

***EGYPTOMANIA IN ANTIQUITY AND IN MODERN WORLD LITERATURE.
IMAGINARY, INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT AND MENTALITY***

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Abstract: The article intends to address the complex issue of Egyptomania in Classical Antiquity and in Modern World focusing on the elements of literature. The concept of "Egyptomania" defines the particular mental attitude of the most part of the ancient and modern visitors of Egypt. The notion reveals the enthusiasm for and the admiration of ancient Egyptian traditions, culture, and material remains, as well as the attempt to exploit the Egyptian forms and symbols in different and provocative contexts, such as the literary one. While scholars have oscillated between different names trying to find the most appropriate and comprehensive expression – 'Egyptomania', 'Egyptophilia', 'Egyptianizing', 'Nile Style', 'Pharaonism', etc – after many tribulations, 'Egyptomania' has finally received a respectable status, revealing the admiration of the foreigners for all that ancient Egypt could mean.¹ The echoes of the powerful impact of Egypt on the culture of Classical Antiquity reverberates through many Greek and Roman literary works. Thus, the paper offers examples taken from some of the famous Greek and Roman writers such as Herodotus, Aeschylus, Plato, Plutarch, Vergil, Ovid, Juvenal, Horace, Apuleius, etc., trying to emphasize not only the intercultural context, but mainly the elements of historic imaginary and mentality.

Keywords: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptophilia, Classical Antiquity, Pharaonism

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, was hooked on Egypt. His desk was covered with a small army of Egyptian gods, goddesses, and noblemen. Over the famous couch hung a print of Ramses the Great's temple at Abu Simbel. Fragments of mummy cases were suspended from the bookcase. But Freud is not alone in that. Since I was a teenager, I myself succumbed to Egyptomania. My first contact with Ancient Egypt, Egyptian antiquities, and of course Egyptology took place when I was twelve years old. I saw an American movie whose main character happened to be a woman - young, charming and, guess what, Egyptologist! -

¹ In his 1971 survey of the topic, C. Froidefond labeled the Greek view of Egypt as a 'mirage'. C. Froidefond 1971, *Le mirage égyptien dans la littérature grecque d'Homère à Aristote*, Aix en Provenances, Ophrys.

who discovered the legendary lost tomb of Seti I in the Valley of the Kings. Since that day my life has been totally changed. I spent most of the time studying ancient Egypt, but not only - reading Ancient Egyptian fiction novels and seeing Egyptian themed-movies as well. I am however aware that doesn't have a logical and rational explanation why my house looks like a warehouse with kitsch-Egyptian statues of gods, papyri, lamps, and vessels decorated with hieroglyphs and pharaohs. It is easy to be consumed by Egyptomania, but far harder to explain it. I wondered whether this overwhelming fascination with Egypt's glorious past, hieroglyphics, mysteries, and antiquities may be defined as Egyptomania, or otherwise. Doing research on this topics, I was not surprised to find that Western scholars offered interesting answers.

Defining the terms

According to Marjorie Venit², *Egyptomania*, as defined by Jean-Marcel Humbert refers to the appropriation and reinterpretation of Egyptian forms in new contexts so as to renew their vitality and produce new meanings.³ Egyptomania however is only one of several expressions of Western response to Egypt that Humbert and other scholars isolated so far. Amongst these Egyptophilia signifies a love for Egypt and all things Egyptian, an appreciation endorsed by both collectors and artist-travelers. For instance, art historians distinguish Egyptomania from: a) Egyptophilia, the love and acquisition of things Egyptian;⁴ b) the artistic and fashion style labeled as 'Egyptianizing', 'Nile Style', or 'Pharaonism', c) from the simple enthusiasm for Egypt; d) another expression may be Orientalism and Exoticism, but in this response again Venit saw a real issue, and she details: "*because the paradigm of a foreign culture that constructs an 'Egyptian' model and then uses this model as definitional can also be applied to the construction and usurpation of Egyptian antiquity by the West*".⁵ The divisions suggested at least by Humbert assume a greater mutability than he credits, therefore she takes Egyptomania to mean simply the use of Egyptian antiquity, whether it is by replication or appreciation, or even adaptation. However the term "Egyptomania" is still widely used in scholarly literature and it carries several distinct connotations sometimes associated with the decorative habits of the elite, sometimes with the Egyptian cults and their popularity,

² Venit 2002, 261.

