How Pharaohs Became Media Stars

Edited by

Abraham I. Fernández Pichel

Successive reinterpretations and resemanticisations of the pharaoh in the Egyptianising narratives of popular culture, following the aesthetics of Japanese manga, Marvel and DC superhero comics, H.P. Lovecraft's cosmic horror novels, vampire literature, the computer games of the 1980s and classic Hollywood cinema (Yul Brynner in *The Ten Commandements*)
Drawing by Jesús C. Gan @Egypopcult Project

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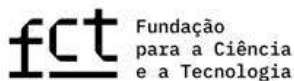
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List of Contributors

Abraham Ignacio Fernández Pichel is FCT Researcher and Lecturer at the Universidade de Lisboa and earned his PhD in Egyptology at the Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen. His main research areas involve the philological and theological study of religious hieroglyphic texts of the Graeco-Roman Period in Egypt and the reception of ancient Egypt in contemporary popular culture. As PI, he currently coordinates the Egypopcult project funded by Fundaçao para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT, Portugal).

Eleanor Dobson is Associate Professor in Nineteenth-Century Literature at the University of Birmingham. She is the author of *Writing the Sphinx: Literature, Culture and Egyptology* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020) and *Victorian Alchemy: Science, Magic and Ancient Egypt* (UCL Press, 2022), and the editor of *Victorian Literary Culture and Ancient Egypt* (Manchester University Press, 2020).

Filip Taterka is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures of the Polish Academy of Sciences. His research work focuses mainly on the New Kingdom in Egypt and, more precisely, the reign of Queen Hatshepsut. He has also published extensively on the presence of ancient Egypt in popular culture.

Guillermo Juberías Gracia is assistant Lecturer and postdoctoral researcher at the Institut d'Études Politiques of the Université de Lyon. He holds a PhD in Art History from the University of Zaragoza. His lines of research are 19th century painting and the influence of the Spanish painter Goya on popular culture.

Jesús Cañadas is a Spanish writer of fantasy and horror. As a great fan of cinema and literature, his books are heavily influenced by popular culture. He is the author of the novel *El ojo de Nefertiti* (2018).

José das Candeias Sales is Full Professor at the Universidade Aberta (Portugal) and a researcher in the Centro de História of the Universidade de Lisboa. He works mainly on the reception of ancient Egypt and Egyptomania, being co-responsible for the research project *Tutankhamon em Portugal. Relatos na Imprensa Portuguesa (1922-1939)*.

Maiken Mosleth King has a BA and MA in Egyptology from the University of Liverpool and is a PhD candidate in the Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Bristol. Her thesis focuses on Egyptian funerary stelae from the Roman Period. Her research interests also include the reception of ancient Egypt and antiquity in visual media.

Marc Orriols-Llonch is Lecturer at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. His main line of research is Gender Studies in Egyptology, more specifically sexual relations and masculinities. He is also a member of the Institut d'Estudis del Pròxim Orient Antic and Tàcita Muta (Grup d'estudis de dones i gènere a l'Antiguitat).

Nuno Simões Rodrigues is Associate Professor at the Universidade de Lisboa and holds a PhD in Ancient History (Classics). His main areas of research are cultural history of ancient Greece (mainly myth and religion), social and political history of ancient Rome (end of Republic and High Empire) and reception studies (antiquity in cinema).

Samuel Fernández-Pichel is a Lecturer at the Universidad de Huelva and holds a PhD in Media Studies from the Universidad de Sevilla. Among his works are the books *Social Imaginaries on American Film in the Age of George W. Bush (2001-2009)* (in Spanish), and *Imágenes resistentes* (on contemporary independent cinema in Spain). His main areas of research are film studies, digital culture, and urban cultural studies.

Sara Woodward received her PhD from the University of Leeds and works at Leeds Trinity University. Her research explores nineteenth-century literature, Egyptomania, Egyptianising fiction, mummy fiction, and nineteenth-century occultism and theology.

Tara Sewell-Lasater is the Director of First Year Seminar at Montana State University. She earned her PhD in Ancient History from the University of Houston. Her research focuses on Ptolemaic queenship and royal women's roles in ancient Egyptian administration and society.

Víctor Sánchez Domínguez is Lecturer in History in the Departamento de Historia Antigua at the Universidad de Sevilla. He holds a PhD in Ancient History and his main research areas are Classical History and the use of role-playing games and popular culture as educational tools to learn about and understand the past.

Preface

The history of the reception of pharaonic Egypt, especially in popular culture, was long ridiculed under the heading of Egyptomania as a venial scurrility and was hardly considered a subject of solid scholarly work. Since the turn of the millennium at the latest, a clear change has taken place: it is becoming increasingly clear how formative and relevant the engagement with Egypt was for the self-understanding of European culture, and still is today. Initially, topics such as the Italian Renaissance, the history of religion, or the Enlightenment, with the subsequent deciphering of hieroglyphs and the establishment of scientific Egyptology, were the focus of interest. The importance of solid research into popular culture and how much this can only succeed as a project beyond disciplinary boundaries is made clear in this volume. Film, literature, comic books and video games cannot be understood in separate case studies of the reception of Egypt, but only as part of a history of fascination that is interwoven in many themes and aspects.

