

SOME REMARKS ON THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN NOSTALGIA

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At first, I have to admit that dealing with Egyptian Nostalgia is a very complex and debatable task. This phenomenon is considered as one of the key words of the Ancient Egyptian Civilization as a whole. Many questions arouse motivating this study such as: could looking back to the past by some people be considered as a refusal of their present time? What factors may influence those people to turn back to their past? Is this Nostalgia restricted to a specific field of creation such as art or literature only, or restricted to a specific class of society? But the biggest question is: why do scholars have different, sometimes contradictory views concerning this phenomenon? Archaism or Archaismus¹ is the most commonly used term by Egyptologists to express the Egyptian interest in their past. But scholars also used other terms as: Classicalism, Classicism², Antiquarianism³, and Revival, die Konservative Haltung, Revitalisierung, Rückgriff, or even Renaissance⁴. We can add an anthropological one to this list which is: Fundamentalism⁵. Although these terms seem to have the same meaning, there are slight differences between them. Being an embodiment of the Egyptian's realization of his existence, Nostalgia is expected to express itself in all fields of civilization: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Literature, Funerary practices, and other cultural activity. Concerning Archaism, we can divide its fields into two main types⁶:

First: A Silent type; which refers to the artistic stylistic forms such as painting, sculpture, etc. *Second*: An Eloquent type; namely the secular and religious literature. Concerning the Silent type, it is expected that scholars have to exert some effort to extract and to conclude the archaizing tendencies involved indirectly in it. On the other hand, the Eloquent expresses itself more clearly and directly, with no "obscure meaning". These Eloquent texts may mention *Sp tpy*⁷ first time: referring to the time of creation, or talk about the ideal past of the "Golden Age"⁸, or even use archaic

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grammatical, epigraphic or orthographic forms of writing⁹. The first initial challenge which we may face is the problem of dating, by which we get different suggestions. Most of the scholars focus on the Late Period. It cannot be a peak or a starting point at the same time. But others have different suggestions. H. Brunner supposes that Archaism started during the New Kingdom: "*Vielleicht die erste Periode, in der Man archaismus feststellen könnte, ist die frühe 19. Dyn.*"¹⁰. While there is another opinion sets an earlier start during the Old Kingdom. J. Josephson assumes that "*the earliest acknowledged example of an archaism occurs in the sixth dynasty tomb of Nisutnefer in Giza*"¹¹. And a third one may refer to the Middle Kingdom as an assumed starting time of this phenomenon. D. Wildung says: "*The art of the royal workshops in Memphis at the beginning of the twelfth Dynasty referred back to the legacy of the Old Kingdom from Memphis*". And so, "*Looking back to the past had smoothed the way forward into the future*"¹².

These wide gaps could be considered as a result of the diverse bases upon which each scholar built his assumption. In other words, this is due to the lack of common agreed upon criteria for detecting and measuring this Nostalgia or Archaism accurately. If each scholar, separately, would have his own point of view, he'll surely get different results and conclusions. Another important point which must be taken into consideration is the differentiation between "Tradition" and "Nostalgia" or "Archaism". Traditions are simply habits which are inherited and practiced continuously from the ancestors by their successors with no time gaps between both of them¹³. Using the inherited archived religious texts in temple rituals may be a good example for Traditions¹⁴. But within Archaism, a time gap between the present and the past must exist. So, turning back to the past happens in this case with consciousness. The process of choosing specific elements of the past, to be revived – i.e. Eclecticism which reminds me also of Egyptomania-, takes place under the umbrella of "awareness" and does not automatically happen as in tradition. This "conscious" Archaism requires archives kept in safety up to a few years to be imitated,¹⁵ the examples of which may be:

1) Tut-^cAnkh-Amun's "restoration stela" which refers to the reformation executed by the king to end the Amarna's disturbance¹⁶. And as the king wrote in the inscriptions of this stela that the goal of Pharaonic history is: "*that the world becomes as it was at the time of creation*"¹⁷. So, El-Amarna period is considered here as the "time gap" which existed between the present & the past times.