³ Humbert et al. 1989, 21.

⁴ McCalla, 1998, 282.

⁵ Venit, *loc. cit.*

sometimes with the usage of Egyptian patterns and models in literary works since Classical Antiquity to the Contemporary World. Actually, the Egyptomania took its roots in the Greek and Roman World and imposed in the history of art a particular style of painting, sculpture, architecture, furniture, decorative arts, while in literature and music very specific features define the Egyptian style as well. It is thus obvious that the desire for Egyptian artifacts and the literary taste for using Egyptian pharaonic historical or fictitious characters or settings was not – at least at first - an irrational “mania”; instead, it was the consequence of intensive and wide-ranging trade connections and intercultural communication that affected not only the elite or cult participants but also the average citizen be it Greek or Roman. As a result, in order to better assess the incorporation of Egyptian culture and civilization in the Classical Antiquity, one must look primarily to the land-based archaeology and literature.⁶

Egyptomania in Classical Antiquity

It must be said therefore that *Egyptomania* represents an intercultural, or even better said a cross-cultural and intellectual phenomenon which appeared in Classical Antiquity thanks to the foreign travelers and traders (mainly Greeks and Romans), and consequently to economic and trade contacts. It was the starting point of a complex psychological process which implies amongst others the image of the self and of the other, the awareness of ethnocentrism and marginality on both sides (Greek and Roman on one side and Egyptian on the other side). From the earliest known encounters with the various cultures of Western civilizations, ancient Egypt has been a central cultural point of reference and an inseparable element of the dynamics by which Classical Antiquity Europeans and Ancient Egyptians have envisioned their own cultures. Most of our views of ancient Egypt belong to ‘outsiders’. They first came in contact with Egypt when its civilization was already more than 3000 years old. Throughout Greek and Roman history, Egypt and all that it may imply inspired powerful imaginative responses ranging from fascination to fear. From the earliest Egyptian-Aegean trade to the ultimate association of Isis and Sarapis with Roman imperial cult, this course tracks the evolution of Egyptian interactions with the Greco-Roman world and the corresponding changes in Greek and Roman attitudes towards Egypt. The representations of Egypt shifted permanently, translating significant changes not only in the ways Greeks and Romans viewed the land of the

⁶ Heinz, 2010, 24-25.

Nile, but also in the ways they conceived of their own societies and cultural identities.⁷ This was partly in response to the course of events. For instance, Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire (including Egypt) and the subsequent rule of the Greco-Macedonian Ptolemies led to a very different configuration of 'Greek' and 'barbarian', its polarity being to an extent destabilized in the light of Alexander's conquests. Nevertheless though many of the elements of the Greek portrayal of foreign peoples – the association with incomprehensible speech, with monarchy or excessive wealth – originate in the archaic period, such stereotypes were only organized and brought into sharper focus in the light of the Greek-Persian wars.⁸

Pharaonic Egypt with its fabulous civilization and culture has served as a historical reference having the power to legitimize and validate 'novel' historical religious and cultural paradigms ranging from cultural identity to science. Ancient Egypt permanently suggested and even imposed within foreign civilizations original cultural paradigms and models which influenced and empowered throughout history a variety of groups. The result is a multiplicity of interpretations of ancient Egypt: Roman, Christian, Islamic, nationalistic (both foreign and Egyptian), Egyptological, and commercial.⁹ In a recent study, Fekry Hassan points that *"by emphasizing different aspects and de-contextualizing these, the various users or consumers of ancient Egypt formulated particular historical narratives, all claiming to be founded on one monolithic tradition."*¹⁰ Furthermore, scholars recently suggested that even in ancient Egypt a process of legitimation was based on a constant reinterpretation of its past and on a reiterative process of invention of traditions.¹¹ Consequently any research on this topics should take into account both the past civilization, mentality and culture, and the present social, political, and economic interests.