Abraham Ignacio Fernández Pichel has created a solid basis for this research. With his education at renowned French and German universities and his work first in Egypt and now in Lisbon, he has an insight into numerous different research cultures and can bridge the gaps that unfortunately still exist between the language families. The research project '"Ich mache mir die (ägypstiche) Welt, wie sie mir gefällt". Current Conceptions and Ideas on Egyptology and Popular Culture' (abbreviated to 'Egypopcult') based at the Centre for History of the University of Lisbon, which he initiated and directs, provides a solid basis for documenting and analysing the reception of Egypt within pop culture in the long term.

It was not only the theories of post-structuralism and new historicism that drew attention to the fact that the supposed difference between high culture and pop culture is a construction for prestige gain. Pop culture's images of Egypt are much more widespread than those of scientific Egyptology. Nevertheless, they also make use of the results of scientific Egyptology and shape the evocations and associations that Egypt triggers in the public imagination. Pop culture has contrasting aspirations from those of scientific Egyptology, and different epistemological foundations. But the reception of ancient Egypt and pop culture on the one hand, and scientific Egyptology on the other, are closely connected in the reality of life. Without research into the reception of ancient Egypt, Egyptology as a reflected cultural science hardly seems possible.

Florian Ebeling, LMU Munich
Editor of *Aegyptiaca - Journal of the History of Reception of Ancient Egypt*
(https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/aegyp)

Introduction

"Ich mache mir die (ägyptische) Welt, wie sie mir gefällt" (Egypopcult Project)

Abraham I. Fernández Pichel

Even today the academic world often rejects the different manifestations of contemporary popular culture as a source of study in many subjects of the humanities. In the fields of history and archaeology its role is, however, fundamental to the framework of research into cultural reception. In this respect, as defined by Sonna and Illarraga (2016: 9-10):

> Cines, series, películas, libros, videojuegos: las cosas que nos divierten hoy no tienen nada que envidiarle a *La Ilíada* o a *La Odisea* de Homero - el *Game of Thrones* en tiempos del surgimiento de la filosofía - si nos quitamos la venda romántica de nuestros ojos.[1]

But if in the study of other historical periods, such as the classical world (Frauenfelder 2005; Llewellyn-Jones 2009; Nisbet 2006; Wyke 1997) or the Middle Ages (Aberth 2003; Elliot 2010; Harty 1999; Young 2015), this traditional opposition between academicism and popular culture has been progressively softening since the end of the 20th century, in the case of academic Egyptology this process is proving to be much slower and more incremental.[2]

In addition to this drawback, we can add others that are affecting our discipline. Firstly, academic research on reception in Egyptology has been dominated by the processing of isolated and significant leitmotifs of Egyptian civilisation, mainly mummies, pyramids, the figure of Cleopatra, and some objects from Tutankhamun's tomb (Brier 2013; Taterka 2016). Secondly, for the analysis of these leitmotifs, researchers have often exclusively drawn on mainly Anglo-Saxon literature from the turn of the 20th century and Hollywood epic movies since the middle of the that same century, while more recent productions and media such as TV series, comics, games, or the internet have been almost completely ignored. Thirdly, most of the works frequently analysed refer exclusively to the reception of ancient Egypt in western civilisation, ignoring other cultural spheres, like modern Egypt and the Islamic world or the Far East.[3]

The analysis of the visions of ancient Egypt reflected in contemporary popular culture must go beyond the simple observation of the use of Egyptian incidental motifs or complex narratives set in antiquity or featuring characters from the pharaonic past in current literary

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[1] 'Cinemas, TV series, films, books, video games: the things that entertain us today have no need to envy Homer's *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey* - the *Game of Thrones* in the time of the rise of philosophy - if we remove the romantic blindfold from our eyes' (translation by the author).

[2] In this respect, Jean-Marcel Humbert's extensive bibliographical production is particularly noteworthy, including numerous books (1989) and articles (1988; 2014). Equally decisive is the contribution of Florian Ebeling at the scientific level (2019; Assmann and Ebeling 2020) and as co-editor of the journal *Aegyptiaca. Journal of the History of the Reception of Ancient Egypt*, published by the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München since 2017. MacDonald and Rice 2009, among others, may also be included.

[3] An exception to this purely Western approach can be found in Cooperson 2010; Cornelius 2003; Kesh 2022; Haikal 2012.

and audiovisual products. It is essential to integrate these elements into a long tradition that clearly shows the fruitful dialogue established between the past and the subsequent presents (in the plural), up to and including our own time, in the framework of cultural reception, Egyptomania and mnemohistory.[4] In this respect, Florian Ebeling (2019: 57) states:

> The focus here is therefore not on two points in time, that of the act of reception and that of the object of reception, but on the processual and semantically unfolding interaction of history, reference to the past and self-understanding in this interspace.[5]

Within this diachronic perspective there is certainly a constant recurrence of the same motifs and narratives inspired by ancient Egypt over time, but there is also a continual transformation and resemanticisation of them. Examples just from recent sources illustrate this: the pyramid appears in many contemporary works in its function as a tomb as it was in the past, but in other testimonies it is a spaceship (*La trilogie Nikopol* (1980-1992) by Enki Bilal) or the lair of a tyrannic ancient god (*Moon Knight: Welcome to New Egypt* (2016) by Jeff Lemire). Elsewhere, the pharaohs might be portrayed as travellers from the future (*Chrononauts* (2015), Mark Millar), as representatives of a civilisation from outer space (*Ian Kaledine: Le secret de la taiga* (1983) by Ferry-Vernal; *Stargate* (1994) by Roland Emmerich) or one may embody the terrestrial appearance of a superior cosmic being (*Nyarlahotep* (1920) by H.P. Lovecraft). Therefore, within the apparent reiteration of the same leitmotifs there is room for both continuities and discontinuities.

