall. Terrible thoughts rip at my flesh and the specter of death rises up before my eyes.
>
> I jump out of bed and dash to my closed door, hesitate a moment, then throw it open to face the unknown.
>
> My father is seated, my mother leans against the sideboard, and the servant stands in the doorway. They are all crying.
>
> My mother sees me and comes to me. "We scared you . . . Don't be afraid, son."
>
> Through a dry throat, I ask, "What . . . ?"
>
> She whispers hoarsely in my ear, "Saad Zaghloul . . . . May he live on in you!"
>
> I cry from my soul, "Saad!"

I go back to my room.
Gloom hangs everywhere.

What Remained

I don't remember even a single one of my companions in the *kuttab* or in the elementary school, which was located opposite the mosque of al-Husayn, inside which there was a historic clock. I saw the demonstrations from this school. Much blood flowed in the area. You might say that the biggest thing to undermine my child's sense of security was the revolution of 1919. We saw the British and we heard the shooting and I saw the bodies and the wounded in Bayt al-Qadi Square. I saw the attack on the police station.

How do I view my childhood now? My life as a child is reflected to some extent in *The Cairo Trilogy* and even more in *Fountain and Tomb*. It was an ordinary childhood. I didn't experience divorce or polygamy or being orphaned. An ordinary childhood in the sense that the child grew up with parents living a quiet, settled life. My father wasn't a drunkard or addicted to gambling. He wasn't unusually authoritarian. Such things had no place in my life. Anything that might even cloud it was kept from me. The atmosphere in which I grew up spoke of my parents' affection and my family's affection, and I regarded my parents and my family as sacred. The only vein of culture in the family was religious. In 1937 my father died, at sixty-five years of age. I was living with my mother in al-'Abbasiya, to which we had moved in around 1924, but the place to which I remained attached, to which I always look back, is al-Gamaliya.

Between al-'Abbasiya and al-Husayn

We left the Gamaliya area for al-'Abbasiya when I was twelve years old. Our move to al-'Abbasiya had a major impact on my life. The 'Abbasiya to which I moved at that early age did not resemble today's 'Abbasiya. Now there are buildings everywhere and streets intersect and run parallel to one another, but the 'Abbasiya of my early days contained a lot of green space and few buildings. The houses were small, consisting of a single story, and each house was surrounded by its garden. Beyond the houses, the fields extended to the horizon. My father would accompany me, with my mother, to the Qubba

Gardens area, on the other side of Gardens Bridge, and there we'd ride a little trolley car that ran on rails and took us deep into the gardens. The quiet was profound and the area very large, with only a small number of villas. All that has gone. The gardens have disappeared and buildings have filled the place. Despite all that, al-'Abbasiya was not completely cut off from the older districts. I said that my move to al-'Abbasiya caused a major shift in my life, and the strange thing is that I have maintained my relationship with my friends—my friends from al-'Abbasiya, the friends of my boyhood—up to this moment, those who have passed into God's mercy excepted.

An unavoidable authorial note: Our great writer derived numerous characters in his novels from his 'Abbasiya friends, but I will refer here to just one work, in which he wrote about a number of them directly: Mirrors. *See the chapters devoted to Ga'far Khalil, Khalil Zaki, Rida Hamada, Hanan Mustafa, Zahran Hassuna, Saba Ramzi, Surur 'Abd al-Baqi, Sayyid Shu'ayr, Sha'rawi al-Fahham, Safa' al-Katib, Taha 'Anan, 'Adli Barakat, 'Ashmawi Galal, 'Isam al-Hamalawi, and 'Id Mansur. From the late sixties on, I used to attend the weekly meetings of our great writer with his 'Abbasiya friends every Thursday evening at the old 'Urabi café. There, with his boyhood friends, he appeared at ease, unconstrained. I became acquainted with most of the 'Abbasiya friends, but then the meetings stopped because of the crisis in the public transportation system, which prevented our writer from traveling from his home on Nile Street to al-'Abbasiya.*

A Strange Character

I didn't forget al-Gamaliya.

My nostalgia for it cast a powerful shadow. I always felt a desire to go back to al-Gamaliya, to my friends there. What was it that made this easy for me to do, and on a regular basis? We had a friend from the 'Abbasiya clique who abandoned his studies and went to work with his father in a small fabric store in al-Ghuriya. We were on vacation during the school recess, which was more than four months long, and he used to say to us, "You have to come and see me every day." In those days we used to cover the distance on foot, starting from Faruq (now al-Gaysh) Square and then going via al-Husayniya Street, al-Futuh Gate, and al-Mu'izz Street. We had to walk as far as al-Ghuriya so

that I could enjoy the area. When we got to him, we'd stay with him until the store closed and then we'd move on to his two favorite places to sit—the Midaq Alley café and Fishawi's café. I discovered Midaq Alley thanks to this friend of ours. The fact is there was a strange bond between the area, the people there, the historic monuments, and myself, a bond that stirred up heartfelt emotions and obscure feelings from which I was to find relief in later years only by writing about them. To return to that friend of mine, he was an adventurous person. He worked with his father, but when the crisis of the thirties arrived, he abandoned him and disappeared. He went to glean a living in Upper Egypt. He was very daring. He let his beard grow, said he was coming from 'Illumined Medina,' and sold people dust from the Prophet's tomb. He would treat sick people and got into lots of scrapes. Once, he caused a man to hemorrhage while pulling out one of his molars and had to flee the town. He was an excellent salesman despite that. Then he married and settled down. He was the perfect smooth talker. In fact, he was the one who taught us the way to the various parts of Cairo. Where is he now? I don't know. He used to come and visit me when he came to Cairo. He'd take me by surprise at the ministry of religious endowments, and later at the ministry of culture. Then he disappeared. I don't know whether he's still alive or has passed on into God's mercy. If he were living in Cairo, he would certainly visit me. He was an adventurer. I remember that after he abandoned his father in the wake of the crisis of the thirties and then got into financial difficulties, he wanted to go back to his father and he asked me to act as his go-between. I went to his father. He was a neighbor of ours, living on the same street. The man received me very cordially, but when I mentioned his son's name, the whole household flew at me, even his mother, because he'd abandoned the family at a difficult time. This friend of mine had no understanding of the principles of loyalty and family attachment. One might even say he had no principles, or was ahead of his time. In any case, what matters is that he was an adventurer, and his personality and his experiences opened up for me numerous worlds that I have written about many times and that are scattered through many of my novels. As for that friend of mine himself, I don't know where he is now.

My Starting Point

Among my friends from al-'Abbasiya who have passed into God's mercy are Fu'ad Nuwayra and Ahmad Nuwayra, both of whom belonged to the 'Abbasiya clique. They were brothers of the musician 'Abd al-Halim Nuwayra. My friendship was with Ahmad, the older of the two. 'Abd al-Halim Nuwayra used to join us from time to time. He was the youngest of the family. Both Ahmad and Fu'ad died young, God rest their souls. We always spent our evenings around the mosque of al-Husayn. I used to visit the area with boundless fascination. Our nocturnal outings would reach the peak of their beauty in Ramadan, when we would go to the mosque to listen to Shaykh 'Ali Mahmud and spend the whole night there until morning. This was while I was studying and then when I was a government employee. You know, I kept going to the Husayn area until the beginning of the seventies, when I used to meet you there. However, my advancing age and the deterioration of public transport made me stop going regularly. In addition, the place itself had changed. The old Fishawi's was demolished. The nights I spent at Fishawi's until morning were among the most enjoyable hours of my life. These nights brought many different types together. Not to go to al-Gamaliya saddens me greatly. Sometimes one may complain of a certain aridity of the soul—you know those moments that every author goes through—but when I walk in al-Gamaliya, images flood my mind's eye; most of my novels came to me as living ideas while I was sitting in this area smoking a waterpipe. It seems to me that there has to be some link to a specific place, or a specific thing, that is the starting point for one's feelings and sensations. Take, for instance, our writers who lived in the countryside, such as Muhammad 'Abd al-Halim 'Abd Allah or 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi; you'll find that the countryside was the cornerstone and the wellspring of their works. Yes indeed. The writer needs something that shines and inspires.

First Love

I returned to al-Gamaliya as a government employee when I worked in the Ghuri Library and supervised the Good Loan project. That was at the end of the forties and the beginning of the fifties. I was working in the minister's office, the minister of religious endowments, and it happened that there was

a cabinet reshuffle and they asked me to choose a different place to work, and I chose the Ghuri Library in the Azhar district. Naturally, they were astonished since it's a place no government employee would normally choose to go to because of its distance from the ministry and the neglect that surrounded it, but I had a different goal in mind. I spent some of the most enjoyable months of my life in the Ghuri Library. It was during this period, for example, that I read Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. I used to go regularly to Fishawi's café during the day, when the ancient café was almost empty. I'd smoke a waterpipe, think, and observe. I'd walk in the Ghuriya area too. This area is reflected in my works. Even when, later on, I shifted to treating intellectual, or symbolic, topics, I would also return to the world of the *hara*. What engages me is the reality of that world. There are some whose choice falls on a real, or imaginary, place, or an historical period; my preferred world is that of the *hara*. The *hara* came to be the background to most of my works, so that I could go on living in the area that I love. Why does The *Harafish* take place in a *hara*? I could have had the events take place anywhere—in some other place of a different nature. The choice of the *hara* came about here only because when you write a long work of fiction, you have to be careful to choose an environment you love, that you feel at home in, so that you 'have a good time.' As for the open space that appears within the world of the *hara*, I drew on al-'Abbasiya for that. When I was living in al-'Abbasiya I often used to go out to the edges of the desert, to the area of the springs where they customarily used to celebrate the Prophet's birthday. There I would find myself alone, especially given that this empty area was bordered by the tombs. It was a limitless space. It was in al-'Abbasiya that I suffered my first real love. Before that, I'd become aware of beauty in al-Gamaliya in so far as such feelings can seduce a boy of eight or ten; but in al-'Abbasiya, I knew my first love of the other kind. It was an experience devoid of any relationship, in view of the difference in age, and class, which meant that it could have no aftermath. If it had, it might be that the experience would have lost much of the emotion that I invested in it. The effects of this relationship would show up later in Kamal 'Abd al-Jawad's experience in *The Cairo Trilogy* and his love for 'Ayda Shaddad. I knew al-'Abbasiya as good times and irreplaceable friends. I used to play soccer with my friends. I was a good player.

Author's Note: In the words of the celebrated physician Dr. Adham Ragab, one of Mahfouz's 'Abbasiya friends: "Naguib Mahfouz was a soccer player of rare quality. When we were boys in al-'Abbasiya, he was a weaver and a dodger, a maneuverer of the ball who, had he continued, would have rivaled Husayn Higazi, al-Titsh, and, in the following generation, 'Abd al-Karim Saqr. I tell you, as history is my witness, that never in my life so far—and I speak as a soccer addict and thus an impartial witness—never in my life have I seen anyone who could run as fast as Naguib Mahfouz."

Translated by Humphrey Davies

Samia Mehrez

Respected Sir

from

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1994

> Sometimes the artist finds it difficult to express himself, especially when we consider the state's position towards him. This is generally true in the Arab world, where we cannot dissociate art and politics . . . . The artist's dilemma depends to a great extent on the state's position vis-à-vis freedom of expression. Should the state ignore the writer's voice, it alone is the loser, for his is the voice of truth . . . a voice that knows and offers what no intelligence apparatus is capable of providing.[1]

This statement by Naguib Mahfouz, quoted in Gamal al-Ghitani's *Najib Mahfuz yatadhakkar* (Naguib Mahfouz remembers) reconfirms Mahfouz's acute awareness of the relationship between literature and politics in the Arab world and of its constraining, perhaps even compromising, effect on cultural production in general and on the creative writer in particular. The interest of the above passage does not lie solely in the relationship it establishes between literature and politics, but also in the nonauthoritative position Mahfouz assigns to the

creative writer. First, the passage designates a passive role to the writer and an all-active role to the state. The state takes a position toward writers, takes a position regarding freedom of speech, and recognizes or ignores the writer's voice, while the writer can only write (or not write) and hope that the state will realize the importance of his or her voice. Mahfouz presupposes a writer who depends on the state for recognition and legitimacy, without considering alternatives to such a binding, even stifling, relationship. Second, implicit in this passive writer-active state relationship is a tacit agreement to self-censorship on the part of the former given the authority of the latter. Even though Mahfouz recognizes the relationship between writers and authority, he fails to encourage writers to become the active participant they must be if freedom of speech, which Mahfouz advocates, is to prevail.