The special place Egypt held in Classical Antiquity

Before surveying *how* Egypt impacted life in the Greek and Roman world, we must first ask *why* Egypt? More precisely, why so many Egyptian artifacts, patterns or influences are traceable in the Greek and Roman civilizations. Here are some of the main responses: a) it was a monumental society with interesting and exotic objects; b) for the Greeks, it was the

⁷ Hassan, 2010, 259-273.

⁸ Harrison, 2003, 146.

⁹ Hassan, 2010, 259.

¹⁰ Idem.

¹¹ Kemp 2006.

ancient land with a faultless memory in which the first relations between men and the gods developed. Actually, of all the places and peoples with whom the Greeks came into contact, it was with Egypt and the Egyptians that they had the most complex relationship. Egypt was seen as the source of many of the most fundamental features of Greek culture, an essential detour for Greek writers.¹² While one must admit that references to Egypt occur in practically every classical author, nonetheless it would not be correct to say that Egypt was “central” to the Greco-Roman world. Indeed, marginality is paradoxically central to classical views of Egypt.¹³ c) Later, for the Romans, Egypt it was not only the realm of an enemy but also and eventually a productive province, as well one to be exploited for the benefit of Rome¹⁴. However, an interesting supplementary explanation exists also: the unique connectivity within Egypt itself. The concept of connectivity has recently become the subject of intense academic examination, exemplified by Horden and Purcell’s book, *The Corrupting Sea*¹⁵. In short, more and more scholars emphasize that the ancient world was not insular but in fact very sophisticated in its exchanges and was highly connected through economic and social ties. Though *The Corrupting Sea* has been instrumental in developing the concept of connectivity as applied to the ancient world, it is by no means a singular work. As a result, of late, the scholarly realm has been flooded with evidence for the economic and social relations within and among various regions, particularly for the Roman period¹⁶, evidence which may help us to expand and improve our understanding of the ancient world. Last but not least, it is important to acknowledge the concept of relative connectivity, determined by geographical factors, a concept which a huge significance, particularly in the case of Egypt, because its peculiar geography lends itself to advanced connectivity. The Nile appears to give Egypt a comparative advantage in terms of trade and exchange in the Roman world, an advantage that should be taken into consideration when examining any sort of Roman-Egyptian relations.¹⁷

¹² Harrison, 2003, 145.

¹³ Burstein, 1994, 3-17.

¹⁴ On the Roman attitude towards Egypt in literature: Vout 2003, 180–183; Versluys, 2002, 4–7; Curran, 1997, 8–67.

¹⁵ Horden, Purcell, 2000.

¹⁶ Scheidel *et al.* 2007.

¹⁷ Heinz 2010, 25.