The subjectivity of the authors of works of popular culture including writers, screenwriters or comic artists, among others, and the influencing factors of various kinds (political, social, economic and ideological) in which they are embedded, also play a decisive role in these dynamics. The *Sitz im Leben* of these authors thus often allows us to explain some of the different motivations for and purposes of the versions of ancient Egypt that they develop in their work. Only in this way can we understand, for example, the implications for contemporary politics of works such as Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *Faraon* (1966) or Ismail Kadaré's novel *Pyramidia* (1992), the various social and gender changes of recent decades in the western world as reflected in *Stargate* (1994), *The Mummy* (1999) or *Agora* (2009), or the influence of diverse currents of contemporary thought on the visual or textual modern representation of Egyptian civilisation. In addition, as products primarily intended for entertainment, films, novels or comics are subject to the trends and preferences dictated by audiences and readers.

In conclusion, these questions show the capacity of contemporary popular culture to recover elements from the past from the viewpoint of the present, which is, at the same time, influenced by the succession of previous presents that have created the tradition that surrounds and influences each author in his creative process.[6]

Seen in this way, as one might suppose, historical or archaeological authenticity and accuracy is not a necessary objective in all cases, hence it has only a limited impact on reception studies.

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[4] The term 'Egyptomania' is currently undergoing a profound revision and is even considered by many scholars as inappropriate. In this regard, see Berger (2021: 12) and Versluys (2017: 131). See also the different contributions to this topic in Versluys 2020. Regarding mnemohistory, we refer to the previously mentioned articles by Ebeling and Assmann, as well as to Assmann 1997; Ebeling 2018.

[5] See also Assmann 1997: 9.

[6] On the authors and their relation to this tradition, see Assmann and Ebeling (2020: 33).

Although authors often carry out genuine research work, with direct access to historical sources or, more often, to scientific literature,[7] we must not forget that contemporary popular culture is made up of fictional products and therefore recreates a recognisable but not necessarily historically truthful version of ancient Egypt.

These preliminary questions briefly summarise some of the fundamental principles and theoretical approaches governing current academic research in the field of cultural reception. This draws on contributions from numerous disciplines and sub-disciplines including collective memory, mnemohistory, historiophoty, Egyptomania, intertextuality, visual culture, transmedia narrative, and many others. The application of these in modern research is changing the landscape of cultural reception studies, while progressively enabling its consolidation within academia and its presence in the educational programmes promoted by different universities all around the world.

I have no doubt that the development during 2023 and 2024 of the research project '"Ich mache mir die (ägyptische) Welt, wie sie mir gefällt". Current Conceptions and Ideas on Egyptology and Popular Culture' (abbreviated to Egypopcult) will contribute to this goal. Its German title is adapted from a phrase from a well-known Swedish TV show of the 1960s and 1970s, *Pippi Långstrump* (or *Pippi Longstocking* in its English version), summarising the conscious reinterpretation of the past in the minds and creations of contemporary authors: 'I make the (Egyptian) world in the way I like it'. The project is funded by the *Fundaçao para a Ciência e a Tecnologia* (FCT), the main governmental research institution in Portugal, and is, to my knowledge, the first and only academic project on ancient Egypt in contemporary popular culture funded by a public institution worldwide.

To carry out this project, the scientific team, coordinated by myself as Principal Investigator (PI), is multidisciplinary and intergenerational, integrating mainly experts in Egyptology, but also from the fields of literature, art history, audiovisual communication, cultural studies, museology or informatics, among others, from American, African and European universities. In the first phase of its development, Egypopcult consists of 11 scientific members, 4 consultants and more than 40 external collaborators from more than 20 universities. These numbers will only increase over the project implementation period.

In terms of concrete objectives and outputs, Egypopcult aims to promote studies in Egyptology and popular culture by creating a space for multidisciplinary scientific debate and exchange. This collaborative initiative is channelled through the creation of a free-access online database and a scientific network, which can be used as an essential source for future research internationally. In the configuration of the database, we intend to record the evidences of popular culture that allude, explicitly or implicitly, to ancient Egypt, from the 19th century to the present day, paying constant attention to the new examples provided by movies, TV series, comic books, genre fiction literature, games, the internet, and the list continues. In this work of data collection and analysis, the participation of researchers, but also of ordinary people interested in popular culture and Egyptology will be essential in order

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[7] Even works that strive for greater historical veracity are, in the end, fictional and not documentary. Sometimes the research work of screenwriters and artists is complemented by the involvement of a historical consultant in films or novels. Thus, in the case of Egypt fiction, Egyptologist Kazimierz Michalowsi advised Jerzy Kawalerowicz on *Faraon* (1966) and Stuart Tyson Smith did the same for *Stargate* (1994) and *The Mummy* (1999). In this respect, see Coleman 2004.

Figure 1. Logo of the Egypopcult Project by Dirk van Dijl Animation & Illustration (© Egypopcult)

to promote the creation of a broad and heterogeneous community of users. With regard to this, another priority in the configuration of this user network is the integration of people from cultural backgrounds other than the western world, such as Africa and Asia, whose cultural manifestations and mass media are less known to us.