Therefore it is not surprising that despite this statement, and others made by Mahfouz that suggest his constantly compromised position vis-à-vis authority, there seems to be a general consensus in the Egyptian intellectual and literary milieu that the Nobel prize winner's life has been a long quiet stream. For example, in his published series of interviews with Mahfouz, Ghali Shukri, a leading Egyptian journalist and literary critic who wrote one of the earliest long studies on Mahfouz's works,[2] describes the Nobel laureate as an ordinary man: "People expect a writer or famous artist to have an extraordinary life, when, in fact, Naguib Mahfouz's life is devoid of such unusual events."[3] Likewise, Louis Awad, one of Egypt's foremost intellectuals, has emphasized Mahfouz's wide appeal: "Never have I known a writer to be so widely accepted by the right, center, and left—whose works are appreciated by modernists, traditionalists, and those in between—as has been the case with Naguib Mahfouz."[4]

There might seem to be a contradiction between what Mahfouz says about the writer's position and what his critics have to say about him, that is, between how he articulates his literary career and how others see it developing. But, rather than view his statements and those made by others as contradictory, I argue that they must be read as complementary. Only by so doing can we begin to understand how Mahfouz came to occupy his present position in the literary and intellectual world. Indeed, it is only because of his careful navigation and constantly negotiated position that Mahfouz may *seem* to lead an uneventful life.

Throughut his career as a writer Mahfouz has walked a fine line between sincere political commitment and an amazing disengagement from politics. Consequently, his literary history is punctuated with several interesting jolts and confrontations with the state and with religious authorities that have remained *potentially* explosive and disruptive. In fact, to say that Mahfouz is an ordinary man or that his life is devoid of "unusual events" is to ignore one of the more fascinating and complicated aspects of Mahfouz's life. The question then becomes *how* and *why* these politically charged moments in Mahfouz's career have been hushed so that he finally emerges, unlike many of his contemporaries, unharmed by the authorities, in relative peace with the multiple factions of the intellectual community, and one of the most popular writers in the Arab world. The details of some of these *potentially* explosive moments in Mahfouz's literary history indicate that the deleted eruptions in his career can be attributed to the creative writer's apparently separate yet intrinsically interrelated role as civil servant. The great writer was employed in the government for more than fifty-four of his eighty-two years.[5]

In compiling an archaeology of confrontational moments in Mahfouz's life one will begin to discern certain patterns that will eventually lead to a rereading of this writer's "uneventful" life. Perhaps one of the most striking characteristics about Mahfouz's literary biography is his increasing caution, not so much in what he writes but in *how* and *when* he circulated what he has written. Although his works are predominantly critical, on both a social and a political level, his career as a writer is marked by a politics of nonconfrontation that, in many instances, has subjected him to criticism. This extra-careful attitude toward the written word is something Mahfouz has learned over the years, in more than one trying encounter with power. Very early in his career, in an episode that marks his initial introduction into the world of narrative and its relation to authority, whether religious or political, Mahfouz came up against the first signal of possible confrontations with the religious authorities in Egypt.

His lifelong friend Adham Ragab told this story as an example of the long history of uneasy moments that Mahfouz has lived and survived. Mahfouz had just published his first novel, *'Abath al-aqdar* (The absurdity of the fates),* in 1939 and took a copy of the novel to the home of his mentor in

philosophy, Sheikh Mustafa Abd al-Raziq. There he encountered several other sheikhs and religious authorities, one of whom took the novel, looked at the title page, and said disapprovingly, "What do I see? The Absurdity of the Fates? And can Fate be absurd, dear sir? Fate is of God's creation! How dare you associate absurdity with God?"[6]

As Adhma Ragab indicates, this instance of "intellectual terrorism" was perhaps the first to which Mahfouz was subjected. But in 1939 novel writing was still a budding art, and Naguib Mahfouz was still an unknown writer, thus a good scolding from a respected religious authority seemed to suffice to set him on the right track. Also, it is important to note that even at this early point in his career, Mahfouz was benefiting from considerable patronage, a factor that has recurred quite frequently in his life. 'Abath al-aqdar had already been published when the sheikh attacked it, thanks to the interest that the towering Egyptian liberal intellectual Salama Mousa had taken in Mahfouz's early writing attempts. Mousa had read the manuscript, liked it, and serialized it in his literary magazine, *al-Majalla al-Jadida*, thus becoming one of the earliest patrons for the young liberal writer.

Mahfouz experienced another collision with authority, this time political, after the publication of *al-Qahira al-jadida* (New Cairo)** in 1943. In this novel Mahfouz critically depicts Egyptian society during the thirties. He exposes political and moral corruption in a country submerged in poverty, hypocrisy, and opportunism through the story of a government employee who became a pimp in order to advance in the bureaucracy. This particular story happened to coincide with a real scandal among the Egyptian ministers at the time! Because of this 'coincidence' *al-Qahira al-jadida* earned Mahfouz an interrogation by the mufti of the Ministry of Waqfs, Sheikh Ahmad Hussein (Taha Hussein's brother). But, because Sheikh Ahmad Hussein was under the impression that Mahfouz was one of Taha Hussein's students, he wrote a report in the young writer's favor, thus saving him from the accusation. The sheikh also volunteered advice to the young writer: "Why don't you write about love, and stay away from these dangerous things."[7]

Similarly, when Mahfouz recalls the publication of *Zuqaq al-midaqq (Midaq Alley)* in 1947, he remembers being called in for advice by Ibrahim al-Mazni (the well-known writer who was also responsible for the decision

to grant Mahfouz the Arabic Language Symposium prize in 1946 for his novel *Khan al-Khalili*): "Realism is a bad thing, my friend, and we still don't understand either realism or romanticism. All the calamities in *Zuqaq al-midaqq* will be dumped on you. So be careful."[8] And careful he was, not about *what* he was writing but about *how* he would make the written word pass, or not pass, depending on the kind of danger it presented and the general political climate in the country.

Perhaps the example that best narrates the shifting strategies in Mahfouz's confrontation with, and manipulation of, the authorities is that of his banned novel *Awlad haratina (Children of Gebelawi),* published in 1959. Much of *The Cairo Trilogy* had been written before the 1952 revolution and is considered a monument in social realism. For the seven intervening years, Mahfouz did not write. His publication of *Awlad haratina,* a work that defies a unilateral interpretation, invites a careful analysis of the relationship between Mahfouz's seven-year silence and his shift from the social realism of *The Cairo Trilogy* to the symbolic mode of *Awlad haratina*. If *The Cairo Trilogy* can be read as a social history of Egypt between the two world wars, then *Awlad haratina* can be read as a symbolic history of Egypt after the revolution. Whereas *The Cairo Trilogy* spans the recent historic period from the 1919 revolution to 1944, with all its political debates and ideologies, through a representation of three successive generations in a middle-class family, *Awlad haratina* transports us into a timeless, symbolic *hara* (alley), where the successive heroes (whose life histories parody those of the successive prophets), all descendants of the imposing Gebelawi, reenact the human struggle for meaning, knowledge, and social justice.

Mahfouz has often remarked that literature should be more revolutionary than revolutions themselves, that writers must find the means to continue to be critical of the negative elements in the sociopolitical reality. Anyone who agrees with this statement will have to accept Mahfouz's reading of his controversial novel. In this novel he was addressing the leaders of the revolution who were ruling Egypt. In using the alley to symbolize Egypt, he was forced to use an inverted symbol; normally one would write about Egypt and mean the world or the universe, not the inverse. But he had to do this in fear of censorship.[9]

Awlad haratina first appeared in serialized from on the pages of *al-Ahram*, whose editor in chief at the time was Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal, the man responsible for transforming Egypt's leading daily newspaper into an intellectual fortress by inviting the country's leading writers and intellectuals to join its editorial staff. Even though Mahfouz himself offers us a political reading of *Awlad haratina*, the prevailing reading at the time was overwhelmingly religious. Before the whole serialized version of the novel was completed in *al-Ahram*, all hell broke loose. The following is a brief version, in Mahfouz's words, of what happened:

> Several petitions were sent to al-Azhar as soon as the novel appeared. For the first time the sheikhs of al-Azhar had to read a novel. And one must remember that the work was considered highly innovative even in the intellectual circles of the time. So the sheikhs cannot be blamed for their interpretation. The petitions had made reference to the Prophet Muhammad, and accordingly the shekhs condemned the work as blasphemous and demanded that it be banned.[10]

When I asked Mahfouz how he received this kind of blow, especially since *Awlad haratina* represented his return to the literary scene after seven silent years, his answer was:

> Sabri al-Khuli [representative of President Nasser] said to me: "We do not want a fight with al-Azhar. We will ban the book itself and anything written about it, but if you want to publish it outside Egypt you may do so." I considered this a reasonable solution given the attack on the book.[11]

True, the book itself was never published in Egypt—it appeared in Beirut and continues to be sold underground in Cairo, with Mahfouz's knowledge, but the serialized version of the novel was not discontinued. Haykal, who was a close friend of Nasser's, made sure that it went on, despite the protests by al-Azhar.

What is noteworthy in the above abbreviated history of *Awlad haratina* is the fact that Mahfouz himself does not seem to play a major part in this drama. The ultimate courageous decision is made by Haykal in favor of Mahfouz. Patronage shielded Mahfouz, and in return he agreed to compromise rather than opt for an open confrontation with the religious authorities.

The fact remains that such strategies do work, but this time not without a lesson for Mahfouz. One year before the publication of *Awlad haratina*, Mahfouz had been appointed chair of the Cinema Institute. This appointment, which Mahfouz speaks of as his favorite "job," did not last long, because of the attack on his "blasphemous" novel:

> It was the first time I was ever appointed to a position that had to do with art. In addition I considered myself a friend of art rather than a censor. I used to defend it. I remained in this position for only a year or so, since the attack on *Awlad haratina* was already underway. The ministers took their complaints to Tharwat Ukasha [minister of culture] protesting my selection as the censor.[12]

But the turbulent history of *Awlad haratina* does not stop there; the whole issue came back to haunt Mahfouz thirty years later. In awarding Mahfouz the Nobel prize, the Swedish Academy listed *Awlad haratina* as one of the milestones in Mahfouz's career that had earned him international recognition. The special attention paid to this banned book brought the fate of its publication in Egypt again into question. A campaign was launched by some of Egypt's leading critics, including Ghali Shukri and Raga al-Naqqash, to obtain a green light from al-Azhar for publication, reiterating that there had been no legal action against the book. In fact, the Egyptian evening paper *al-Masa'* began to serialize the novel once more. The moment was indisputably a permissive one, but Mahfouz declined. He asked that *al-Masa'* stop publication with the excuse that his permission had not been obtained and he refused to engage in the live debate that was taking place, so that it eventually died down.[13]

Publisher's Notes:

* Translation published as *Khufu's Wisdom* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003).

** Translation published as *Cairo Modern* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008).

Notes

1 Gamal al-Ghitani, *Najib Mahfuz yatadhakkar* (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1987), p. 9.

2 Ghali Shukri, *al-Muntami: dirasa fi adab Najib Mahfuz* (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1964, 1969, 1982, 1988).

3 Ghali Shukri, *Najib Mahfuz: min al-jammaliya ila nubil* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-'Amma li-l-Isti'lamat, 1988), p. 103.

4 Louis Awad, *Dirasat fi-l-adab wa-l-naqd* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anglu, 1964).

5 I am here including Naguib Mahfouz's appointment as member of the editorial staff of *al-Ahram* after his retirement in 1971. Mahfouz's first governmental post was in the administration of Fuad I University in 1934. His appointments from then on were as follows: in 1939, he was appointed parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Waqfs; in 1960 he became chair of the Cinema Institute; in 1962, he was appointed art advisor to the Cinema Organization; in 1963, he headed the Reading Committee of the General Cinema Organization; in 1965, he became a member of the Supreme Council for Arts and Letters; in 1966, he was appointed general supervisor of the General Cinema Organization; from 1968 to 1971 he was chosen as consultant to the minister of culture, Tharwat Ukasha. Mahfouz retired in November 1971 and joined the editorial staff of *al-Ahram* during December of the same year.

6 This information is part of an interview conducted with Dr. Adham Ragab in Cairo's weekly magazine *Uktubar*, 30 October 1988.

7 My interviews with Naguib Mahfouz at *al-Ahram*, 1989.

8 Ibid.

9 Mahmud Fawzi, *Najib Mahfuz: za'im al-harafish* (Cairo: Dar al-Jil, 1988), p. 43.

10 My interview with Mahfouz at *al-Ahram*, 1989.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 My interview with Fathi al-Ashri at *al-Ahram*, 1990. Al-Ashri is one of the literary critics at *al-Ahram* and was the first to volunteer some of his time to help organize and supervise Mahfouz's schedule since the Nobel prize. By virtue of his position, al-Ashri has been in close contact with Mahfouz himself and has been exposed to most of the issues and controversies that have surrounded Mahfous since the award.