The Greek view on Egypt and Egyptians¹⁸

Herodotus, the Greek historian and tourist who visited Egypt around 450 B.C., the Athenian reformer Solon, Plato the philosopher, Pythagoras, or Eudoxus are all reputed to have visited Egypt and inspired from its ancient wisdom. They were however neither the firsts nor the last travelers through the land of the Nile. There is a long list which can be opened by historical or legendary celebrities such as Homer, Lycurgus, Orpheus, Musaeus, Melampus and Daedalus. But at the same time as Egypt was elevated above other foreign lands as a source of Greek practice, ideas and ideals, it was also distanced, seen as representing the reverse of the normative (i.e. Greek) world, or subsumed into the collective cliché of the ‘barbarian’.¹⁹ As François Hartog has argued, Egypt was one of many “barbarian” countries whose customs were often defined by the Greek historian as an inversion of Greek customs: “*The Egyptians seem to have reversed the ordinary practices of mankind.*”²⁰ Amongst the Greek intellectuals who flocked to Egypt since the fifth century BC one of the first to suffer from Egyptomania was Herodotus (c. 484 – 425 BC). He visited Egypt around 450 B.C., when the pyramids and sphinx at Giza were already two thousand years old and left one of the most vivid and tantalizing accounts (*Histories*) of ancient Egypt as he presumably experienced it.²¹ Written half a century after the Persian wars, Herodotus’ is the fullest account of Egyptian history and society by any Greek writer and it also provides a point of reference for all subsequent accounts.²² In his *Histories* he expressed his enthusiasm about Egypt saying that “nowhere are there so many marvels in the world.” Of the Egyptians he wrote, “they have existed ever since men existed upon the earth.” Herodotus was undoubtedly fascinated by this particular mixture of history and mythical antiquity. As a detailed account of Egyptian culture and history, Herodotus’ well-known second book gives a rather positive perception of Egypt²³, and scholars concluded that his admiration was not completely unconditional.²⁴ Herodotus’ many factual errors have long been recognized, such as his incorrect dating of the pyramid builders by a thousand years. In the most thorough commentary on Herodotus’ Egyptian account, A. B. Lloyd concludes that Herodotus “presents a view of Egypt’s past which shows no genuine understanding of Egyptian

¹⁸ Hartog, 1986, 953-967.

¹⁹ Harrison 2003, 146.

²⁰ Herodotus, *Histories*, 2. 35. See Hartog, 1988

²¹ Lloyd, 1988, 22–53.

²² Harrison 2003, 146.

²³ Idem, “Herodotus’ Account on Pharaonic History”, and also the introduction in *Herodotus. Book II*, 1-60; Smelik and Hermeljik, 1984, esp. 1873-1876 on Herodotus’ conception of Egypt.

²⁴ Smelik and Hermeljik, pp. 1874-76.

history. Everything has been uncompromisingly customized for Greek consumption and cast unequivocally into a Greek mould.”²⁵ Herodotus reported of various religious outrages committed by the Persian King Cambyses in his trip to Egypt. Although most likely fictitious,²⁶ the account resulted into a surprising affinity between Egypt and Greece, both being the pious victims of impious Persians. In fact, Herodotus displays a deep ambivalence towards Egypt. This place simultaneously fascinates him and provokes him repulsiveness. In the first positive case, Egypt is recognized as a land of enormous antiquity, much older than the Greek civilization itself, a land of ancient wisdom, the source of Greek religion, and particularly of the names of the gods. But most of all Egypt is a land full of wonders: natural ones, such as the Nile river, and even more impressive, man-made ones, such as the pyramids. However, as Phiroze Vasunia remarked, for Herodotus it was absolutely impossible to imagine that these huge monuments could have been executed without slave labor. This prejudice contributed to another key cliché about Egypt, its connection with despotism. From a political standpoint, Egypt could not for Herodotus be a school for democratic Greece.²⁷ At the same time, the great antiquity of Egypt emphasizes its immutability. Therefore Greece’s progressiveness is frequently contrasted with the static character of Egyptian civilization. Just as Egypt is neither Europe nor Asia, but a place through which each passes on the way to the other, Egypt is also strangely out of the temporal stream in which the events of Europe and Asia lie.²⁸ Herodotus also refers to the Egyptians as the wisest people of all mankind (2:160). Although he belongs to the second century CE, it may be useful here to glance at Plutarch’s criticisms of Herodotus. Amongst other things, Plutarch reproaches Herodotus for being pro-barbarian for overthrowing “the most solemn and sacred truths of Greek religion” by “using worthless Egyptian stories”.²⁹ He finally criticises him for making the chiefs of the Dorians - the descendants of Danaus - pure-blood Egyptians (‘The fact is that he has completely abandoned Epaphus and Io and Iasus and Argus’ (857 e)). This means that Plutarch sticks to Aeschylus’ version, where the genealogy of Danaus as son of Epaphus, who is himself the son of Io and as such a descendant of Argos, is firmly established.