Another of the main outputs of the Egypopcult project is an international seminar to be held in Lisbon in early 2024, open to the whole academic community and to the general public in the on-site modality or via Zoom or other video platforms. This international event aims to constitute a reference framework in the field of reception studies in which new approaches to the multiple recreations of ancient Egypt in contemporary popular culture will be presented.

This monograph, *How Pharaohs became Media Stars: Ancient Egypt and Popular Culture*, is also of great relevance to the development of the Egypopcult project. The book begins with an *état de la question* on popular culture and its relationship with Egyptology: José das Candeias Sales offers an analysis of the concept of popular culture resulting from the frequent opposition of notions such as high culture, low culture, *culture lettrée*, mass culture and others, while presenting the essential dynamics that have shaped the reception of ancient Egypt from antiquity to the present. In doing so, the author stresses the necessary and desirable valorisation of Egyptianised popular culture as a sub-discipline of Egyptology in its own right.

The next three articles present the use of Egyptian narratives in literary works of historical fiction, of mystery, and of science fiction and fantasy. Firstly, Filip Taterka analyses the multiple influences of ancient Egypt in Terry Pratchett's *Pyramids (The Book of Going Forth)* (1989). In this and other works Pratchett creates a fantasy universe in which he projects some of his main concerns, while at the same time using it to expose some of his criticisms of life in the modern world. Secondly, Pauline Gedge's novel *Child of the Morning* (1977) is the

subject of Maiken Mosleth King's analysis. In this article, King analyses the literary portrait of Queen Hatshepsut from the perspective of academic Egyptology and contemporary feminism, specifically the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. Thirdly, Sara Woodward's article focuses on Marie Corelli's *Ziska, the Problem of a Wicked Soul* (1897), which reveals a representation of ancient Egypt linked to mystery, secret wisdom, occult power and esotericism. This and other works by Corelli and other nineteenth-century authors also serve to contrast the ideas of various theologies of the time, such as 'Electric Christianity', and the otherness represented by ancient Egypt.

The next section of the book focuses on Egyptian-inspired cinema and consists of four articles. In the first, Eleanor Dobson explores both the visual and narrative influence of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922 on cinematic versions of *The Mummy*, specifically Karl Freund's 1932 film and Stephen Sommers's more recent one (1999). Nuno Simões Rodrigues then looks at the sequences set in Egypt in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956). In his article, Rodrigues goes beyond a purely visual analysis of the film and delves into the documentary sources that inspired the American director and producer, mainly the Bible and Flavius Josephus, as well as other ancient authors. All of this gives the Moses played by Charlton Heston obvious biblical, but also Hellenistic, resonances. Guillermo Juberías Gracía uses some of the same sources as the previous article, but his approach is eminently visual. As an art historian, this author exposes the obvious analogies between early recreations of settings and scenes in some classic Hollywood films and the paintings of various nineteenth-century painters, notably the Dutch painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema. The last contribution in this section, written jointly by Abraham I. Fernández Pichel and Marc Orriols-Llonch, brings together examples from cinema, but also from literature and comics, to analyse the recurrent sexualisation of numerous Egyptian characters in contemporary popular culture. Their analysis also reveals the configuration of specific models of masculinities and femininities that are part of the tradition of popular culture and Egyptomania.

The following two articles constitute a section devoted to games of different types inspired by ancient Egypt. Tara Sewell-Lasater studies the figure of Cleopatra in the video game *Assassin's Creed Origins* and her analogies with the portrayal of the Ptolemaic queen according to ancient sources and up to the present day. Sewell-Lasater's approach poses the confrontation between the female Cleopatra and the eminently masculine perception of her conveyed by numerous sources, which was decisive in the construction of the character in *Assassin's Creed*. The second article focuses on some of the books in the *World of Darkness* RPG universe. Ancient Egypt is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for this type of game, of which the authors, Abraham I. Fernández Pichel and Víctor Sánchez Domínguez, offer a brief compilation. The article focuses on the analysis of the Egyptian narratives used in the game, with a double motivation: to know the historical sources available to its creators and the influence of various works of popular culture in the textual genesis of the game.

The different audiovisual and textual media studied in this volume also include the internet. Within this vast domain, Samuel Fernández-Pichel examines the image of the Egypt of the pharaohs transmitted by the content creators of the social network TikTok, drawing on models taken from digital ethnography. From this observation, different visions and recreations of a multifaceted Egypt emerge, sometimes configured through personal and subjective perceptions of the past, and sometimes following the guidelines of today's mass tourism.

By way of an epilogue, *How Pharaohs became Media Stars: Ancient Egypt and Popular Culture* culminates with a contribution that seems to me innovative and necessary. Studies, academic or otherwise, focusing on popular culture abound with reflections by specialists and amateurs, but the testimony of the authors themselves who recreate ancient Egypt in their works or who include characters and artefacts taken from the pharaonic past in their plots is undoubtedly lacking. The choices made by these creators according to their historical and geographical contexts, their knowledge of history and popular culture, and their personal preferences and those of their audiences are an object of study in themselves and, as such, are integrated into the interests of Egypopcult. Among the authors collaborating with our project, Jesús Cañadas, one of the main representatives of the new fantasy literature in Spain, stands out. He is the author of the article 'The Road to *El ojo de Nefertiti*. Representing Egyptian Mythology for Middle-grade Readers', in which, in a tone far removed from the purely academic, he presents the different stages of the creative process of this novel set partially in Egypt and with historical characters introduced in a plot of horror and fantasy.