Khairy Shalaby

Fist Fight

from
The Lodging House
2006

I never thought I could be brought down so low that I would accept living in Wikalat Atiya. Nor did I imagine that I would become such a rotten bum that I would come to know a place in the city of Damanhour called Wikalat Atiya. It was a place someone like me would not dream of under any circumstances; my feet could not take me to such a far-off place, which the sons of the city themselves might not even know, even those who traveled through it from one end to the other, and who knew every rat hole in it, had I not—as it became clear to me—broken the world's record for bumming and homelessness.

I am supposed to be a student at the Public Teachers' Institute; I mean that's what I was over two years ago. I was on the verge of becoming a teacher after a year, since my talent was obvious in pedagogical studies and in lesson planning, including the modern methodologies, though I was plagued by a math teacher who was despicable and disgusting and a bastard. He was not happy that sons of detestable peasants from villages and hamlets, more like barefoot riffraff than anything else, could excel in education over the true sons of schools, originally from elite backgrounds and good, wealthy folks;

and so he would screw with me in every exam, provoking me with dirty looks, writing me up every time I sat up in my seat or coughed or turned around to ask one of my classmates for a ruler or compass or an eraser, things that I don't think ever bought once throughout all my school days. This pissed him off, and it made him even more bitter that I never bought a book he required or a quad-lined notebook which, he urged, was necessary. So the son of a bitch saw fit to prevent anyone from helping me one bit; he even kicked out a classmate who snuck me a compass. When he cussed me out, I began to aim looks of suppressed hatred at him, such that I enraged him terribly, and he took away my blank answer sheet, and then, like the swaggering, pompous ass he was, kicked me out. I froze as if nailed in place, shaking with fury; my eyes must have been like flaming arrows, since he bared his teeth and said, "Why are you looking at me like that, boy?"

Still I persisted in my gaze, I don't know why or what I could have done. He kicked me, his kicks forcing me toward the classroom door, and I was down flat on my face, I who had not so long ago fancied myself a venerable, respectable teacher. I lost it but quickly pulled myself back together. Like a wild, rabid dog I threw myself at the gut of Wael Effendi the math teacher with all my might. I snapped at the flesh of his face with my teeth, and I bashed in his nose and teeth with my forehead, I kneed him in the groin and stomped on his shins, until he fell down to the ground, and I kneeled over him holding this collar and burying my fingers in the flesh of his neck. The whole exam hall sprang to life. I felt like an entire city was raining blows on my body, trying in vain to extract him from me. The clamor grew and cheating flared up and tons of crib notes and cheat sheets began piling up, and the dean came running in a panic, and more than one policeman came, and the billy club slammed down on my back, my rear end, and my head. But every blow I received, I returned to Wael Effendi by raising his head then smashing it on the ground as if I wanted to shake out his brain. Then when it appeared to me that he'd given up the ghost and all his limbs had collapsed and he turned yellow and the light in his eyes had gone out completely, I went limp, and I responded to the hands that lifted me from him. When I stood up I started stomping on his stomach, on his groin, on his face, until I felt him in a shredded heap, stained with blood, my blood and his.

They took him to the hospital in critical condition; they handed me over to the city police in pitiful condition, accompanied by the dean's curses and his description of my family and all my kind as despicable hooligans, and he cursed Taha Hussein as the one who destroyed education and polluted it with lowlifes like me. I knew that he would say this, but I didn't give a damn; for I was certain that I had quenched my thirst for revenge and avenged my wounded pride, and many of my classmates were looking at me with a great deal of sorrow tinged with something like admiration; and besides, I felt that I hadn't finished the piss that I must yet piss in Wael Effendi's mouth, but I would still go to jail and my future would be ruined at his hands, and that I would undoubtedly kill him the moment I was free again.

The court took pity on me, giving me a six-month suspended sentence and expelling me from the Institute. A year after that I went to school one day, on the pretext of getting my transcripts, intending to stick a knife in the heart of Wael Effendi, and I was surprised to find that he had been disfigured by the loss of an eye where apparently, in my madness, I had gouged it out, and the marks my teeth had dug in all over his face were still there, and he walked to class a broken man, having given up his arrogance and swagger and lowered his perpetually bellowing voice with his lisping, fancy tongue. As for the distinctive elegance of his dress, it had faded completely. I noticed my grip on the knife handle loosening in my pocket and I was overcome with a kind of pity for the both of us. He had seen me out of the corner of his good eye but he didn't recognized me since my appearance had changed drastically, for my hair had grown long and was visibly messed up and my beard had grown, and my clothes were wrinkled and dirt had accumulated on my face and my hands and my clothes, so much so that most of my classmates did not recognize me as they passed by me in the schoolyard or the secretary's office. Actually I liked that, as I hadn't wanted them to remember me, and I only wanted to get my papers and put them in the pocket of my gallabiya to use as identity papers when necessary.

That incident meant that I would never return to my village at all, and that I would make the city streets my home. I spent all day and all night wandering the streets and alleys and neighborhoods, from Susi Street to Mudiriya Street to Iflaqa Bridge to Shubra to Abu al-Rish to Nadi Street. I

spent some time at the public library reading stories and novels and poetry, looking for a better world to shelter me for a few hours, after which I turned back to the asphalt streets of Damanhour, stingy by their very nature, dry in character, and inhospitable to strangers. I cut across Susi Street from al-Sagha Street after I had smelled enough of the ful midammis wafting upward from al-Asi's restaurant, the most famous ful-maker in all of Egypt, for they say that he presented King Farouk with a pot of his ful, and when the king had a dish of it for breakfast, he gave him the rank of bey via urgent cable, the title by which he was now called by the dozens, no, hundreds of visitors who came to his restaurant every day, from all over the country, for a dish of this famous ful.

When I turned off Susi Street and onto Suq Street, I was greeted by the fruits of Fakharani in a complete garden of awesome and appetizing scents, so it pleased me to plunge into the bazaar, to mix in my nose the smells of apples, dates, guava, and lemon with the smells of fish and meats and gargir and dung from the horses drawing wagons. The crowded street, paved with broad, flat stones and crisscrossed with little canyons of dirty water, spat me out onto the main street which was the height of cleanliness, running from the railroad station to Iflaqa Bridge on Mahmudiya Canal. By that time the smell of frying ta'miya had intoxicated me and I was convinced that I had eaten my fill, even though my insides were completely empty. When the dark night came all sensations gave way to stifling cold or fear or loss. I knew sleep inside the drain pipes and under the trees on the rural thoroughfares and near the twenty-four-hour bakeries and on the sidewalks close to the low-class coffee shops, yet I hadn't fallen so low as to know the place called Wikalat Atiya.

Translated by Farouk Abdel Wahab

Feral J. Ghazoul

Nomadic Text

from

Nocturnal Poetics

1996

The Arabian Nights has moved with ease and confidence from one cultural context to another, and has managed to transplant itself into different epochs. In his study of the influence to *The Arabian Nights* on European and American literatures, Robert lrwin suggests humorously—but correctly—in a chapter entitled *"Children of the Nights"* that "it might have been an easier, shorter chapter if [he] had discussed those writers who were not influenced by the *Nights*."[1] So pervasive has been the presence of *The Arabian Nights* in Western imagination over the last three centuries that it is difficult to find writers who have escaped its fascination and abstained from alluding to it. This includes such writers and literati as Voltaire and Proust, Wordsworth and Joyce, Poe and Whitman.[2] How can one work be shared and internalized by so many writers who belong to different and often hostile schools and orientations?

Even more striking are the critical debates which have used *The Arabian Nights* as a text of reference—if not a battleground—to further their position.[3] This marvelous work also seems to cut across epochs and cultures: ancient Indians, medieval Persians and Arabs, Europeans during the Renaissance and

the Age of Enlightenment, as people of the New World—both in its southern and northern hemispheres—have dwelt on this work. It is indeed a text for all times and places. How does this text manage to travel so well and not wither in alien climates and distant regions?

It is remarkable that a text which is neither sacred nor canonical can overpower and interpenetrate so many cultural and literary systems. No doubt, the very fact of its fluidity and tolerance for textual mutations and variations has strengthened its ability to migrate. Added to this, its segmentary character based on autonomous narrative blocks and detachable enframed and framing stories, make it easier to de-link the parts and recycle the narratives, or specific blocks in them, for an infinite number of new ends. There is no need to bind oneself to the whole chain, since one can choose the stories one fancies without having to deal with the rest. There is thus a double flexibility in the text of *The Arabian Nights:* stylistically, it offers an unfixed discourse and structurally it offers loose (but by no means absent) links of articulation. It can, in other words, be easily deconstructed and reconstructed, rendering itself an example of a recyclable artifact.

The variety of themes and motifs in *The Arabian Nights* offers essentially an encyclopedia of narrative tales and genres. This allows for the coexistence of a variety of narratives: short and long, elaborate and simple, fables and epics, sacred and pornographic, childish and philosophical. *The Arabian Nights* also combines many narrative techniques—from boxing and embedding, perspectivism and self-reflexivity, juxtaposition of poetry and prose, tragic and comic plotting—thus allowing any sensibility to find an echo in one or more of the heterogeneous samples. The unity of the whole is at a deep level, permitting diversity on the surface level.

It is, then, the richness and variety of the text with the possibilities of excision and refashioning inherent in it that explains its continuous appeal and influence. But that is not all, for collections of stories abound and none really occupy the privileged position of *The Arabian Nights* in the world's imagination. The reason for this, I believe, lies in the nature of the frame story which justifies the telling and transforms the framework from a contrived gadget or a narrative machine to an engendering matrix. The frame story joins narration and creativity with their raison d'être; it turns narration itself

upon itself. It is a self-reflexive text, and in that sense it appeals not only to those who enjoy a good narrative, but also to those who like to understand the phenomenon of narration. Unlike other collections that may have moral, religious, or social ends, *The Arabian Nights'* end is contemplating its own activity. It is somewhat like an *ars poetica,* a poem about writing poetry, or a play about the performing of a play. Such works will always capture the interest of those who wonder about the literary process itself, the nature of art and fiction, and indeed the identities and inversions of human activity in its myriad forms.

The thematic thrust of the frame story, which offers a myth of myths, is based on deploying fundamental drives or instincts—those of life and death, of integration and disintegration—about which not enough can ever be said. The text seems to perceive that it is embarking on a never-ending path, and thus projects an infinite discourse—a narration that goes on and on. This ongoing narrative impulse has proved to be contagious: not only do its readers want to reread it, but they also want to rewrite it. It has, if one may borrow from Eco his term *opera aperta,* "open structure." It is not only a work that offers a hope, it is also a work that invites participation in the form of rewriting, recompiling, or reinterpreting. The ending is not a real closure, but more of bringing down of a curtain on a stage to stop the performance for the night, while promising more performances and sequels.

The nomadic character of *The Arabian Nights* stems from an intersection of several factors: (1) the variety of the enframed genres with an overall framing unity and a matricial base; (2) the work revolves around elemental forces in human existence and thus speaks to everyone, everywhere; (3) the work addresses itself to the problematic of its very being—narration—constituting what amounts to the creation of a myth of the origin of verbal creativity and its healing powers; and (4) the unlimited options afforded by the stylistic fluidity and structural flexibility of the work.

But above and beyond these factors, what makes *The Arabian Nights* such a widely and diversely interesting next is its "otherness." Its beauty is unconventional; it is darkly beautiful, for it articulates the beauty of what is suppressed and oppressed. It uncovers unspeakable desires and marginalized types. Women, salves, and the riffraff are central. It is not only

that Shahrazad narrates her stories at night that makes the poetics of the work nocturnal—it is also because she adopts a nocturnal rhetoric and a Dionysian poetics. All the chaotic, anarchic, and subaltern drives constitute the "otherness" that is aired freely in the text. Inasmuch as civilizations everywhere are based on repression, the need to acknowledge what is repressed is essential and a relief. When reading *The Arabian Nights,* we feel that we are getting even with canonical values and their tyranny. Even though *The Arabian Nights* constitutes no longer a taboo, it remains for the West, and possibly for the world at large, an alien cultural product with an-other poetics. In Arab culture, it is identified with the rabble and can never aspire to canonization, no matter how influential it has become with the literary elite. At the deepest level, it is precisely this "otherness"—aesthetic and cultural—that makes the work so continuously appealing. A text that evokes the distanced and the buried makes one feel a sense of restoration in internalizing it.