2) Each Egyptian king considered his reign as a new start of the world. So, many kings like Amenemhat I, Seti I & Herihor in the reign of Ramses XI used the term *wHm mswt* to describe their ascension to the throne¹⁸. This proclaims a "Re-birth" or renewal act for the entire cosmos inspired by the ideal past during the time

of creation¹⁹. This may prove, as Homung describes²⁰, *"the Pharaoh's ability to repeat what the creator God had done at the beginning of time"*. *"Injustice and disorder may rule until a new king could ascend the throne and reintroduce Maat as the basis of all order"*. *"All this has little to do with historical reality"*. If we agreed with the assumption that any specific civilization lives either in a "Linear Time" or in a "Periodic, Cyclic Repeated" one²¹, we can then accept that this theory of *wHm mswt* (renewal or birth), lets the Egyptian time takes the shape of the cyclic "Ouroboros snake" with his "tail in mouth" (*sd m r3*)²². The main task of the king is to return back some of the completeness of the world enjoyed during the time of creation.

3) The late period, namely the Kushite – Saïte period is considered to be an obvious peak in this Nostalgia²³. Some scholars assume that, in the Late Period, a kind of "misinterpretation" or confusion occurred concerning what is mythical and what is historic²⁴. This means that the Egyptians of that period, due to political circumstances and foreigners' rule, could not differentiate between the mythical inherited events and the actual historical past. Against this opinion, Assmann considers the Archaism of this period as a civilizational revolution. From his point of view, the Egyptians of that period explored and re-discovered their great past, which was inspiring consciously and selectively in all fields of civilization and there was no kind of "mixing"²⁵. Now, how can we determine the bases and motives of Archaism in a specific period of time? We can figure out the following concerning this question:

1) The density and degree of Archaizing tendency widely differs from one period to another across Egyptian history. Simply, this means that each period has its own motives although there is a possibility of having some common ones at all periods.

2) The ancient Egyptians categorized the past into two types: Mythical and Historical. Otto expresses this differentiation and the relation between these types as follows: *"Die Urzeit als das ganz andere, die Schöpfungszeit als das Normen Gebende und die Jetztzeit als das die Schöpfungszeit Fortsetzende"*²⁶. Egyptian texts referred to the time of creation as *sp tpi* (first time) with great frequency²⁷. The golden age 'm *haAw nb r-Dr*' or the standard past is the time at which *"the original harmony between men and the divine world order existed"*, before the Gods' departure from the earth to heaven²⁸. At that golden age, *Isft* was replaced by *MAat*²⁹ which descended from Heaven³⁰, the snake (and the crocodile) didn't bite, the scorpion didn't sting, bellies were full of food and there was no hunger in the two lands³¹. Thus, these are the characteristics of the time of Gods and the Sun-God. As Kákósy assumed, *"The reign of the successors to the throne of the Sun-God already shows signs of Gradual decadence"*³². This decadence was thought to

be defeated through restoring the ideal past of the golden age by kings mainly or even by individuals themselves sometimes.

3) Was Archaism just a case of "copying" the past? Upon answering this, Peter Der Manuelian suggests in his important study that the Saite period, for example, used the past, and didn't copy it as it is³³. The Egyptians of that period, both kings and individuals, consciously selected elements of different periods and made their own reproductions i.e. a kind of a "Hybrid Mixture"³⁴. Of course we can't consider this process of 'taking the past as a model' as a rule for all other periods characterized by Archaism. But we do have to take this differentiation between taking the past as model and copying the past into consideration in all fields of creation.