The image of Egypt and Egyptians reflected through stereotypes in Greek theatre

²⁵ Lloyd, 1975-1988. The quote is from Lloyd, 1988, 52.

²⁶ Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984, esp. 1864-1869.

²⁷ Vasunia, 2000, 75-109.

²⁸ Idem 110-135.

²⁹ Plutarch, “On the malice of Herodotus” 857 c-e.

Many stereotypes of Egypt and the Egyptians can be found in Greek theatre. Mainly two Greek tragedies centralize Greek-Egyptian comparisons through stereotypes: *The Suppliant Maidens* of Aeschylus and the *Helen* of Euripides.³⁰ Let's take first the case of Aeschylus' play *The Suppliant Maidens*, where the 50 daughters of Danaus flee before the 50 sons of Aegyptus who want to marry them. The play involves the story of the descendants of Io, the Argive woman impregnated by Zeus, a priestess of Hera in Argos, the city where the daughters of Danaus present themselves as suppliants.³¹ She traveled to Egypt in the form of a cow and there gave birth to Epaphus, whose descendants ruled Egypt and then founded numerous important cities in Greece. This kind of story, whose rationale seems to be the desire to make a claim of relative priority, will reappear in different guises, as will varying claims about the relative antiquity of Egypt and Europe. Aeschylus' play recounts the maidens' supplication of the king of Argos for protection. The sons of Aegyptus are represented in the play by a number of negative stereotypes: their blackness is emphasized and associated with death; they are savage and lustful, and, along with the Danaids, have no appreciation of the democratic institutions of Greece, expressing surprise, for example, that the king must consult a deliberative body of Greek citizens instead of simply acting on his own advice. The Argives, on the other hand, are represented as the protectors of women against these oversexed Egyptians. Furthermore, by giving a Greek (although mythical) pedigree to Danaus and Aegyptus, Aeschylus tells his readers that there were Greeks involved in the founding of Egyptian civilisation. Moreover, the way the Suppliants characterize the sons of Aegyptus is not at all complimentary to the latter, and denotes a harsh criticism of the Egyptians, who appear as a lustful people: 'Abominable is the lustful race of Aegyptus and insatiate of battle' (v.741-742; see also 816ff.). The *Helen* of Euripides recounts an alternative version of Helen's whereabouts during the Trojan War, namely that she spent the 10 years of the war in Egypt. Herodotus cites an account he received from the Egyptian priests at Memphis, who claimed that Helen had been kept by the good king Proteus, the type of the generous host, until the rightful husband could come for her (*Histories* 2.113-115). In the *Odyssey*, Proteus is a mythical monster whom Menelaus encounters in Egypt on his way home from Troy. He is the Old Man of the Sea, whose wisdom is accessible only to those who can hold him fast while he changes his form (*Od.* 4.351-570). In Euripides' version when Menelaus is shipwrecked in

³⁰ Idem 33-74. See also Radwan.

³¹ Herodotus, in *Histories* Book 2:182 makes a short allusion to this story.

Egypt on his way home, he discovers that the real Helen has been there all along, while Greeks and Trojans had been fighting over a phantom double. In this telling, however, Proteus' son, Theoclymenus, is king; but he turns out to be another lustful Egyptian trying to have Helen for himself. Not the generous host, but the xenophobic murderer who customarily kills strangers who land on his shore, Theoclymenus is similar to the sons of Aegyptus in Aeschylus' play, from whose rapacious grip the good Greek men must wrest their women. Such stories clearly reflect more about the anxieties of Greek men than they do about real Egyptians. The figure of Proteus is one of many importations into the Egyptian king lists of Greek figures.