Many cultures, needless to say, have contributed to *The Arabian Nights* as we know it, but it remains associated with the Arabs who have preserved it. Is there something in early Arab aesthetics and culture that touched a certain chord when first listening to the narratives of *The Arabian Nights?* It is difficult to answer such questions, but we can speculate as to why the Arabs held on to this work despite the fact that it went against the grain—at least against the canons of the literary establishment.

I would venture to explain the persistence and growth of this collection of tales in Arab culture as a result of the fact that it complements and dovetails with the *qasida,* the classical Arab ode. Both types are made to move easily in a nomadic life style. The Bedouins in their moves from one place to another had developed art forms that suited their nomadism and migrations. Dramatic performances need a fixed stage and an elaborate theatrical institution, which nomads could not afford given their way of life. This does not mean that there was no drama, but it means that dramatic art was probably subsumed in ritual drama and holy sacrifice. Narrative and poetry, on the other hand, need one *rawi* to recite the text, and this recitor needs an exceptional memory in order to narrate and declaim. Even though writing was well-known in pre-Islamic Arabia, the Bedouin life style, ever on the move,

imposed an economy of tools and reduced what was to be carried around to the minimum. Mnemonic aids were a necessity in this cultural ambiance, and Arabic poetry developed its own structural and rhythmic devices that would ensure the memorization of a text. Monorhyme prosody and limited meters helped pack up Arabic lyricism from one place to another, in specifically defined verbal containers, so to speak. A parallel device that helped preserve prose narratives used an opposite, albeit complementary, strategy. It made use of expandable containers that functioned like verbal accordions. In *The Arabian Nights,* the complex narrative structure allows for the maximum capacities of enfolding, while permitting and even encouraging stylistic liberty and license. In the *qasida* the complex poetic meters control the stream of words and subordinate them to the straightjackets of prosody. Both strategies tap and channel verbal creativity, but in classical Arabic poetry the formulation affects the very order of signifiers, while the unacanonical formulation of *The Arabian Nights* affects the order of signifieds. Textual nomadism is the result of an entrenched oral culture and the lack of affixing institutions. Although the Arabs had their oasis towns in Arabia before Islam where writing was known and used, a culture of writing was not yet in evidence—with all that it implies in changes of thought and knowledge. After the advent of Islam and the rise of powerful and settled caliphates in Syria, Iraq, Spain, etc., one would not expect a poetics built on orality to persist, yet it did—alongside a culture based on the book and *écriture.* The poetics of the nomads exemplified in the *qasida* remained overpowering, even though a more written poetics was developing in what came to be called *adab,* with its new prose rhythms and elaborate sentence structures. With writing, texts developed in the medieval Arab world that covered philosophical treatises and refined narratives, while some works—like *The Arabian Nights*—though written down by narrators, were never part of the literary canon and thus continued to carry the imprint of free oral diversifications. But unlike the oral poetics of the *qasida, The Arabian Nights* was neither glorified nor recognized as literature. If the poetics of the *qasida* represented the Apollonian streak—the poetics of broad daylight—that of *The Arabian Nights* represented the Dionysian streak,

to borrow the Nietzschean opposition, a poetics of the dark and of secret nights. The poetics of The Arabian Nights is determinedly nocturnal: it deals with nocturnal narrations and stands for a tenebrous aesthetics. Its poetics is nocturnal, literally and metaphorically.

Notes

1 Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*, 290–91.

2 On the presence of *The Arabian Nights* in literature and culture, see Hiam Aboul-Hussein and Charles Pellat, *Cheherazade: Personnage littéraire* (Alger: SNED, 1981), and Pete Caracciolo, ed. *The Arabian Nights in English Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

3 See on the role of The Arabian Nights in shaping nineteenth-century criticism in England: Muhsin Jassim Ali, *Scheherazade in England* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1981).

Yusuf Idris

The Cheapest Nights

from

The Essential Yusuf Idris

2008

A little after evening prayers a torrent of abuse gushing out of Abd al-Kerim came pouring down on the entire village, sweeping Tantawi and all his ancestors in its wake.

No sooner had he rushed through the four prostrations than Abd al-Kerim stole out of the mosque and hurried down the narrow lane, apparently irritated, one hand clasping the other tightly behind his back. He was leaning forward, his shoulders bent, almost as if weighed down by the woolen shawl he was wearing, which he had spun with his own hands from the wool of his ewe. Presently he raised his brass-yellow face and caught the wind on the trip of his long hooked nose, blotched with many ugly black spots. He muttered, clenching his teeth, and the taut dry skin of his face wrinkled, bringing the points of his mustache level with the tips of his eyebrows, which were still speckled with drops of water from his ablutions.

His irritation grew as he trudged along down the narrow lane trying to find a path for his large flat feet with cracks in their soles so deep they could easily swallow up a nail.

The lane was teeming with youngsters scattered like breadcrumbs, tumbling about in all directions, and getting in his way. They pulled at his shawl, knocked against him, and made him cut his large protruding toe on the bits of tin they were kicking in his path. All he could do was lash out at them, vituperating furiously against their fathers and their forefathers, the rotten seed that gave them life, and the midwife who brought them to existence. Shaking with rage he cursed, and swore, and snorted, and spat on the wretched town where brats sprouted out of the ground in greater numbers than the hairs on one's head. But he comforted himself with the thought that the future was going to take care of them. Half of them were sure to die of starvation, while cholera would carry off the rest.

He sighed with relief as he emerged from the swarming lane into the open square surrounding the pond which stood in the middle of the town. Darkness spread before him where the low gray houses nestled close to one another, with heaps of manure piled before them like long-neglected graves. Only a few lamps shining across the wide circle of night indicated that there were living creatures packed beneath their roofs. Their dim red lights, winking in the distance like the fiery eyes of sprites, came across and sank in the blackness of the pool.

Abd al-Kerim peered into the gloom that stretched before him, the stink from the swamp winding its way up his nostrils. It oppressed him so he couldn't breath. He thought of the townspeople already snoring behind their bolted doors oppressed him even more. But now his anger turned on Tantawi, the watchman, as he recalled the glass of tea the latter had offered him in the glow of sunset, and which his parched throat and his longing for it had forced him to accept at the cost of his pride.

It was very still in the square. Still as a graveyard; nothing stirred. Abd al-Kerim walked on, but halfway across he halted. Not without reason. Had he followed where his feet were taking him, in a few paces he would have been home and, having bolted the door behind him, there was nothing for him but to flop on his pallet and go to sleep, and there was not a grain of sleep in his eyes just then. His head felt clearer than pump water, lighter than pure honey, and he could have stayed awake till the next crescent moon of Ramadan appeared. All because he couldn't resist a glass of black tea, and Tantawi's fiendish smile.

And now he felt no desire to sleep and the townspeople were all huddled, snoring in their hovels, leaving the night to their obnoxious children. What was he to do with himself? Stay up. But where? Doing what? Should he join the boys playing hide-and-seek? Or hang around for the little girls to gather round him and snigger? Where could he go with pockets picked clean? Not a wretched piaster with which to take himself to Abou al-Assaad's den, for instance. There he could ordered a coffee and then smoke a waterpipe and stay till all hours, or sit and watch solicitors' clerks at their game of cards, and listen to the radio blaring out things he didn't understand. He could laugh to his heart's content poking Abou Khalil in the ribs and then move on to where Mo'allem Ammar was sitting with the cattle dealers and join their conversation about the slump in the market. But he hadn't a wretched piaster. God bring your house to ruin, Tantawi!

Nor could he go across to Shaykh Abd al-Megid's, where he was sure to find him squatting behind a brazier with a coffee-pot gently boiling on top. Al-Sheehy would be there, sitting near him, telling of the nights that made his hair turn gray, and the days gone by when he had thrived on the simpleminded, kind-hearted folks of those days, and how he was made to repent of swindling and thieving and laying waste of other people's crops by the wily generation of today.

No, he couldn't even go there, because only the day before he had pushed the man into the basin below the waterwheel and made a laughing stock of him. They'd been having an argument over the cost of repairing the wheel. Not a civil word had passed between them since.

If only he could just grab his ferruled cane and go to collect Sama'an and together make off for the neighboring farm of al-Balabsa. There was fun to be had over there. Wedding feasts, and dancing girls, and high jinks, and merry-making, and what-have-you. But where was the money for all that? Besides, it was late. Very likely Sama'an would have gone to make it up with his wife at her uncle's, where she was staying. And the road was treacherous, and everything was pitch black. Merciful God! Why must he be the only clod in town tormented by lack of sleep? And Tantawi. *He* wasn't tormented. *He* was probably snoring away peacefully in some quiet nook. God in heaven, let him snore his away to hell!

Suppose now that he were simply to go home like a God-fearing man. He would nudge his wife and make her get up and light the petrol lamp, heat the oven, warm him a loaf of bread and bring him the green peppers left over from lunch. With luck there might be a piece of pie left over too, which his wife's mother had sent them in the morning. And then she'd make him a nice brew of fenugreek and after that, pleased as a sultan, he'd sit and repair the handles of his three worn reed baskets.

Yes, what if he did just that? Would the station take wings and fly, or would the heavens collapse on the threshing floor? He knew no such thing was likely to occur. He also knew his wife. She would be lying like a bag of maize with her brood of six scattered round her like a litter of puppies. Nothing would make her stir. Not even the angel Israfil blowing his trumpet to raise the dead. And even if by some miracle she were to wake up, what then? He wasn't kidding himself. The petrol lamp was only half full and the woman would be needing it when she sat up to bake all night tomorrow. That is, if they all lived till tomorrow. And the children, growing hungry at sundown, would have devoured the last of the peppers with the last scrap of bread. And the pie was sure to have followed after the peppers and the bread. As for fenugreek and sugar, he needn't worry. There simply wasn't any in his house. And never again was he going to be offered a glass of tea like the one he had drained at Tantawi's.

God damn your soul to hell, Tantawi, son of Zebeida!

Anyone coming to relieve himself in the square at that hour, and seeing Abd al-Kerim planted in the middle of it like a scarecrow, would have thought him touched in the head or possessed of a devil. He was neither. Just a man whose perplexity was greater than he could deal with. A simple man, unfamiliar with the things of the night, the tea playing havoc with his head; his pockets stripped clean on a cold winter's night, and all his companions long sunk in deep sleep. What was there for him to do?

He stood thinking for a long time before he made up his mind. Having no choice he crossed to the other end of the square. He could only do what he always did on cold winter nights.

Finally he was home. He bolted the door and picked his way carefully in the dark over the bodies of his sleeping children, to the top of the mud oven. Inwardly he reproached the fates which had plagued him with six bellies so voracious they could gobble up bricks.

He knew his way in the dark from long habit on cold winter nights. And when he found his woman he didn't nudge her. He took her hand and began to crack her knuckles one by one, and to rub against her feet, caked with tons of dirt. He tickled her roughly, sending a shiver down her sleeping bulk. The woman stirred with the last curse he called on Tantawi's head. She heaved herself over and asked nonchalantly through a large yawn what the man had done to deserve being cursed in the middle of the night. Abd al-Kerim muttered, cursing whoever drove him to do this, as he fumbled with this clothes preparing for what was about to be.

Months later the woman came to him once again to announce the birth of a son. His seventh. He condoled with himself over this belated arrival. All the bricks of the earth would never fill up this one either.

And months and years later, Abd al-Kerim was still stumbling on swarms of brats littering the lanes, tumbling about in all directions and getting in his way as he came and went. And every night, with hands behind his back, catching the wind on his long hooked nose, he still wondered what pit in heaven or earth kept throwing them up.

Translated by Wadida Wassef

Salwa Bakr

City of the Prophets

from

The Man from Bashmour

2007

I left Baghdad several days later, by which time Shihab had made all the necessary arrangements for my exodus. He told me that my departure coincided with the conjunction of 'the head' and Mercury. Before leaving, I went to my Sheikh's zawiya, where I performed two cycles of prayers and asked God Almighty to bless me on my way. Yashkuri, who was there to bid me farewell, gave me two tunics and an elegant Baghdad-made robe modeled on the type made for the caliph, which was as beautiful as any I had ever seen, to wear when I traveled. I gripped him in a long embrace and thanked him for the gifts, then mounted my riding camel, which was a robust workhorse that Shihab had presented to me. His wife Rawayihiya had given me a number of long-necked glass bottles filled with perfume that she said I could give to whomever I liked, use myself, or sell if I needed to along the way. As for Rita, she supplied me with some semolina cakes, which are a type of dry sweet well suited for travel. She wished me many blessings and stood there a long time asking God to keep me in care and to grant me safety and success.