Finally, I would like to thank all the members of the Egypopcult team for their collaboration and help during the preliminary and initial phases of the project: scientific members, consultants, external collaborators, reviewers, translators, proof-readers, fellows and students. Among all of them I would like to highlight Filip Taterka and Alfonso Álvarez-Ossorio for their availability and help in all circumstances; Eleanor Dobson, Tara Sewell-Lasater and Sara Woodward for always giving me an affirmative and pleasant response to my constant requests during the last months; Samuel Fernández-Pichel for the fruitful conversations we both had and will have on every topic we can imagine; Marc Orriols-Llonch, for our shared complaints, frustrations and also motivations, and for the longest WhatsApp voice messages I can remember; and Michael Vina, for always finding time to revise my English. Thanks also to José Augusto Horta, director of the Centro de História at the Universidade de Lisboa, for his unconditional help and the support that all my projects have had from him since I arrived in Lisbon. Thanks also to my colleagues at the Centro de História for their collaboration in logistical matters, among many others. The permanent assistance of Mike Schurer, editor of Archaeopress Publishing Ltd., has been equally invaluable throughout the planning and writing of the book. I would also like to thank Florian Ebeling and Kevin McGeough for their collaboration and kindness, for guiding me in matters that I am only learning little by little.

Finally, Egypopcult and this book would be nothing without the love and patience of my family. Their presence was enough for me to often go beyond what I could humanly do. In this section I include you, Sarah. Without you, none of this would have made any sense.

Abraham I. Fernández Pichel
Ulm, June 2023

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Theories on Pop Culture and Egyptology

José das Candeias Sales

Given the variety of disciplines, analytical models, approaches, and perspectives that have been brought to bear on 'popular culture', and to the diverse epistemological traditions that have informed its academic discussion, there is no definition of the term that garners clear unanimous acceptance (Certeau 1990; Bourdieu 1985; Chartier 1995: 179-180, 183-185; Adorno 2001; Storey 2009: 4-8; Baker and Jane 2016: 57-60). Notwithstanding this diversity, 'popular culture' has a direct association with the processes of 'cultural reception' as well as with 'cultural memory', 'collective memory', and 'mnemohistory'. These often bring to the fore topics of representation, mimicry, rejection, and cultural identity, all of which are active links to the past, to tradition, history, and memory (Assmann 1998; 2015; 2017; Assmann and Ebeling 2020; Ebeling 2017: 1-3; 2018: 1-8). The scholars studying 'popular culture' have expanded their interests and focuses, nowadays, to consider new subjects and themes such as issues of gender and sexuality, the oppression and empowerment of women, social inclusion, planetary ecology and sustainability. They scrutinise such diverse fields as advertising campaigns, television fiction, technological tools, the music industry and more, all of which which show us that these related concepts encompass more than what is usually covered by the concept of 'reception'.

The accelerating and enhancing effects of 'the media culture', 'mass media', and 'social media' in contemporary society grant an expansion and reach of global production and consumerism, truly universal at times, such as we have never seen before (Kellner 2020: 1-5). The 'mediatic reception', covering vast audiences everywhere, is, thus, another topic of the 'popular culture' equation that we must not overlook (Storey 2003).

The Cambridge Dictionary online defines 'pop culture' as 'Music, TV, cinema, books, etc. that are popular and enjoyed by ordinary people, rather than experts or very educated people'.[1] This short and generic definition encompasses an intention and a reality: the category 'popular culture' incorporates, delimits, characterises, and designates practices and products that do not belong to the sphere of 'erudite culture' yet which have some coherence and autonomy that is unrelated and different from 'lettered culture'. However, this idea is rooted in a truth that must equally be accounted for: 'popular culture' is a definition invented by scholars to think and reflect on this ever-changing cultural phenomenon. Thus, the concept has, in itself, some ambiguity. On the one hand, it is 'popular' because it is 'enjoyed by ordinary people'; on the other hand, it is created and reflected upon by expert and very educated people. This makes it difficult, at times, to sort out its components, its premises, and its hierarchies.

There are two underlying intelligibility models that are common to all the disciplines that resort to this concept, and each have their own research strategies, descriptive styles and opposing theoretical proposals. One emphasises the autonomy and symbolic coherence of 'popular culture', recognising its legitimacy and independence; the other assumes popular

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[1] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pop-culture (Accessed 29/1/2023).

culture's dependence on the dominant, legitimate, and pure 'lettered culture', which leads to the delegitimisation, inferiorisation, and exclusion of the former (Chartier 2003: 7). Thus, the concept of 'popular culture' is often defined indirectly and residually, implicitly or explicitly, by opposition or in comparison to other forms of culture or other conceptual categories such as 'folk culture', 'mass culture', 'high culture', 'dominant culture', and 'working-class culture' (Storey 2015: 1, 5, 6, 13).

In fact, in the traditional vision, 'popular culture' consists of all symbolic expressions (such as music, dance, festivities, literature, art, fashion, gastronomy, religion, legends, superstitions, amusements, games, etc.) produced and consumed by the lower and less literate social classes, as opposed to the 'erudite culture' of the intellectual, academic elite, the culture legitimated by the higher social classes, by lettered and cultured people. Thus a powerful and structured social dimension is associated with the concept of 'culture'.