4) Concerning the motives of Archaism, we can first refer to different previous interpretations concerning this phenomenon. Anthes considers it as "a replacement for the lack of contemporary creativity and imagination"³⁵. But Otto considers it as "a longing for the 'Golden Age' of Egyptian history"³⁶. While Wolf considers this "eclecticism as an evidence of an age in chaos"³⁷. But Assmann attributes it to "a fear (due to foreign pressures) of losing contact with the time of original creation and hence one's collective cultural identity"³⁸. As for Der Manuelian, he assumes that Archaism prior to dynasty 26 was due to political and economic instability, while it was during Dynasty 26 due to "xenophobic tendencies". This was because of the foreign domination (like Assyrians) and the increasing numbers of foreigners whose presence pressured the sense of Egyptian national identity³⁹. Tait relates this phenomenon to the broader developments in Egyptian society, from at least as early as the Kushite period.⁴⁰ And from an artistic point of view, Morkot sets different reasons for this Archaism which are: "a political factor" (the re-unification of Egypt following the Persian rule); "a cultic factor" (the restoration of earlier monuments for cultic purposes); and "a personal antiquarian tendency"⁴¹.

Concerning the mechanism of Archaism or selecting some specific elements of the past to be imitated, we can refer to Hornung's assumption, that the historical events are generally too many, but only few of them were recorded and archived for different reasons⁴². Subsequently, only few of those few recorded historical events are to be models to be repeated by, or which can inspire different Archaizing groups:

First: Individual eclecticism or selection: in which each person has his own reasons to choose specific archived history or persons from the past to appreciate. Good examples of this type are prince Khaemwaset son of Ramesses II who showed a special interest in the pyramids' period⁴³; the Late Ramesside official Imiseba, who had archival responsibilities at Karnak, also had scenes of festival processions copied from major Theban temples in his tomb⁴⁴. *Second:* As for class Archaism in which for

example the royal regime is looking for legitimacy through association with the past, we have Hatshepsut who inspired the style of Mentuhotep neb hepet Re's temple for hers at Deir el Bahari⁴⁵. Or if the regime is starting a new era as in the case of Amenhotep I, who showed the influence of eleventh & early twelfth dynasties' monarchs revealing the desire of the eighteenth dynasty's founding king to advertise himself as the seal of the original Theban chain of kings⁴⁶. *Third*: The Kushite-Saite Period will serve as a model for social Archaism because, although the initial motive for Archaism then was to again legitimacy from an association with the past, it turned into a wide social interest. Sabine Neureiter assumed that Archaism of the late period was due to the Elite who wanted to use the past to ensure their privileges. She wrote: "*Der Archaismus ist Ausdruck einer Sehnsucht der herrschaftstragenden Elite nach ihrer ursprünglichen Exklusivität*"⁴⁷. But Assmann supposes that this phenomenon was a kind of aristocratic civil awareness. From his point of view, that was not only an expression of the need of the Elite to keep a higher position than the lower classes, but it also contained and involved all classes to represent the Egyptian civilization abroad, in the face of Assyrians, Greeks, Jews and Persians⁴⁸. This of course explains why Archaism became a popular movement at that time and was not restricted to a specific class. But before anything else, we should establish when the past starts? Of course there is no single answer for this question. Each period in Egyptian history had its own golden age of the past to follow. Ashton's study suggests that Archaism doesn't require a long past to explore. Some Ptolemaic Sculpture looks back to the very recent past⁴⁹. The Saite Period was inspired mainly by the Old & New Kingdoms' styles. And for the New Kingdom Archaism, Middle & Old Kingdoms were mainly taken as Models⁵⁰. This means simply, that each Archaizing tendency (Individual, Class or Social type) has its own taste depending upon complex factors. This taste exerts its eclectic effort to choose a specific past and even specific persons and styles of this past to imitate.

CONCLUSION:

Concerning the phenomenon of Egyptian Nostalgia and Archaism, it still needs a more comprehensive study to create a complete picture. It is necessary to bring all the partial studies close together to compose the whole mosaic scene of this phenomenon. So I deeply agree with what Brunner mentioned: "*Das Phänomen harrt noch umfassenden Sammlung und genauen Interpretation*"⁵¹. Although many scholars have written articles concerning this phenomenon from different point of views, it still needs Better definition of its terminology. And this will allow locating Nostalgia better in different spheres of Egyptian activities. When these standards are to be applied, many variable factors must

be taken into consideration: the period of a specific Nostalgia, the location and the class in which Nostalgic features are to be studied...etc.