Having paid most of the money I had made during my employment at the stationer's shop, and which I had left in the safekeeping of Shihab's wife, to the owner of the caravan that would be overseeing my journey, I had just a few pennies in my pocket.

At the journey's outset the caravan only stopped long enough for us to rest or sleep until, two days later, we reached the city of Jerusalem. As I observed the city, I noted that it was built upon a mountain. At the time of our arrival it was raining hard, which we were told was normal for Jerusalem. The purpose for our stop there was to allow some of the merchants in the caravan to deliver some of their wares. When the guards granted us permission to go into the city's marketplaces, we were led to a location referred to as The Three Markets near the Mihrab Gate, which included a market for perfumers and druggists and another for fabric vendors. We then passed through the qaysariyat with their roofed marketplaces, bazaars, hotels, and merchants' inns with residences located from above them, until at last we arrived at a large caravansary constructed from lovely pink stone. In the center of it there was a courtyard with the appearance of a roofed bazaar. We went inside and tied our riding animals. I learned later that this place was known as Khan al-Fahm, located on Khatt Dawud, or King David Avenue, which was the city's main thoroughfare. This street, which was the city's largest, ran from the Aqsa Mosque at Bab al-Silsila, that is, the Chain Gate, as far as Bab al-Mihrab, or the Prayer Niche Gate, which is known also as Bab al-Khalil, or the Hebron Gate.

Along the way I became acquainted with a man who traded in spices, and who appeared to be highly virtuous and well mannered. Near the beginning for our journey a rest shop in one of the villages located along the road that led out of Baghdad, I noticed him shooting me frequent, scrutinizing glances. Not pleased about this, I began feeling restless and suspicious of him.

"Sir," I said to him, "you keep looking at me. Have you perchance learned something about me that you disapprove of?"

"Certainly not!" he replied. "I have never seen you before. Nor do I disapprove of you on account of anything I see in you. However, I am a man with a discerning eye, and I know people well. You are going out in search of someone dear to you, and you will expend great effort and time in the

process. This person in quite ill, though, and you may or may not reach him in time. Only God knows. However, on your way to him you will continue on the path you have set out on, and never turn back."

I was amazed at what the man had said. At the same time, I was gripped with a sense of dejection, fearing that some harm may have come to my beloved Thawna. When I asked him how he had perceived these things, he refrained from saying anything more, as though he were not willing to confide things about himself to someone like me. Consequently, I felt annoyed and offended at his self-importance.

So I pressed him, saying, "What you just said is nothing but superstition and trickery. No one knows the future but God alone. Have you ever heard the saying, 'Astrologers lie even when they speak the truth'?"

Realizing what I was getting at, he retorted quickly, "I am not an astrologer, I assure you. Rather, physiognomy is a profound science. Have you never heard what the sheikh and philosopher once said about it? He said, 'Outward vision only sees perceptible entities when darkness is dispersed by the light of the sun, and when the barriers which separate vision from its objects disappear. So also with inward vision: It is not within its capacity to perceive the spiritual world unless the mirror of the heart has been purged of the lusts that prevent the divine light from being reflected therein.'"

Then he added, "I have 'read' what you are setting out to do through physiognomy. I have observed you as we have traveled, including your various tones of voice, the way your neck moves, the outlines of your nose and eyes, the condition of your hair, the odor given off by your body, the condition of your teeth, and the shape of your hands and feet. I have even observed the condition of your fingers, toes, fingernails, and toenails."

Incredulous at what he was saying, I recalled that a Hanafi sheikh from Harran had once come to Afif's shop requesting that he copy a book which he described as being precious and rare. He said that some time earlier, the caliph had asked his chief translator to find a copy of this book and to translate it for him into Arabic due to the great wisdom and knowledge it contained. The translator betook himself to the land of the Greeks beyond the Byzantine Sea and found the book, which was entitled *The Secret of Secrets,* in a pagan temple to the sun. It had been written by a sage of old by the name of Aristotle

for a renowned king, although it had been copied from an ancient manuscript wrongly attributed to the thrice-great Hermes. In any case, the man came across a copy of the book in Persian, from which he then translated it.

As we were spending the night in the caravansary, a man who had just arrived in the city from the land of the Greeks informed us that the Byzantine emperor Nikephorus had advanced into Bulgaria and laid siege to its capital city, then defeated and sacked it. In the process, he had killed large numbers of people. So great was Nikephorus's barbarism, he said, that he had begun laying out young men on the ground and trampling them underfoot.

Then, after night had fallen and we had gone to sleep, we were all awakened by the sound of loud laughter and guffawing. We got up to see what the matter was, and what should we find but that one of the merchants was having a fit of laughter which he had no power to control. We tried every trick in the book to get him to quiet down from reprimands, to curse, to beatings, to water poured over his head, to poking, to slapping, to pinching, to reciting verses of the Holy Qur'an intended to ward off evil influences, but all to no avail. Some of us thought he had gone mad. He remained in this condition for an hour, then died. Some of the elders who were with us suspected foul play. The man had brought an Ethiopian slave with him, so they took him aside for questioning. They tied him up and flogged him till he bled, and when he could not bear the pain any longer, he confessed that he had given the man a poison know as 'laughing poison.' When he was questioned as to the nature of the poison, he told his questioners how he had made it: He took twenty dirhams of ginger, and fifty dirhams of pepper, then ground them all into a fine powder. Then he added five ratls of water and soaked the mixture in it for one day and one night. Then he took a ratl of saffron, ground it up finely and soaked it in the five ratls of water that had been mixed with the previously mentioned ingredients. This, too, he let soak for a day and a night, after which he allowed it to macerate. He then left the mixture until the solids had settled to the bottom, leaving the water clear. In this clear water he soaked another quarter of a ratl of saffron for one day and one night. He then repeated this process two more times until it had become a deadly poison. He said that he had given his victim two dirhams of the poison mixed with honey at his dinnertime, since his master had been in the

habit of drinking honey mixed with water after the final evening prayer. What he had done, he said, was all on account of the fact that after accusing him of being remiss in his work, his master had threatened on more than one occasion to castrate him. The slave added that he had been afraid that this master was actually going to carry out his threat when the caravan arrived in Egypt.

The following day, they took the slave and handed him over to the city police chief. As for the dead man, we brought him grave clothes from the market, then washed his body and prepared it for burial. From the caravansary we took the deceased to the city's great mosque, where we prayed over him and buried him in a nearby tomb. As for his merchandise, we inventoried it and left it as a deposit with the caravansary proprietor until the man's family had been informed of his death.

Never in my life had I seen a mosque as magnificent as the Aqsa Mosque. Hence, when we left the cemetery, I excused myself from those who were with me and went back to get a better look at it, since my earlier exposure to it had confirmed to me that it was, indeed, one of the most splendid, extraordinary mosques in all of existence. A masterfully constructed edifice overlaid with gold and colored with pure dyes, it had numerous doors opening out from its three sides, and the entire mosque was wide-open space, unroofed anywhere but at one end. It had a spacious, rectangular atrium of exquisite beauty and delicate craftsmanship with colonnades of colored marble and mosaics that were more beautiful than any I had ever seen, even in the church at Antioch. In the atrium there was a large platform five cubits in height, with stairs that led up to if from several locations. In the center of the platform rested a huge, octagonal, lead dome on marble pillars. The dome was embellished inside and out with mosaic and colored marble. In the center of the dome was the rock to which people make pilgrimage, and on the edge of which one can see the footprint of the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace. Beneath it was a grotto into which one descended by several steps and inside of which one could pray. This dome had four doors and to its east there lay another dome atop lovely columns called the Dome of the Chain. The Dome of the Ascension was likewise located on the platform, as was the Dome of the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace. All of these rested on columns and were topped with lead. In the mosque floor,

numerous basins and reservoirs had been dug, as the entire mosque had been built over a rock in which rainwater would collect. Consequently, not a single drop of it went to waste, and everyone could benefit from it.

I went on wandering around the mosque until after the mid-afternoon prayer. After I had performed my ablution, prayed, and uttered praises to God, I approached one of the walls of the mosque's atrium and sat down besides it. My roaming about the mosque, our walk to the cemetery, and insufficient sleep the night before had left me in a state of weariness. For some time I sat there ruminating, staring into the firmament that opened out above me and at the land that was visible to me in the distance, with its meadows, its tilled field, its hills, and its houses. Then I began thinking about something my sheikh had said once as he spoke to us about his inner certainty:

> I found heat to be opposed to cold, and I found that the two opposites could never come together in a single place so long as their natures are what they are. I thus perceived from their existence together that there is something that unites them, an irresistible power that conquers them contrary to their natural propensities. That which can be conquered is weak. Moreover, this weakness, together with the influence of that which conquers it, is evidence both of its temporal nature and of a being that brought it into existence, an originator that originated it, however, its creator or originator does not resemble it, because whatever resembles it must, ipso facto, likewise be temporal. Hence, its creator and originator is God, the Lord of the worlds.

I remained in this state for some time, reflecting on the cosmos and its grandeur, until my body grew lax and senses were dulled, and my consciousness began to grow hazy. Hence, I was tempted to surrender to my lethargy and take a much-needed nap to help me through what remained of the day and what might face me at the caravansary that night. I remained motionless for some time with my eyes open, staring into the heavenly expanse above me and meditating on the majesty of the Creator. Enveloped by a sultry breeze

that refreshed my spirit and calmed my senses, I found myself slipping little by little into a contented, peaceful slumber. I do not know how long I remained in that state. However, I wakened to something which, for all I know, may have been a dream, or may have been a waking vision of reality itself. My beloved Thawna had come to me in the same dorm in which I had seen him once before while I was hiding in the marshlands of Egypt. As he had been the first time, he was standing atop a high hill with a staff in his hand. His face radiant with benevolence, he said, “Why the rush? Rather, remain in the city of the prophets until your spirit has drunk its fill and is indwelt fully with faith. Then come. I will wait until you get here.”

I sat there for a while, speechless and disconcerted, uncertain what to make of what I had just experienced and the vision I had had of Thawna. But then God granted me guidance and opened up a clearer understanding to me. As a consequence, I made up my mind to do the very opposite of what I had originally intended. Getting up quickly, I went to the caravansary, where I found the caravan guide and informed him that I would not be leaving with the others the next morning. Instead, I explained, I would by staying for some time in his city of the prophets. After bidding farewell to all those who had been with me on the journey, I gathered up my meager belongings and left. On my way out the gate, I met up with the physiognomist who had spoken to me before, and when I began bidding him farewell, too, he looked at me thoughtfully, then said, “Did I not tell you that you were about to embark on a path from which you would never turn back?”

I roamed about Jerusalem for some time thereafter. Winter after winter passed, and summer after summer. The city grew accustomed to me, as I grew accustomed to it. I would spend one night in a mosque, another in a marketplace, and still another in an orchard or a wilderness. The city had captivated me as no other city ever had, so much so that I could not part with it. It was as if there were no other place on earth where my spirit could find solace and comfort.

Some days I would spend in churches, and others in mosques. At other times I would go up to the fortress, then to David’s Prayer Niche in the heart of the mosque that had been built on the West side of the fortress wall. An elevated spot to which one could ascend by a staircase, it marked the place

where the Prophet David had sat, upon him be peace. I would linger there, looking through the large stone window where a mark had been left by his elbow when it sank into the stone, and I would marvel at the tile in which the imprint had been made. As for the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, its structures are among the wonders of the world. I would go there from time to time and gaze at the place where the Master, upon him be peace, had sat on the stone, and the rock-strewn spot where he was flogged and tormented, as well as the prison in which he was placed. I would remain there until the arrival of someone from the house of Nusayba or the house of Jawda—two Muslim families that had been given the keys to the church and entrusted with the tasks of opening and closing it.

I lived off what I received from people by way of alms and gifts, and most of my time was spent in prayer and worship. I preferred peregrination to anything else in this world. Sometimes I would go down to Dayr al-Musallaba, an old Byzantine monastery masterfully constructed of stones and lime. Situated gracefully in a sea of olive trees, grapevines, and fig trees not far from a village to which it was connected by a road, the monastery housed Greek iconographic paintings that had been drawn with the most exquisite skill and symmetry.

Other times I would go to an elevated spot that overlook the Jericho Valley, the site of another monastery known as Dayr al-Siq, which in its turn looked out over green expanses and the River Jordan. Once there, I would be received by gracious, spirited monks, who would offer me some of what they had on hand by way of bread and fruit, then leave me to devote myself to meditation or prayer. The only people who would come their way were travelers for whom the monastery was their intended destination, or those passing through the farms in the valley beneath. As for the area above them, it was the site of a road that led to the red dune beyond.