Egypt as the cradle of wisdom

From the 4th century BC onwards, Egypt is presented as the place where the most prestigious Greek philosophers acquired at least part of their wisdom and knowledge. In the first century BC Diodorus gives a list of these philosophers: “(...) *we must enumerate what Greeks, who have won fame for their wisdom and learning, visited Egypt in ancient times, in order to become acquainted with its customs and learning. For the priests of Egypt recount from the records of their sacred books that they were visited in early times by Orpheus, Musaeus, Melampus, and Daedalus, also by the poet Homer and Lycurgus of Sparta, later by Solon of Athens and the philosopher Plato, and that there also came Pythagoras of Samos and the mathematician Eudoxus, as well as Democritus of Abdera and Oenopides of Chios.*’ And the Egyptian priests argue that ‘*all the things for which they were admired amongst the Greeks were transferred from Egypt.*”(1:96,1-3). That this kind of list was a *topos* still well-known at the beginning of the second century CE is shown by Plutarch's treatise *Isis and Osiris*.³² Although he does not give such a list, Strabo also testifies to this tradition when he writes that Heliopolis had been in ancient times “*a settlement of priests who studied philosophy and astronomy*”, where Plato and Eudoxus lived thirteen years with the priests (‘as is stated by some writers’) (17:1,29). Moreover during the 4th century appears a more positive perspective of monarchy in the philosophical tradition. This was reflected not only in greater praise for Sparta, but also – and more important for this analysis - for Egypt insofar as it displays the stability associated with strong central rule. In this case one may focus on Plato's connection

³² See paragraph 10 (354 e): “*Witness to this also are the wisest of the Greeks: Solon, Thales, Plato, Eudoxus, Pythagoras, who came to Egypt and consorted with the priests; and in this number some would include Lycurgus also.*” This does not make Plutarch an admirer of Herodotus' work. On the contrary, he criticizes him sharply. Thus one could criticize the Herodotean tradition and simultaneously continue to propagate some elements of it.

with Egypt. According to Plato's *Timaeus* Solon the lawgiver lived for a time in Egypt and learnt from Egyptian priests about events of the distant past, which none of the Greeks had previously known (22 a). In this work Plato praises the *politeia* of Egypt, although his praise is quite ambivalent. Actually his own relationship to Egypt is complex and ambivalent. When Solon is told by the Egyptians that the original Athens had a government that was identical to the ideal one described in Plato's *Republic*, this must be understood as the Plato's way of using the "cultural capital" of Egypt to his own purposes. Although Plato's own antidemocratic sentiments make the authoritarian government of Egypt an apparent ally in his ideas about kingship, one should emphasize that his ideas about Egyptian government, do not reveal a genuine understanding or sympathy for contemporary Egypt, which for most of the classical period was ruled by the Persians. Although traditions about Greek intellectuals and lawgivers making trips to Egypt where they were schooled in Egyptian wisdom, grew to include Plato himself, it is striking the extent to which Egypt was an idea for the Greeks, manufactured for their own purposes, rather than a contemporary reality which they confronted on its own terms.

Roman views of Egypt and Egyptians

Based on the archeological and literary evidence, now one can say that the Romans were Egyptomaniacs. At least a part of them. When their legions came back home from Egypt after long field marches and a voyage on a hot Mediterranean, they shipped most of Egypt's obelisks to Rome. Emperor Constantius II decorated the Circus Maximus with an obelisk. Wealthy Romans ordered the production of obelisks as replicas of the originals. These were manufactured in Egypt and even in Rome. It is known that the Romans held Egyptian costume parties. Some of their villas were decorated with mosaics of Nile sceneries. Caius Cestius, a Roman magistrate, even let built his own tomb in the shape of a pyramid. He incorporated his pyramid into the city walls of Rome close to the Porta Ostiensis. However, this positive attitude, this enthusiasm towards and admiration for Egyptian antiquities and inspiring trends was not always the same, and certainly, not during the last three century BC. Until the end of the Republic, Roman public opinion took relatively little notice of Egypt. The Ptolemaic kingdom entered into sporadic contacts with the Roman Senate in the third century BC.³³ Towards the middle of the second century BC, Egyptian cults arrive at Pozzuoli, brought there from Delos by Italian merchants; soon there were temples of Isis and Osiris at Pozzuoli