In principle, this erudite culture deriving from the dominant class, the *culture institutionnelle*, would be endowed with some kind of intrinsic, essential, and segregated superiority, which would allow for its domination over the people's culture, the *culture ordinaire*, regarded as 'inferior'. Through culture, and by differentiated mechanisms and symbolic demarcation, the dominant social groups exercise a hierarchical social control over the dominated. However, this is something that is generally more consensual than forced (Bourdieu 1985; Mattelart and Neveu 2008).

In the field of cultural studies there are two main perspectives on popular culture that have persisted. One sees 'popular culture' as a marginal culture, an imitation of the dominant culture (which is considered legitimate and the point of reference), and a simplified, misrepresented, and non-autonomous subproduct of that culture. The other considers it as working-class culture, an authentic culture, autonomous from the dominant classes, which is admirable in its own right and not inferior or subservient to these (Ribeiro 2019: 110).

In this sense, there is the tendency to look at 'popular culture' or 'working-class culture' (*low culture*) – which is resistant to and different from the 'dominant culture' (*high culture*) – through the lens of traditional, folkloric expressions. This view censures its practices, considering them heterodox, superstitious, and isolated. 'Popular culture' is then seen as a smaller and 'inferior' cultural space, populated by and resulting from the cultural expressions of 'inferior' people (who are actually the majority). This paradigm represses, smothers, downplays, and despises popular culture, effectively anticipating its disintegration, fragmentation, and disappearance. Ultimately, the conceptual category of 'popular culture' is an empty vessel, and it can be filled in many ways, frequently conflicting, depending on the context in which it is used (Storey 2015: 1-14).

However, 'popular culture' cannot be seen as either a mere reproduction of the elite's lettered culture or as a simple autonomous creation. There is, obviously, a synthesis of original, specific, and unique elements, as well as imported, adopted, adapted, and contingent elements. The field of culture is filled with tensions, disputes, reactions, resistances, challenges, inventions, re-inventions, performances, simulations, and metamorphoses: 'Cultures are arenas in which different ways of articulating the world come into conflict and alliance' (Storey 2003: x).

If there is no pure 'erudite culture', there is no pure 'popular culture' either. The supposed cultural 'purity' is frequently an ideologically driven construction (a normalisation with a symbolic motivation of increasing and/or maintaining 'social cohesion' and 'social stability') with a purpose of political-mental supervision and regulation, in articulation with adjacent forms of propaganda and manipulation. The same can be said about 'traditional', 'authentic', and 'genuine' as adjectives to describe culture, whatever it may be. This means that it is urgent to desacralise the conventional criteria of cultural legitimation.[2]

The rise of an increasingly widespread mass culture, especially following the mainstreaming of mass media, social media, and platforms such as websites, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Netflix, Amazon Prime, HBO Max, etc., have helped to augment the processes of the dissemination and reception of popular culture and so of its destinations. The media influences and promotes the creation of shared identities (the 'we' and the 'other'), images, ideologies, rituals, and symbols. The mass culture of our time favours and enriches 'popular culture', and the latter entrenches, expands and renews itself. To recognise this indisputable transformation and its consequences is a vital demand for the common citizen, as well as for any investigator of any scientific or other field of study (Kellner 2020).

Although in certain linguistic-cultural backgrounds these might not be perfect synonyms, the concepts of 'popular culture' (culture of the people or folk culture) and 'pop culture' (culture delivered to the people or mass culture) share some elements, since they group together certain cultural products that have benefited from the spread of media culture and consumerist culture in terms of both production and distribution.[3] These two cultures are similar because they are made available for mass audiences all round the world, and they do not make any distinction between social groups or classes, even though 'pop culture' has a greater connection to mass media and resorts to strategies of greater recognition and resignification among specific groups of consumers (Narváez and Laba 1986: 9).

We perceive 'pop culture' – with its phenomena, clichés, icons, celebrities, and superstars – as an integral part of 'media culture', to the extent that it is dependent on the media to be constructed, shared, absorbed, and levelled. Thus, the easy and generalised access to the majority of people characterises massified 'popular culture'. 'Pop culture' is mainly a way of consuming and enjoying culture, with the basic function of entertaining, that influences and reverberates on wide, massive, transversal, and global contexts (Kellner 2020).

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[2] Even when one claims, for example, the 'purity' or 'authenticity' of a traditional dance, choreographed generation after generation, always in the same way, allegedly, affixed to a regional or local song, sung in the same meetings in a community, under the same chords and musical arrangements, or when we celebrate an event (for example, Carnival) according to ancient rites, unique to and characteristic of a village, we always have to consider the historical-cultural context in which these practices happen and repeat themselves. If we do this we can understand the changes and motivations that make these cultural spheres likely to be exploited and manipulated politically and ideologically. Even if we keep that event within a traditional repertoire, a phenomenon such as mass tourism, for example, distorts what could be 'genuine' and makes it artificial, fake, and soulless. A particular social practice can change the essence of a certain cultural practice.

[3] It should be said that the use of these concepts can in fact indicate specific features, according to the cultural, linguistic, and terminological traditions of each country and researcher, which makes this categorisation process and the attempt at terminological stabilisation very complex. For example, in English, there is a dichotomy between 'folk culture' and 'mass culture'. In French, 'culture populaire' can be shortened into 'pop culture', but it should not be mistaken for 'culture de masse' or 'culture médiatique'. In Portuguese, 'popular culture' and 'pop culture' cover different phenomena, but in Spanish they are equivalent.