One day I was passing through a valley known as the Valley of Jehosephat, where there is a spring of water. A group of women had come to the spring, and in their midst I saw a young woman who was one of the most beautiful I had ever seen. The other women pushed her into the spring, after which she took a drink and cast some of her clothes into the water. When, after she had done so, she remained standing on her feet, all the women cheered,

applauded and let out trills of joy, saying that she was innocent and pure. Baffled by what I had just witnessed, I asked someone to explain it to me, and I was told that this spring was referred to as 'The Spring of the Virgin,' or 'The Spring of Accused Women.' Any woman who had been accused of not having conducted herself honorably would be brought to this place to be tested. If she was guilty of the accusation against her, she would die after drinking of the spring's water. If, however, she drank of its water and remained unharmed, this was evidence of her purity and innocence. It is said that the Virgin Mary, upon her be peace, agreed to submit to this test, drank of the spring's water, and thereby demonstrated her purity, since she neither died nor suffered any harm. And the spring has born her name ever since.

Translated by Nancy Roberts

Hala El Badry

The Bed Sheet

from

Muntaha

2006

It was past three o'clock in the morning when the vehicle came to halt in front of the farmhouse gate, raising a din that roused the dogs out of their silence. The moon was whispering to the earth with a soft light that reflected off the river, turning its surface into fractured silver mirrors that moved to the rhythm of the breeze as it strummed its tunes on the tresses of the lofty willows. The wolf howled, calling out to the legendary rabbit that had stolen into the sky's luminous ball. Since its howling came from a distance, it caused no worry to travelers, who knew that its territory came to an end at the borders of the outlying fields. In fact, some of them were familiar with its den next to the old tumbledown bridge.

The car's engine turned off and silence reigned powerfully once again, making way for the croaking of wakeful frogs singing their ode to romantic love and a dog pleased with its own bark, their voices permeating the stillness.

Rushdi Musaylihi got out of the car, taking care not to let his cast-enveloped arm touch the car door. With an athletic physique that he took pleasure in maintaining, he had a kind-looking, round face with a ruddy complexion that bore signs of exhaustion from the long journey.

His face had an Egyptian twinkle to it despite his mixed features, the blueness of his eyes, his black hair, and the bushy eyebrows that lent him a harsh appearance, which only disappeared when he smiled broadly and laughter graced his thin lips.

His steps, confident and relaxed despite the feebleness in his wounded legs, rustled through the blue gum tree leaves that had fallen beneath the bay windows with their wooden latticework. He stood outside Taha's bedroom window and coughed three times, the air piercing his weary chest.

"Abu Abdallah!" he called out.

The slumbering Taha stirred.

"Abu Abdallah!" Rushdi called out again.

Taha saw a wide road and a friend waving to him in the distance and calling his name. He ran toward him, spreading his arms to receive him. Then he began to rouse to the sound of someone's voice, which suddenly constricted the untrammeled, open space of his dream world. He opened his eyes, which came up against the ceiling with its walnut beams, and realized that he'd been asleep. He heard a voice coming from outside and knew it wasn't a figment of his dreams.

Despite the heaviness of his body, he jumped up without realizing who was calling.

"Yes! I'll be right there!"

As he opened the window to see who was calling, Wadida got out of bed and lit the kerosene lamp. Hearing a commotion among the sentries in front of the arms depot, she brought the large lantern while the mayor welcomed his brother, who had returned from the Palestine war during the truce.

"Welcome! Welcome! Thank God you're back safely! I'll be right down!" said Taha.

A gentle stir made its way through the rooms overlooking the street and the river. Taha rushed to open the apartment door, leaning his body forward. Then, adjusting his feet inside the yellow leather slippers which he hadn't yet managed to get all the way on, he crossed the upstairs landing that overlooked the house's inner courtyard and served as a corridor onto which all the extended family's living quarters opened. Burly and tall with a broad chest, powerful forearms and venous hands, the sun had been his companion

all-year round in the wide-open spaces, causing his forehead and nose to take on a bronze-like sheen. He had piercing black eyes that he would beam into the pupils of the person he was speaking to, who would invariably get flustered without having committed any offense. He had a sharp nose and a broad mouth guarded by lips with a bluish tint, and luxuriant black hair that was hidden constantly beneath a white turban. So ingrained was the habit of covering his head, he didn't forget to put on his skullcap despite having been awakened so early and unexpectedly, and his drowsiness fled before the onslaught of his sudden burst of activity. Before reaching the door that led to the stairs, he heard an unusual commotion. Looking up as he secured his turban, he was accosted suddenly by a tall, thin specter. Stark naked, it looked in the moonlight like a shadow leaping up the marble stairs toward the third floor. After being thrown off balance ever so briefly, Taha ran after the ghost, then raised the lamp higher in order to make out his features. He nearly took a spill on the landing as he dodged two young servant girls who'd been sleeping in the open air, and who were roused by the sudden commotion without realizing what was happening around them. Then he noticed a third girl curled up in the corner. She was clinging to a robe with which she tried to conceal her body. The flame grew brighter, revealing the fugitive's face as the stairs disappeared one after another beneath the pounding of his feet.

"Stop, you dog. Where do you think you're going? Even if you reach the sky, I'll catch up with you. In my house, you bastard? In my household? I swear to God, even Azrael won't be able to rescue you once I've got hold of you!"

The flights of stairs that had separated the two men vanished gradually until Bashir, the household's coffee server, reached the door to the roof and hesitated. After turning to face the mayor and realizing he was cornered, he took a few tremulous steps backward. His white teeth gleamed in the surrounding darkness, and in his eyes there glimmered two stars with a defiance that filled his pursuer with the kind of revulsion that leads one to kill, not as a celebration of life—as when a hunter rejoices in his quarry—but out of contempt. A bat fluttered out in front of them, roused by the scent of blood soon to be shed. As Bashir stepped back, his elbow pushed open the tower door that suddenly loomed behind

him, and he went in. His pursuer approached the door and bolted the latch securely.

Panting, he said, "You wait for me here. As soon as I finish receiving the guests, I'll be back to settle accounts with you."

With sweat trickling down his face, Taha flew down the stairs in a fury, forcing the servants who had been sleeping on the steps and their naked companion to get hurriedly out his way. In the stairwell he saw dancing of shadows, which would appear whenever the lamps glowed more brightly, then disappear again. He recognized them as the women of his household. They stood back to let him pass, none of them daring to utter a word to him.

He shot ahead like a rock that's been released from a slingshot and is headed for its target, his body snapping with a stifled explosion. The commotion roused everyone who had been shrouded in slumber's mist, and the household awakened one room after another. Small lights were apprehensively lit, and everyone in the extended household appeared in the darkened courtyard—which resisted the light that was breaking in from its various sides—blanketed in sleep like pilgrims circumambulating the Kaaba in anticipation of the divine blessing. Audible kisses were planted intermittently on welcoming hands, then on cheeks, followed by warm embraces. People's questions about Rushdi's wound, which rose in a steady crescendo, put a damper on the joy occasioned by having him home alive, while other questions were being asked about the war, the truce, and the number of wounded. They were shocked by how thin Naziha, Rushdi's wife, had become.

Wadida said to her, "If he'd known that his going away would eat you up like this, he wouldn't have left."

Laughing, Naziha said to her sister-in-law, "Men go off to war, and they don't give a hoot if we die of worry!"

As conversation heated up about the trip back to Egypt, those present temporarily forgot about the night's other 'surprise.' Umm Hilmi stole away from the family and headed up to the roof. No one noticed her disappearance except Wadida, who came after her, sensing that she was up to something.

"Where are you going?" she asked, grasping her shoulder from behind as she started up the stairs.

"Get out of my way, Wadida, and ask people if they need some supper!"

"Niʿma . . . you wouldn't dare! Your brother would kill us! Do you want to create a disaster on top of the one we've already got on our hands?"

"A disaster is what will happen if we leave him on the roof. Taha will kill him and be lost over nothing. Are we going to let him murder this cockroach?"

Not waiting for Wadida to reply, Niʿma continued, "Besides, what business is it of ours what happens to the servant girl? It's her family's problem. They can slaughter her or marry her off, but that's their concern. However, the mayor won't let the matter pass!"

"Come back, Niʿma. Your brother will never forgive you for this. After all, this man has violated the sanctity of his household."

"Prudence is in order, my dear. Keep out of it, and I'll take responsibility for whatever happens."

Ni'ma continued on her way up, her shoes clicking beneath the weight of her plump, rounded hips. A tall woman, she had inherited her fair complexion and sharp features from her mother, who was of Circassian origin, and her dark, wide eyes from her father. She wore her long hair in braids, to which she added strands of pure gold whenever she left the house.

Wadida withdrew, muttering angrily. Unconvinced of the wisdom of what her husband's sister was about to do, she asked God to grant His protection. On her way down, she was accosted by a pair of panic-stricken eyes glimmering in the dark.

Collapsing onto the floor, Rawayih implored, "I kiss your feet, ma'am. Protect me! Protect me! And may God protect you in this life and the next!"

Then she burst into frenzied tears that rained down onto her hands as they clung to her mistress's feet. Pained, Wadida tried mightily to free herself from Rawayih's grip without knowing what to do.

"Get up," she said, "and hide in the grain storage room. Tomorrow's another day. If you went home now, the whole village would know about the scandal."

The girl rose halfway, sobbing and wiping her nose with the back of her hand.

"He's the one who comes to me, I swear to God. I was afraid to tell you. Sometimes he would threaten me, and other times he'd promise to marry me."

They heard Niʿma coming down the stairs on tiptoe. In a stern whisper she said, "Shut up, you tramp! Doesn't your honor mean anything to you? You've buried your father's head in the mud. Come on now, up with you. Sleep in the grain storage room."

"What did you do?" Wadida asked her warily.

Not taking her eyes off Rawayih until she was out of sight, Niʿma replied, "I opened the latch for him and let him go his way!"

The two women went together into the large sitting room in Umm Taha's apartment where the family was gathered, young and old, around Rushdi and Naziha.

Seeing her mother-in-law holding back her tears, Wadida said, "What's this, Mama? He's back home safely. What more could we ask?"

"I've placed my trust in God," replied Adila.

Taha's daughter Kawthar got up to serve lemonade to the members of the family, who sat and listened to Rushdi until dawn of the following day.

In the morning, after life had stirred anew throughout the five feddans on which the farmhouse stood, they found out how Bashir had slipped into the ladies' apartments, since the rope that he had used was still hanging in place, tied to a hollow crescent moon over the middle wooden door.

When Taha sent one of the sentries to bring Bashir and he came back empty-handed, he said, "So, then! I swear I'll bring him in, even if he's hiding under his mother's breast! As for the one who let him go, his punishment is postponed for now!"

Successive reports had circulated in the village to the effect that Radi the fisherman, his wife Hamida and their son, Ma'mun, had woken in a fright to the sound of something being knocked down on top of their roof, and that it had shaken the walls of their house. They bought it would go through the roof beams, which groaned and nearly gave way. Before they discovered what was behind it, they saw a phantom leaping into the street and running away without a stitch of clothing on. The peasant women, who had gathered to fill the water jars at the time of the dawn prayer, added that they'd investigated the matter and that there would have been no way for a man to jump out of the farmhouse tower, and from such a high elevation, since Radi's house, which had been built in part of the area occupied by the cattle pen, faced the

farmhouse's high wall on two sides. And as for its eastern side and the side that faces the qibla, they faced onto the street corner. In any case, Bashir never showed his face in the neighborhood again.

One ill-fated day before noon, Qanu', the village midwife, personally examined Rawayih in the presence of her mother and Umm Taha, and found an unborn child in her womb in the beginning of its fifth month. She informed the village matriarch that an abortion would be dangerous, and that it could end the girl's life.

Then she added, "It's up to you. Consult among yourselves, and I'll do whatever I'm told!"

She left them to think it over, but before she'd gotten as far as the gate, the mayor's mother had decided that the servant girl would have to go, and that the decision would have to be made by her parents. Despite her explicit instructions that no one was to breathe a word about the matter, the news quickly got out to the people of Muntaha. After all, it was highly unusual for a servant girl to leave her job at the farmhouse before she married, or even after she married for that matter, given the difficulty of finding employment elsewhere.