³³ See Maehler, 2003, 203-216

and Pompeii. Here, far from Rome, their followers were not harassed by the authorities, and provincial towns (*municipia*) were free to allow the formation of associations (*collegia*), while in Rome this was strictly regulated. The authorities in Rome were suspicious or even hostile to all 'Eastern' cults, no matter whether they were of Greek (i.e., Dionysos) or Oriental origin, because they felt that these were not compatible with the rational, juridical and utilitarian nature of Rome's very conservative religious traditions, which were a pillar of the political establishment. They feared not only the irrational elements of foreign cult practices, but also the danger of political opposition and subversion being fomented in foreign cult associations. The Senate's repeated attempts to ban Egyptian cults in Rome (but not in Pompeii, Beneventum, or other parts of Italy) suggest that the authorities were primarily suspicious of anything that they could not control and regulate. Their repression was not aimed at the Egyptian gods as such, but rather at the indigenous followers of foreign cults. This attitude is the driving force in the persistent repression of Egyptian cults in Rome, which continued well into the Augustan period.³⁴ The Ptolemaic era ends with the death of Cleopatra VII and the annexation of Egypt into the Roman empire as a province in 30 BC.³⁵ Although Romans sometimes expressed curiosity about Egypt in the Republican era, there is a dramatic change as Egypt becomes a province. Rome's rule in Egypt was one of its most unsuccessful ventures, and there was persistent mutual hostility and mistrust between Romans and Egyptians.³⁶ The Egyptians "experienced a qualitative change in repressive policy beginning with the principate of Augustus which imposed rigid restrictions on upward social mobility."³⁷ Literary sources from the Augustan period tend to repeat a number of negative clichés and *topoi*: the treacherous murder of Pompey by Ptolemy XIII, the pernicious attack on the state by the dangerous and seductive Cleopatra, the bizarre worship of animals, Egyptians as cowardly Orientals and barbarians, etc. For instance, in his victory ode to Augustus on the defeat of Cleopatra, Horace concludes with a famous coda which seems to make the Egyptian queen sympathetic, but the middle stanzas of the poem are a catalogue of negative stereotypes of Egyptians (*Odes* 1, 37).³⁸ Other Augustan poets, such as Vergil and Ovid, also reference Egypt in purely negative terms, but the most outrageous attack is found in Juvenal's 15th satire, which is a withering example of Juvenalian indignatio prompted by a supposed instance of Egyptian

³⁴ Idem, 204.

³⁵ Versluys, 2000; Carratelli, et al. 1992; Bonacasa, et al. 1998.

³⁶ Nimis, 2003.

³⁷ Reinhold, 1980, 100.

³⁸ See Etman, 1998, 161-175.

cannibalism.³⁹ In these sources emphasis is often placed on the seditiousness of the Egyptians, which no doubt reflects a major context in which Romans ever thought about Egypt, for whom the province was simply a land “*to be exploited methodically and efficiently.*”⁴⁰

A positive evaluation of Egyptian religion by a foreigner: Apuleius

Some remarks should be made of the only Latin work that seems to provide a serious and positive evaluation of Egyptian religion, the 11th book of Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*, from the second century of the common era. The novel seems to be an adaptation of a Greek original that told a humorous story about a man turned into an ass, and his subsequent adventures before reassuming his human shape. The original is now lost, but an epitome survives amongst the works of Lucian. Apuleius has apparently added to this story a final book describing the character's redemption and initiation into the rites of Isis and Osiris. This final book is so different from the rest of the novel in tone and topic that religious scholars like J. Gwyn Griffiths have assumed that it is a serious representation of a true experience tacked on to an immoral tale. It is taken by these scholars to be an accurate source for details about Isiac religion.⁴¹ However, not everyone agrees that the ending is so serious or that the rest of the novel is so immoral. Ingenious attempts to provide a comprehensive view of the novel that would knit together its two disparate parts have so far failed to win consensus. Daniel Selden, however, has argued that the genre of the novel is typified by the figure of speech known as syllepsis, which is characterized by a yoking of two incompatible orders, an insistence on “both” rather than “either/or.”⁴² This is precisely the characteristic that Selden and Stephens have subsequently identified as animating Hellenistic poetry, there associated with the encounter by Greek poets of Alexandria with the both/and logic of Egyptian mentality.⁴³ In a thorough discussion of Roman attitudes towards Egypt, Versluys gives a more nuanced view of the subject by reference to the visual material available, which shows that despite a general negative, hostile attitude, Egypt still played an important cultural role in Rome. In such case, the negative echoe of all Egyptian may have had in the Roman society the role of negative