Similarly, it is undeniable that 'pop culture' is directly linked to the market, to consumption, and to capitalist ideas. This is clear once we take into account that 'pop culture' is usually based on the standardisation and repetition of patterns (i.e., industrial production), and that its media products (merchandise, articles of consumption, etc.) aim mainly at generating profit, regardless of the target population that they attract or at whom they are aimed. This 'commercialisation of culture' demonstrates the indissociable link between 'pop culture' and capitalism, from methods of production and distribution to the operation in competitive unregulated markets, subject to free supply and demand.

However, 'pop culture' is also instilled with a democratic nature because its products, contrary to those of erudite culture, are accessible to the majority of people, exhibiting a 'democratisation of culture', and usually there are no differences between the large and heterogeneous audiences. Simultaneously, it encourages a 'reterritorialisation of culture' because of its transactional and universal sense of access, sharing, and significance of cultural products. This makes 'pop culture' a vital instrument of cultural imperialism, above all in western society, where North American cultural imperialism, through the influence of television and cinema, continues to exert a strong and extensive presence.

Furthermore, the 20th century and, to an even greater extent, the 21st century, are clearly characterised by a straightforward separation of audiences, spaces, genres, and styles that provoke an unavoidable fragmentation of cultural expressions, in which the socially pure, lettered, and elite stops being airtight or unique. What matters now is the actual appropriation of certain cultural aspects or traits by groups or individuals, where the sociology of distribution and the wealth of the underlying cultural habits are valued. Experiences, memories, and expectations gain a new sense or worth.

The media culture (the current dominant form of culture that socialises us, in different ways and in different domains) thus supports a system of production and cultural reception mediated by technology that shapes perceptions and desires, standardises worldviews, behaviours, representations and values, and forges identities and affections. As Douglas Kellner says,

> Media culture is thus a form of technoculture that merges culture and technology in new forms and configurations, producing novel types of societies in which media and technology become organizing principles (Kellner 2020: 2).

In this (new) context, the central concept for all cultural history becomes the type of relation between and the way of using the objects, and the manner in which these circulate amongst societies, groups, and individuals. We thus enter into a pluralism of values and understandings that make 'pop culture' one of the most important mechanisms and discourses of appropriation and redistribution of cultural goods. The array of cultural practices becomes more complex, diverse, and enhanced. No longer important is the disqualification, inferiority, or illegitimacy inherent in the old tension with erudite culture, but rather the strategies and tactics of searching for meaning or intelligibility, of reading and interpretation that popular culture promotes and carries forth.

This view of a positive discourse that creates meaning associated with 'pop culture', with its rules, codes, and representations, makes it a fruitful space for the study of reception, of the

use and reinterpretation of practices, of the models and thoughts as creative and constructive activities, and of the cultural goods being transacted or transmitted.

The cultural legitimacy, the autonomy and the completeness of 'pop culture' lend it texture, coherence, and identity. Thus, new territories and techniques emerge but the same scientific rigour in its analysis and overview persists, without giving in to illusion or convenience.

The Construction of Egyptology and Egyptomania

When producing Egyptological knowledge in particular and historical knowledge in general, one also needs to question and to break apart from extremist delimitations that separate the 'erudite culture' (or 'elite culture', or 'high culture') from 'pop culture' taking a broader and wider stance and being more ambitious. The 'erudite' and 'popular' classifications and categories are also constantly evolving and being adapted in this domain.

Adding the 'popular' layer to Egyptological studies (that is, interpreting ancient Egypt through the lens of the non-scholar) implies, *a priori*, the acceptance and adoption of considerable methodological and ideological adjustments. As a result we need to review and reformulate the concept of sources with which we usually work, to select new research instruments and study topics relating to ancient Egypt, and to incorporate the aspect of reception into the scope of the reflections, explanations, and interpretations of the existent global knowledge about ancient Egypt.

Similarly, it is necessary to recognise the (new) present social practices of comprehension and reappropriation of the past as valid so that there can be a meaningful, coherent, and autonomous dialogue, and a symbolic recomposition of that past. Nowadays it is not possible, for example, to ignore the role and the influence that comics, television series and documentaries, and cinema have all had in attracting people to Egyptianising themes. We also cannot disregard the cultural forces that these exert in establishing stereotypes about the past and its agents. The many easily accessible resources available online, the video games that flood the commercial scene, the podcasts, the non-specialised magazines that literally invade social media, radio, and the press, are in themselves and on their own modern phenomena that magnify the knowledge about the Egyptian past and deserve a systematic and in-depth study that helps to elucidate their reach, logics, and consequences.

The frequent organisation of exhibitions and displays of objects and themes from ancient Egyptian culture, generally with powerful underlying marketing operations, have made access to the ancient culture 'popular' and readily available to millions of people. Fashion, advertisement, music, philately, cultural tourism, urban art, and tattoos are, particularly in the western world, other exciting facets that engender closeness and connection with, learning about, and an individual and collective relationship with an ancient civilisation.