Some of the village women said they'd seen Rawayih washing out blood-stained clothing, and that her mother had beaten out an entire robe saturated with the remains of her abortion on a rock at the river's edge. Despite her valiant efforts to conceal it among her black garments and clothes that belonged to her brothers and sisters, what she'd done wasn't lost on the women who had experience in such matters, and none of them offered her any help. When the girl greeted them as she passed by with a tub of wrung-out laundry on her head, her face yellow as a lemon, none of them could bring herself to reply to her.

Pursing her lips, Umm Mahmud said in a long, drawn-out voice that was audible to everyone, "We've lived and seen. Folks with sha-a-a-me are a dy-ii-ii-ng-g bre-e-e-ed!!"

After turning the girl over on her back, Qanu' inserted a dry date stalk into her cervix. When she screamed in pain and her wine-colored complexion—which, on the day before the scandal broke, had been the color of a ripe plum—turned blue, the midwife said sarcastically,

“Some right you’ve got to scream! Shush, or I’ll make this the end of you!”

Rawayih wept silently while her mother looked at the floor, wiping her daughter’s tears furtively with the edge of her black mesh veil. Qanu‘ had prepared a mixture of herbs which she introduced into the girl’s vagina by means of a clean oil funnel before interesting the rough stick. Then she had her drink an emulsion of boiled cinnamon and pomegranate and take laxative pills. The girl began writhing in pain, clutching her abdomen. But before another moan could come out, the old woman stuffed the hem of her dress into the girl’s mouth, saying, “Bite on this, or bite the ground. So you’re hurtin’ now, are you? It was nice at the time, although, wasn’t it, smarty pants?”

She left the room carrying a rag in which there struggled a black fetus that expired a few minutes later.

“Be strong, Abu Shu‘ayshi‘!” she said. “There’s no end to the trouble in this world, brother.”

Weeping, the man said, “It’s God’s will.”

She patted him on the shoulder, saying, “Pray for blessings on the Prophet. Pray for blessings on the Prophet. And ask God for guidance. For every problem, there’s a Lord to solve it. Cast your burden on your Maker!”

In a remote corner of the cattle pen wall, everyone who entered noticed some soft new clay that had been pounded and was still damp. Dark-colored, with golden straws glistening on its surface, the days of misery hadn’t altered it yet. And when Abu Shu‘ayshi‘ came into the farmhouse carrying a sack of wheat on his stooped back to store it in the upstairs granary, he happened to catch Umm Taha’s eye.

After getting out the bottle of carbolic acid, she came up to him and said, “Buck up. Take one cup of this and your troubles will be over!”

The man hung his head and, without looking up or putting the bag down, he said, “One’s offspring are precious, ma’am. She’s my daughter, and this is no small matter.”

He sighed repeatedly and, without his being able to wipe them off, the tears streamed down his cheeks, filling the canals and crevices that the years had etched into his face.

“It’s no small matter,” he repeated.

Squeezing her cane with an agitation that caused the Turkish-Circassian veins to bulge out of her aging neck, the woman's face turned the color of blood-red wine.

Then, squinting her already narrow blue eyes, she accentuated the sharpness of her features with a shriek.

"Where's your courage, man! This is your honor!"

He swallowed the words, the heavy load flaying his back like a whip in the scorching heat.

"One's offspring are precious," he said, then went his way muttering, "There's no power or strength but in God!"

A week later, the sound of joyous ululations could be heard, and Sheikh Eissa's wife, the seamstress, spent the night making bridal attire out of white, rose-colored, and off-white satin. She sent the groom to the chief town in the province to buy a black velvet dress for Rawayih to wear on special occasions for the rest of her life, just like all the other women in the village. Meanwhile, a tray filled with henna—which blankets the ground in Paradise—and piled high with small pieces of paper folded into cone shapes, was taken around to all the houses in the village to invite people to the wedding. As they received the invitation, mothers would say to the invitation bearer, "I'd be delighted to come, dear. Of course we'll be there. A thousand congratulations, and we wish the same for all your beloved children!"

As late afternoon approached, Abu Shu'ayshi' sat holding the hand of Farag, his brother's son, waiting for the ma'zun to draw up the marriage contract. Before coming into the house, every woman in attendance had her mouth to her neighbor's ear, swearing she knew the details of the scandal. However, not a woman in the entire village was absent that day. They came laden with paper cones filled with sugar, bottles of fruit syrup, baskets of rice, and bags of flour. In fact, one of them was so bold as to slaughter for the bride a male duck that she'd fattened specially for the 27th of Ragab season. The women sat on a large mat in the house's inner courtyard while the men occupied the street, sitting on benches and sofas which they'd collected from neighboring houses and sipping a red infusion made from roses and strawberries that Umm Shu'ayshi' kept pouring into

glasses and handing to her girls to pass around until she was sure everyone had been served.

Kamal warbled in a shrill voice in praise of the bride's beauty, a beauty she had never seen. She had been born blind, and her mother, none of whose sons had survived, had named her Kamal in the hope that she would have a son, which she did!

The girls sang the refrain:

There's excitement at Abu Shu'ayshi's house . . .
She's a pretty young thing, and leaves nothing to be desired.

As the long-awaited final scene was about to begin, the groom entered, causing a great stir among the guests. They all stood around him with hands raised as people clapped with a single, if uneven rhythm. The women did a group dance, hopping and stamping as they pushed the groom in the direction of the bride, who gazed at him furtively through the openings in her white veil. Then he sat down beside her in a corner of the room that had been decorated with palm leaves. He lifted her veil and took a sip of the drink with her, then carried her a few steps into the house of his father, who had reserved for him and his brother's daughter a new room that he'd built recently on the roof of his house. Successive gunshots rang out from the mouths of the sentinels' rifles, while tambourines jangled and the girls sang:

Be happy, you with the new room, be happy!

When the new wooden door had been shut the girls came swaying with the young men down the mud staircase, leaving the newlyweds behind, then stopped in the middle of the farmhouse and set it ablaze in song, chanting:

O bride, step on the brocaded mat!
The bride steps, her earrings tinkle.
The groom laughs and says, "You're all mine!"

They didn't budge from their places until the bed sheet had emerged atop wooden sticks, raised high in Qanu's hand. Then it was spirited away, and they left the house to make the rounds of the village shouting, "Tell her father to get up and have his supper!" thereby announcing that the girl's honor had not been besmirched, and that everyone should swallow his tongue.

Translated by Nancy Roberts

Hamdi Abu Golayyel

A Traitor and an Informer

from

A Dog with No Tail

2009

The central security truck was as packed as a public bus. Fifty students hale and hearty, a disabled student, and a student who turned out to be the son of a police officer and got out before we started to move. As I got in I saw a student I recognized. We'd never had much to do with each other but the moment we saw each other we shrieked and embraced in an ecstasy of relief. Staggering about, we both spoke simultaneously, "Did you see? Did you see what happened?" then burst into an uncontrollable torrent of giggles. I tried to pull myself together, reminding myself of the slaps and kicks to come, but it was no good. We were past caring, every one of us, and then it was all playful punches and slaps on shoulders, buttocks, and the backs of our necks. Even the soldiers were laughing. They took us from the college to the Beni Suef Directorate of State Security, and the entire journey was spent doubled up with laughter. Had you seen us in our security truck you would've thought we were on a school trip or off to a wedding.

They ordered us to place our hands on our heads and we stepped down into the tender care of the Beni Suef State Security. They stood in two lines, commanded us to sit, and blindfolded us.

We were led off, two by two, to meet some doubtlessly dangerous individual. From time to time I would hear shrieks and moans and by the time they pulled me up I was petrified. With each step forward my death drew closer. To be dragged around blindfolded in a place like the Beni Suef State Security headquarters is a terrifying thing. We walked what seemed a fair distance. I was later told it was no more than a hundred meters but I'd bet good money that it was at least a kilometer. The trick is blind obedience: convince the person pulling you along that he has some abject and piteous wretch on his hands. Upstairs, downstairs, along passages, and through corridors, until I became aware that we had, at last, come into the presence of others. I pictured myself standing before them blindfolded. I thought: these must be individuals so menacing and shadowy that we have to be blindfolded so we can't see them. The sounds of breathing and murmuring drew suddenly closer. My hands were still on my head and I flinched down in fright but was a little encouraged by a sudden, collective guffaw.

"Don't be frightened," one of them said and proceeded to recite, in the calm voice of a soldier listing name and rank, "From the Fayoum, Itsa Daniel municipality, father deceased, supported by his mother along with four other siblings, two sons and two daughters, source of income a single feddan of land left by his father." With noticeable gentleness he inquired, "Why did you participate in the demonstration, Hamdi?"

"I swear to God I didn't participate, I was standing in the . . . ."

He cut me off.

"No need to swear by God, Hamdi, we know everything. Now then, what do you think of the President of the Republic?"

I said, "I swear I don't know him," almost immediately, then started backtracking, "I mean . . . I mean . . . ."

I got stuck on "I mean . . . ."

"It's okay," he said. "Now, what is it that you do know about him?"

"Who, sir?" I said.

"The President."

"I don't know anything," I replied. "Nothing. I see him on TV and in the papers and that's it." I was on the verge of wishing the President a long life and good health, but thought he might misunderstand me.

"Right. What do you think of His Excellency the Minister of the Interior?"

"That he's the Minister of the Interior."

"You are accused of illegal assembly, the destruction of public property, and conspiracy to overthrow the ruling regime."

I kept up my protestations that I had nothing to do with it, that I was just standing around at the college. He turned to my fellow inmate. His answers put me to shame. They were so unwavering and courageous that the officer himself was intimidated and would only ask him two questions, to which he received a single response.

"What is your opinion of the President?"

"A coward and an informer. Fighting and killing him is lawful for every Muslim."

"What is your opinion of His Excellency the Minister of the Interior?"

"The same. A coward and an informer and the leader of a bunch of thugs. The shedding of his blood is sanctioned by divine law."

Out we went. I thanked God that I could leave walking on my own two feet. They led us blindfolded back to the detention cells where the Brothers were chanting and the sound of their voices shook the State Security Directorate and the town of Beni Suef itself. Actually, I was in awe of them, but I concentrated on saying my prayers. I'd heard one of them say, "The Prophet, may the peace and prayers of God be upon him, once said that whoever repeated *God, deliver me from harm and the wiles of the deceitful, for Thou art the All-Hearing and All-Knowing* three times would be protected from all evil by day and by night." I said it ten times, tens of times. I was searching for an exit: a way out of the mess I'd gotten myself into.

I had a relative who was an army officer, later martyred by the bullets of the Palestinian resistance in Rafah in the seventies. In those days he was working for the quartermaster corps in Beni Suef, so I asked for him through one of the soldiers and he turned up. It would have been better if he hadn't. Instead of consoling me or offering to help he just terrified me even more. The instant he caught sight of me he let fly: "Why are you in here? What got

you locked up with these people? What's your problem?" I stopped him there. "I've got enough questions to deal with," I said. "I've got questions coming out of my ears. If you're going to do something then do it, if you can't, good-bye." He muttered to himself and stormed out. The next time I saw him was inside the Beni Suef General Prison.

Translated by Robin Moger

Alaa Al Aswany

A Rabbit for the Big Fish

from

The Yacoubian Building

2004

The numerous, oft-repeated stories about Kamal el Fouli assert that he grew up in an extremely poor family from Shibin el Kom, in the governorate of El Minoufiya. Despite his poverty he was extremely intelligent and ambitious, obtaining a general secondary certificate in 1955 with one of the top placements in the nation and he plunged into politics the moment he joined the Faculty of Law. Kamal el Fouli became a member of each of the regime's political structures in succession—the Liberation Organization and the National Union, followed by the Socialist Union and the Vanguard Organization, then the Center Platform, the Egypt Party, and, finally, the Patriotic Party. Throughout these shifts, he was always the most enthusiastic and loudest voice in support of the principles of the governing party. During Nasser's era he gave lectures and wrote works on the necessity for and historical inevitability of the socialist transformation. And when the state switched to capitalism, he became one of the greatest supporters of privatization and the free economy, mounting from beneath the parliament dome a fierce and celebrated campaign against the public sector and totalitarian ideas in general. He was one of the few Egyptian politicians

who had managed to keep a seat in parliament for more than thirty consecutive years.

While it's true that Egyptian elections are always fixed in favor of the ruling party, it is also true that Kamal el Fouli is endowed with a real talent for politics that would necessarily have enabled him to assume the highest positions of state even in a democratic society. This same authentic talent, however, like so many talents in Egypt, has been diverted, distorted, and adulterated by lying, hypocrisy, and intrigue till the name of Kamal el Fouli has come to represent in the minds of Egyptians the very essence of corruption and hypocrisy.