³⁹Negative statements by other Roman authors include Propertius, *Elegies* 3.11; Vergil, *Aeneida*, 8.696-700; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.826-31.

⁴⁰See Giusto, 1992, 261-264

⁴¹Griffiths, 1975. There are references to Egypt elsewhere in the novel, beginning in the first sentence, which characterizes the work as “papyrus Aegyptiam argutia Nilotici calami inscriptam” (Egyptian paper inscribed with the sharpness of a Nilotic pen).

⁴²Selden, 1994, 39-64.

⁴³ See also Rutherford, 2000, 116-118.

advertising and marketing, helping thus to enforce in the Roman ethnocentric mentality the Egyptian way of being. Not surprisingly that, despite their animosity toward contemporary Egyptians, the Romans were obviously fascinated with Egyptian realia and religion. *“In order to let Rome remain the ideal center of the world, there also had to be negative properties to counterbalance these dominant [Egyptian] influences. Amongst others for these reasons the unreliability of the Alexandrians is emphasized and not the cultural prestige of the city; the Isis cult is associated with shady amorous practices and not with the immensely popular goddess whose Navigium Isidis ceremony coincided with the official opening of the Roman shipping season, etc.”*⁴⁴

Egyptomania through Pharaonism style in Modern Egyptian Literature. The Case of Naguib Mahfouz

In the last part of this paper I decided to make a brief presentation of an illustrious figure of the Modern Egyptian Literature, one whose work was marked from the very beginning by Pharaonism, the fabulous and glorious Egyptian past: Naguib Mahfouz. In doing so one may better stress the importance of intercultural dialogue and communication by means of literature and language.

During the 1930s in Egypt the ancient past still remained vibrant in the minds of a younger generation of intellectuals. At that time, the future Nobel – Awarded Naguib Mahfouz (1912-2006) spent much of his time writing articles on Pharaonic history and its influence on modern culture. His first book-length work, which he published while still a teenager, was a translation of a children’s book on ancient Egypt, and his first novelistic experiments were historical romances set in Pharaonic times. While his first novel, *‘Abath al-aqdar* (Play of Fates), was not widely discussed in the press, his second novel *Radubis* (Rhodopis), garnered favorable reviews. And his third novel, *Kifah Tiba* (The Struggle of Thebes), began to turn the heads of readers.⁴⁵ The critic Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) wrote: *“If I had a say in the matter, I would put this novel in the hands of every boy and girl. I would publish it and distribute it free of charge to every household.”*⁴⁶ To him, Mahfouz’ novel made ancient Egypt come alive and represented a unique success in Pharaonist literature.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Versluys, 2000, 440.

⁴⁵ Colla 2007, 234.

⁴⁶ Qutb, “Kifah Tiba”, (*al-Risala*, October 2, 1944, 89-92), as reproduced in ‘Ali Shalash, *Najib Mahfuz: al-tariq wa-l-sada*, 208.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 197-198.

To conclude, Qutb's discussion of Mahfouz revived the call for a national literature rooted in the appreciation of Pharaonic civilization, its history, aesthetic styles, and modern relevance. "*The Pharaonic age was the one bright age that stood in the face of the humiliation and decline we were living at the time. The humiliation of British imperialism along with the domination of the Turkish [aristocracy].*"⁴⁸

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