In my opinion, we do have to rely on the modern Egyptian society studies in the field of Egyptology. This will give us many explanations of some mysterious points due to the obvious continuation of many habits, traditions, names, language... etc. through all the different Egyptian eras. We do have to differentiate between "Traditions" which are inherited continued practices, and "Archaism" which is a conscious eclecticism of some elements of the discontinued past. This Nostalgia or Archaism was not just a "copying" of the past blindly, but it was a kind of "modeling" this past through choosing and mixing elements of different previous periods. Even though, this ancient mixture receives also consciously some modern invented elements. Due to this Nostalgia, the modern Christian and Muslim Egyptians never looked at their past as a history. So, they would hardly show any interest to their ancient civilization as a discontinued past without the efforts of Egyptologists all over the world. Finally, all over their history, Egyptians showed a great interest towards the subject of continuation. They always considered themselves as an extension of this far past⁵².

NOTES:

¹ P. Der Manuelian, *Living in the Past. Studies in Archaism of the Egyptian Twenty-sixth Dynasty*, (London- New York, 1994); J. A. Josephson, 'Archaism', in: D. B. Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt I*, (Cairo, 2001), 109- 113; H. Brunner, 'Archaismus', *LÄ I*, 386- 395.

² J. Cervelló Autuori, 'Arquetipo y clasicismo en la historia del antiguo Egipto. Una reflexión', *Studia Africana*, Barcelona 7 (1996), 43-57.

³ C. Aldred, *Egyptian Art in the Days of the Pharaohs. 3100-320 BC*, (London, 1980).

⁴ F. K. Kienitz, Die Saïtische Renaissance, in: Elena Cassin, Jean Bottéro [und] Jean Vercoutter (eds.), *Fischer Weltgeschichte Band 4. Die Altorientalischen Reiche III. Die erste Hälfte des 1. Jahrtausends.*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1967), 256-282; N. Grimal, *Histoire de l'Égypte ancienne*, (Paris, 1988) 426- 433, 448.

⁵ This term is originally an Evangelical expression derived from: "Foundation", and was used by Prophet Isaiah in the Holy Bible: (*Isaiah* 16: 28).

⁶ "Morkot" divides Archaism into "visual art" and Literature & official inscriptions (non-visual). See: R. Morkot, 'Archaism and Innovation in Art from the New Kingdom to the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty', in: J. Tait (ed.), *'Never Had the Like Occurred': Egypt's view of its past*, UCL Press, (London, 2003), 79.

⁷ *Wb* V, 278. 3, 4.

⁸ S. Sauneron & J. Yoyotte, *La naissance du monde selon l'Égypte ancienne*, Sources orientales 1. La naissance du monde, (Paris, 1959), 17-91.

It is the time which followed the Creation period and was characterized by its Idealism because it was ruled by Re, the creator god himself before he left to reside in Heaven.

⁹ Der Manuelian, *Living in the Past*, 388 ff.

¹⁰ Brunner, 'Archaismus', *LÄ I*, 388; Morkot also believed in the New Kingdom's Archaism. See: Morkot, 'Archaism and Innovation in Art from the New Kingdom to the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty', Op. Cit., 79- 99.

¹¹ Josephson, 'Archaism', in: D. B. Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt I*, (Cairo, 2001), 110. While other scholar suggests an earlier Archaism. See: W. Davis, 'Archaism and Modernism in the reliefs of Hesy-Ra', in: J. Tait (ed.), *'Never Had the Like Occurred': Egypt's view of its past*, UCL Press, (London, 2003), 31- 60.

¹² D. Wildung, 'Looking back into the Future: the Middle Kingdom as a bridge to the Past', in: J. Tait (ed.), *'Never Had the Like Occurred': Egypt's view of its past*, UCL Press, (London, 2003), 78.