He has risen through the party hierarchy to become secretary of the Patriotic Party and he has become the primary arbiter of elections for the whole of Egypt, for he nominates or rejects whomever he wishes to or from the party's list and personally supervises the fixing of elections from Alexandria to Aswan. He takes large bribes from the candidates to guarantee that the elections are fixed in their favor while at the same time covering up his corruption with all sorts of tricks, such as swapping favors and financial privileges that divert millions to leading politicians.

El Fouli also keeps secret security reports and documents proving the malfeasances of officials so that he can use them to blackmail or if need be destroy them. At political meetings, whether in the People's Assembly or the Patriotic Party, everyone shuts up when Kamal el Fouli speaks. Indeed a single stern look from him is enough to strike terror into the heart of any official. There are numerous celebrated incidents related about him in this context in which he made minced meat of leading officials in public because they said something that he didn't like, an example being the ruthless campaign that he led a few years ago (on behalf of leading officials) against Dr. El Ghamrawi, governor of the Bank of Egypt, which led in the end to the latter's resignation. A more recent example occurred last year and affected the minister of religious endowments, who enjoyed a certain popularity that made him imagine that he was powerful and influential. Under the influence of this mistaken impression, the minister got up at a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Patriotic Party and made a violent attack on political corruption, demanding that party posts be cleansed of deviant elements and profiteers.

Kamal el Fouli made a sign to the minister to bring his speech to a close, but the minister continued, ignoring him, at this point El Fouli interrupted him mockingly and, turning dramatically to those present, said, "Well, well! Whatever's got into you, my dear minister? Given that Your Excellency is so concerned about fighting corruption, you might want be begin with yourself, sport. You borrowed ten million pounds from the Development Bank and for the last five years you've refused to pay the installments. By the way, the officials at the Bank intend to bring a case and make an example of you"—at which, the minister turned pale and sat down in silence amid the wisecracks and laughter of those present.

Hagg Azzam was well aware of all this and so as soon as he decided to put himself forward as a candidate in the elections for the People's Assembly he sought an appointment with Kamal el Fouli, who kept him waiting for a few weeks, then finally gave him one at the office of his son, the lawyer Yasser el Fouli, on Shihab Streer in El Mohandiseen. After Friday prayers, Hagg Azzam and his son Fawzi went to the appointment. The office was empty except for security staff, Kamal el Fouli, and his son. Azzam and El Fouli embraced and exchanged prayers, compliments, and jokes, and one might have been forgiven for thinking the two were old friends who loved, understood, and respected one another.

After a long conversation ranging over a number of topics by way of preparation, Azzam broached the subject. He spoke of how he loved the people and of his desire to serve them, quoting more than one of the Prophet's noble hadiths concerning the rewards waiting for those who strive to meet the needs of the Muslims, Kamal el Fouli nodding in agreement. Finally Azzam came to the critical point. He said, "This is why I have sought God's guidance, placed my trust in Him, and decided, God willing, to put myself forward as a candidate in the coming elections for my constituency, Kasr el Nil. I hope that the Patriotic Party will agree to nominate me and I'm yours to command, Kamal Bey, for anything you may need."

El Fouli made a show of thinking deeply, even though he had been expecting Azzam to say this.

El Fouli made contradictory impressions on people who saw him. There were his intelligence, quick-wittedness, and overwhelming presence on the one side and on the other his corpulent body, his sagging belly, his always slightly loosened neck tie, the hideous, mismatched colors of his clothes, his crudely dyed hair, his coarse, fat face, his lying, vicious, impertinent looks, and his plebeian manner of speaking, when he would stretch his arms out in front of him, waggling his fingers and shaking his shoulders and belly as he talked, like a woman of the lower classes. All the preceding give him a somewhat comic appearance, as though he were putting on a turn for the amusement of the bystanders. It also leaves one with an unpleasant feeling of vulgarity.

El Fouli asked his helpers for pen and paper. Then he started to draw and for a few moments was so absorbed in his task that Hagg Azzam thought that something was wrong. El Fouli soon finished, however, and turned the piece of paper toward Azzam, who was astonished to see that the drawing represented a large rabbit. He said nothing for a moment, then asked him in an amicable way, "I don't understand what you mean, Your Excellency."

El Fouli answered quickly, "You want to guarantee your success in the elections, and you're asking what's needed. I've drawn you a picture of what's needed."

"A whole 'rabbit'? A million pounds, Kamal Bey? That's a huge amount!"

Azzam had been expecting the amount but preferred to bargain, just in case. El Fouli said, "Listen, Hagg, as God is my witness . . .

(Here all present repeated, "There is no god but God.")

". . . in constituencies smaller than Kasr el Nil I take a million and a half, two million, and my son Yasser is standing here in front of you and he can tell you. But I love you, I swear to God, Hagg, and I really want you with us is the Assembly. Plus I don't take all that for myself. I'm just the postman—I take from you and deliver to others, and a nod's as good as a wink."

Hagg Azzam put on a show of uneasiness for a moment, then asked, "You mean, if I pay that sum, Kamal Bey, I'll be sure of winning the elections, God willing?"

"Shame on you, Hagg! You're talking to Kamal el Fouli! Thirty years' experience in parliament! There's not a candidate in Egypt can win without our say-so, God willing!"

"I hear there are some big fish intending to nominate themselves for Kasr el Nil."

"Don't worry about it. If we come to an understanding, God willing, you'll win in Kasr el Nil even if the devil himself stands against you. Just leave it to me, Hagg."

El Fouli then laughed and leaning back and rubbing his big belly said complacently, "People are naïve when they get the idea that we fix elections. Nothing of the kind. It just comes down to the fact that we've studied the Egyptian people well. Our Lord created the Egyptians to accept government authority. No Egyptian can go against his government. Some peoples are excitable and rebellious by nature but the Egyptian keeps his head down his whole life long so he can eat. It says so in the history books. The Egyptians are the easiest people in the world to rule. The moment you take power, they submit to you and grovel to you and you can do what you want with them. Any party in Egypt, when it makes elections and is in power, is bound to win, because the Egyptian is bound to support the government. It's just the way God made him."

Azzam pretended to be confused and unconvinced by El Fouli's words. Then he asked him about the payment details and the other said simply, "Listen up, Hagg. If it's in cash, I'll take it. If it's a check, make it out to 'Yasser el Fouli, Lawyer' and make a contract with him for any case, as though you were hiring him for it. You understand, of course, that these are mere formalities."

Hagg Azzam was silent for a moment. Then he took out his checkbook and said as he undid his gold pen, "Fine. Let's do it. I'll write a check for half. Then when I win, God willing, I'll pay the rest."

"No way, sugar! Shame on you—you'll get me upset if you go on like that. Keep that kind of stuff for school kids. The way I do things is pay first, take later. Pay the whole amount and I'll congratulate you on getting into the Assembly and read the Fatiha with you right now!"

It had been Azzam's last ploy and when it failed he surrendered. He wrote out the check for a million pounds, examined it carefully as was his custom, and then handed it to El Fouli, who took it and gave it to his son. Then El Fouli grinned all over his face and said gaily, "Congratulations, Hagg! Come on, let's read the Fatiha. May the Lord be generous to us and grants us success! You'll find the contract ready with Yasser."

The four of them—El Fouli, Azzam, and their two sons—closed their eyes, held their hands before their breasts in supplication, and set to reciting the Fatiha under their breath.

Translated by Humphrey Davies

Ahmed Alaidy

A Drop of Oil

from

Being Abbas El Abd

2006

Don't believe her.
She is not what she seems.
She will catch you unawares as the flame catches the moth by the wing.
This is the truth in all its cruelty, so do as you damn well please.

If This Were A Novel, It Would Now Be Time For You To Stop and have a sandwich.

Unfortunately, however, it isn't.

This is not a novel.

No one likes to read about the torments of the demigods when it is revealed to them what semidemihumans they are.

These are the works that go along with the critics to the lavatory to assist them in floating free of the burden of fat buttocks.

And here I'd like to make it plain to the buttocks of both demigods and semidemihuman critics that what Abbas el Abd was doing when he insinuated himself with his tricks into the lives of other was not an end in itself and that I was never more than a false witness who happened along at the right time to swear his tainted oath, and therefore . . .

I swear to you, gentlemen, that I will never tell the truth, the whole truth, or even part of the truth.

Take, for example, that moment at which Abbas extends his hand toward his mouth to remove bit by bit the remains of the food stuck between his teeth with the cover of a book of matches, which he then scrutinizes closely with an instinctive sigh. This is not really disgusting; if you don't believe me, observe him with me as he returns the same food to his mouth, masticates it, and entertains himself by spitting out further pearls of his misguided wisdom:

"If someone gives you a dirty look, pluck out his eyebrows"

and

"God makes the woman in need too snooty to plead"

and

"If someone twists your arm, cut it off."

These may not be your principles, but it's what Abbas does.

Zizzt. Zitttt.

"If someone comes at you with the jack handle, make merry on the back of his neck with your gear stick."

"Where do you get this stuff??"

"From the can of worms we're living in."

"Never in my life have I come across anyone with so much raw malice inside him. If you swallowed your spit you'd get stomach poisoning."

"Thank you so much."

"You know, Abbas, a while ago I read a nice story by someone called Paulo Coelho. Do you know him?"

"Never even heard of his mother."

"This Paulo guy, my dear sir, is a well-known Brazilian author and . . ."

Abbas yawns and drums on his mouth like the Red Indians *woh-woh-woh-woh* so I summarize: "The main thing is, in a place in one of his most famous novels, he's telling about a kid who goes to get wisdom from some big-shot who's living on his own in a palace."

"Cut to the chase."

Ignoring his great performance I continue: "The sage gives him a spoon with a drop of oil in it and tells him to enter the palace right foot first and to

look around and observe without spilling the drop of oil. The kid goes into the palace and comes out again with the oil in the spoon just as it was and right as rain. The sage asks him, 'What did you see inside the palace?' The kid tells him, 'Nothing. I was too afraid of spilling the drop of oil.' So the sage sends him back again with the same drop of oil and tells him that this time he's to take note of the things in the palace. The second time, the kid stares and notes everything carefully and then goes back to him and the sage says, 'What did you see?' and he tells him, 'I saw a bunch of paintings and a bunch of carpets and a whole bunch of other weird stuff' and the sage points to the spoon and says to him, 'Yes. But you spilled the drop of oil, my little chickadee!'"

And the moral is?

"You have to enjoy the world without spilling the drop of oil you have inside you."

As I said this, I looked at Abbas through the grime on the mirror.

How pleasant it is to give one's wisdom a workout from time to time!

(We do it all the time, to make others look less important, or more bad.)

"You think so?"

"Of course."

(Improve your intellectual image and the shortcomings of others will automatically appear.)

"What do I have to swear by to make you believe?"

"There is no god but God!"

"I never liked all those fancy stories and I really get pissed off by people who write like they're saying. 'I've been shaving for four thousand years and you're still calling toffees 'offees.'"

"Look, Abbas. Take it from your buddy here and then you can throw it out the window: there's nothing wrong with making mistakes. The only thing that's wrong is not admitting them." Let's hear it for all those who showed us we're not all alone at the bottom of the glass; there are those who are even closer to the bottom than we are.

Let's kiss the hands of all those who gave us a chance to scream at them: "Get up and dust off your clothes!"

Blessed be the saint who gave us the chance to right ourselves every time he stumbled.

“I have a slightly different perspective.”

“And what might that be?”

Abbas bares his teeth in a smile and says: “That sage guy wasn’t a lousy sage or anything. He was just some piece of shit kid from the ’hood who’d taken ruphenol and was getting wasted on his own so he said, I’ll get someone and mess with his head a bit. Like, ‘Take this spoon, boyo, and wander around inside and don’t spill any or there’ll be trouble . . . ’”

He said nothing for a bit and then went on:

“I bet you while the boy was holding the spoon and feeling his way with his feet the guy who’d taken the roofies was rolling on the ground laughing hard enough to bust his hernia. After a bit, he gets around to dissolving another couple of pills. . . .”

Zizzzt Zitttt.

“So then suddenly the roofies up and tell him to work the boy so he can get the ‘mood’ up to ‘hyper.’ ‘Boyo, take the spoon and go back and take a look at the pictures on the walls and the carpets on the floors the like of which never entered your house except for your mother to wash.’ ”

Zizzzt. Zitttt.

“Ruphenol gives you the best high.”

“Sure, but what are you trying to get at?”

Abbas says that—Zizzzt. Zitttt.—he’s telling you that to arrive you first have to leave.

And there are seven rules for leaving, as is well-known from the beginning of time.

Translated by Humphrey Davies

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