That's why the language of the twelfth Dynasty was regarded as the classical variety of Egyptian until the end of Ancient Egyptian history. See: A. Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian. A linguistic introduction*, (Cambridge, 1995), 5- 8.

¹³ J. Assmann, *Ägypten, Eine Sinngeschichte*, (München - Wien, 1996), 394.

¹⁴ Cf. P. Posener-Kriéger, *Les archives du temple funéraire de Néferirkarê-Kakaï (Les papyrus d'Abousir). Traduction et commentaire*. 2 Vols., Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire, (Le Caire, 1976).

¹⁵ Assmann, *Ägypten, Eine Sinngeschichte.*, 395; J. Osing, 'Alte Schriften', *LÄ I*, 149- 154.

¹⁶ CG 34183 = *Urk.* IV, 2025- 2032; A. H. Schlögl, *Echnaton - Tutanchamun. Daten, Fakten und Literatur*. 4., (Wiesbaden, 1993). 85 ff; , J. R. Harris, 'The Date of the Restoration Stela of Tutankhamun', *Göettinger Miszellen. Heft 5* (1973), 9-11.

¹⁷ E. Hornung, *Idea into Image*, Translated by: E. Bredeck, (New York, 1992), 164.

¹⁸ A. Niwiński, 'Les périodes wHm mswt dans l'histoire de l'Égypte: un essai comparatif', *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Égyptologie* 136 (Juin 1996), 5-26.

¹⁹ E. Otto, 'Geschichtsbild und Geschichtsschreibung in Ägypten', *Die Welt des Orients. Wissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Kunde des Morgenlandes*, III, (Göttingen, 1966), 161-176.

²⁰ Hornung, *Idea into Image*, 163- 164.

²¹ Assmann, *Ägypten, Eine Sinngeschichte*, 29

²² Hornung, *Idea into Image*, 164; L. Kákósy, 'Ouroboros on magical healing statues', in: Terence DuQuesne (ed.), *Hermes Aegyptiacus. Egyptological Studies for B.H. Stricker on his 85th birthday*, Discussions in Egyptology Special Number, 2. (Oxford, 1995), 123-129.

²³ Der Manuelian, *Living in the Past. Studies in Archaism of the Egyptian Twenty-sixth Dynasty*, xxxv; P. Der Manuelian, 'Prolegomena zur Untersuchung saïtischer "Kopien"', *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 10 (1983), 221-245; I. Nagy, 'Remarques sur le souci d'archaïsme en Égypte à l'époque Saïte', *Acta Antiqua*

Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, Budapest 21 (1973), 53-64; D. B. Redford, 'Sais and the Kushite Invasions of the Eighth Century B.C.', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 22 (1985), [1986] 6-15.

²⁴ Brunner, 'Archaismus', *LÄ I*, 393; H. Brunner, 'Zum Verständnis der archaisierenden Tendenzen in der ägyptischen Spätzeit', *Saeculum*, München 21 (1970), 161; D. Eigner, *Die monumentalen Grabbauten der Spätzeit in der thebanischen Nekropole*, Untersuchungen der Zweigstelle Kairo des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes, Vol.6, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, (Wien, 1984), 17- 18.

²⁵ Assmann, *Ägypten*., 396 f.f

²⁶ E. Otto, 'Das «Goldene Zeitalter» in einem ägyptischen Text', *Religions en Égypte hellénistique et romaine*, Colloque de Strasbourg. 16- 18 mai 1967, Bibliothèque des centres d' Études supérieures spécialisées, (Paris, 1969), 93-108 (esp. 96).

²⁷ Brunner, 'Zum Verständnis der archaisierenden Tendenzen in der ägyptischen Spätzeit', 158- 160; , S. Sauneron et J. Yoyotte, 'La naissance du monde selon l'Égypte ancienne', *Sources orientales I. La naissance du monde*, (Paris, 1959), 17-91 (esp. 22 f).

²⁸ L. Kákosy, 'Ideas about the Fallen State of the World in Egyptian Religion: Decline of the Golden Age', *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 17, (Budapest, 1964), 205-216 (esp. 212). This was not a fictional period but it is considered as "the dawn of history" or "the ideal royal reign" which resembles "the reign of Gods".

²⁹ *Pyr.* 265 c.; 1775 b.; Sander-Hansen, E. Constantin, *Historische Inschriften der 19. Dynastie*, (Bruxelles, 1933), 30, 11.

³⁰ This divine task was repeated by: a) either the kings like Amenhotep III (*Urk. IV*, 1683.8-16) & Tutankhamon (*Urk. IV*, 2026.16-19); b) or by some individuals (*Urk. IV*, 490-491).

³¹ Otto, 'Das «Goldene Zeitalter» in einem ägyptischen Text', 103- 106.

³² Kákosy, 'Ideas about the Fallen State of the World in Egyptian Religion: Decline of the Golden Age', 216.

³³ Der Manuelian, *Living in the Past. Studies in Archaisism of the Egyptian Twenty-sixth Dynasty*, 388 f.

³⁴ I Der Manuelian, *Living in the Past. Studies in Archaisism of the Egyptian Twenty-sixth Dynasty*, 406.

³⁵ R. Anthes, 'Ägypten', , in: Fritz Kern (ed.), *Historia Mundi. Ein Handbuch der Weltgeschichte in zehn Bänden*, Band 2. *Grundlagen und Entfaltung der ältesten Hochkulturen*, (Bern, Francke Verlag 1953), 130-223 (esp. 213).

³⁶ Otto, 'Das «Goldene Zeitalter» in einem ägyptischen Text', 100- 101.

³⁷ W. Wolf, 'Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen der ägyptischen und griechischen Kunst', *Archiv für Orientforschung* 6 (1930-1931) 263-273 (esp. 269).

³⁸ J. Assmann, 'Die Entdeckung der Vergangenheit. Innovation und Restauration in der ägyptischen Literaturgeschichte', in: Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht und Ursula Link-Heer (eds.), *Epochenschwellen und Epochenstrukturen im Diskurs der Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte*, (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1985), 484-499 (esp. 485 f).

³⁹ Der Manuelian, *Living in the Past. Studies in Archaisism of the Egyptian Twenty-sixth Dynasty*, 409.

⁴⁰ J. Tait, 'Introduction- ..Since the Time of Gods', in: J. Tait (ed.), *'Never Had the Like Occurred': Egypt's view of its past*, UCL Press, (London, 2003), 13.

⁴¹ Morkot, 'Archaisism and Innovation in Art from the New Kingdom to the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty', 99.

⁴² Hornung, *Idea into Image*, 147.

⁴³ Cf F. Gomaa , *Chaemwese, Sohn Ramses' II. und Hohenpriester von Memphis*, Ägyptologische Abhandlungen 27, (Wiesbaden, 1973).

⁴⁴ T. Bács, 'Theban tomb 65: The Twentieth Dynasty Decoration'. *Egyptian Archaeology* 21, 2002, 21- 24.

⁴⁵ Assmann, *Ägypten, Eine Sinngeschichte*, 394

⁴⁶ Josephson, 'Archaisism', 110.

⁴⁷ S. Neureiter, 'Eine neue Interpretation des Archaismus', *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 21 (1994), 254.

⁴⁸ Assmann, *Ägypten, Eine Sinngeschichte*, 400.

⁴⁹ S. A. Ashton, 'Foreigners at Memphis? Petrie's racial types', in: J. Tait (ed.), *'Never Had the Like Occurred': Egypt's view of its past*, UCL Press, (London, 2003), 187- 196..

⁵⁰ Josephson, 'Archaisism', 109- 113.

⁵¹ Brunner, 'Archaismus'. *LÄ I*, 394.

⁵² Assmann, *Ägypten, Eine Sinngeschichte*, 37 f.