The themes once restricted to academics and specialists have opened up to a notably vast audience. The use and the reception of ancient history in general and ancient Egypt in particular have become seductively attractive to increasingly larger groups, and prompt different readings of the historical element. Notwithstanding the simplification of the past that they promote, and even the spectacular flights of imagination to which they resort,

current popular creations are often endowed with significant budgets and resources and they cannot, and should not, be dismissed. It is important that Egyptologists and other specialists, gifted with their specific research tools and working techniques, with the complexity and density of their field of study, with their comprehensive knowledge of the operations inherent to scientific work, and with their rigorous rules of scrutiny, can turn these products into dignified objects of reflection, explanation, and interpretation, bringing them to the centre of their concerns and interdisciplinary analysis (Rice and MacDonald 2009: 1-2).

An adequate methodology for the collection and analysis of data, together with rules for a scientific and deontological approach, are essential ingredients of this interpretation, and only by using such methods is one equipped to make informed criticism. With regard to the analysis and appreciation of historical films, for example, such methods are necessary for informed comment on the discrepancies, unexpected interpretations, and imperfections that often occur because of narrative, aesthetic, and ideological choices from the producers/ directors themselves.

As cultural artefacts, films function as valuable supporting sources for, simultaneously, the representation, explanation, and interpretation of history and the objects under historical analysis. The traditional academic approach to historical films (whether about ancient Egypt or another past era) is governed by a concern with distinguishing between fact and fiction. It considers films according to their degree of historical rigour, integrity, and faithful imitation of events as against any manipulation, invention, corruption or distortion of the historical reality which they might depict. This now obsolete view has given way to a different perspective, in which the film is a legitimate and powerful visual medium, with formal and stylistic conventions and languages that are different from those that rule written history. It is seen as a way of thinking about our (new) relationship with the past, capable of creating verbal, visual, and audio historical narratives, and adept at capturing vast audiences for new and different notions of the past (Le Beau 1997:151-155; Rosenstone 1988: 1175; McGeough 2022: 1-9; Serafy 2009: 77-86). This is what Robert Rosenstone and Hayden White define conceptually as 'historiophoty': the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse, in contrast to historiography, which is the representation of history in verbal images and written discourse (White 1988: 1193-1199; Rosenstone 1988: 1173-1185).

These different epistemological approaches towards the discovery, rediscovery, and imagination of the Egyptian past, resulting from new sensibilities and social activities, thus deserve their incorporation and consolidation as distinct yet complementary fields of study. These formats demand the practice of a '*nouvelle histoire culturelle*' (new cultural history) that incorporates other narratives and principles, including 'popular culture' (Chartier 1989a: 1505-1507; 1989b: 154-175; 2003: 1, 2, 7). New cultural history entails new historiographic practices, with new fields of study. In the case of ancient Egypt, the current perception is multifaceted and complex, with plural approaches, often with a corpus of theories and ideas distinct from those rooted in conventional history and archaeology, accompanied by an increasingly evident growth and boom in popular interest (the 'popularist movement').

This approach does not seek to disregard or minimise the academic perspective of mainstream Egyptology, but demands that other non-academic, amateur, and alternative perspectives

should not be ignored. While they do not follow academic protocols, they undeniably contribute to the image of an exceptional culture of the ancient world and of humanity (Picknett and Prince 2009: 175-179).

Without being exhaustive, one may list a number of these alternative theories and interpretations, influences and proposals: the occult and esoteric treatment of Egypt, the 'forbidden' archaeologists and architects, the pseudo-historians, the 'pyramidiots', the extraterrestrial theories about the origins of ancient Egyptian civilisation, the Orion-Giza correlation theory, the thesis that ancient Egyptian origins lay in Atlantis, the New Age movement, popular printed journalism, the technical achievements of the ancient Egyptians, and many more. All these readings are truly influential on popular culture with regard to Egypt. However, one must be able to incorporate and decipher the unconscious expressions of collective sensibility in order to (re)discover what is spontaneous, universal, socially shared and meaningful.

Integrating reasoned study of the production and appropriation of 'pop culture' into Egyptological thought requires, primarily, an understanding of the existence of different practical ways of thinking about and experiencing the ancient Egyptian civilisation, that is, of inhabiting diverse, distinct, and even contradictory perspectives, beliefs, and theories about the Egyptian world (Picknett and Prince 2009). This requires an abandonment of the hegemonic, orthodox, and insular discourse of academia while developing an ability to appreciate the worries, interrogations, and exciting problems arising from other epistemological approaches to the past. This also entails going beyond the traditional disciplinary boundaries and discovering the social value of Egyptological knowledge. It is, at root, about developing and applying a different intellectual rationale and critical paradigm when it comes to weighing the diverse considerations and accounts of the impact of ancient Egyptian civilisation, void of any sense of paternalism, superiority, or cultural arrogance.

The historicity of ancient Egypt is also a result of its cultural consumption, and with that supplementary dimension of interpretation it gains new reconfigurations and representations that create new significations and meanings. Cultural consumption is another layer of production, another look, other and new meanings, another intellectual and ideological exercise that is capable of creating new messages, codes, meanings, and interpretations of life in a continuous and vigorous process, involving practices that can be heterogeneous, conflicting, contradictory, and divisive.

Viewed diachronically, especially in western culture, it is undeniable that ancient Egypt has always exercised a powerful magnetism, even though Egyptology 'has paid a very high price for this popularity' (Moreno García 2015: 50). The rediscovery, reception, reinvention, and recreation of the Egyptian past has created a lasting cyclical trend, regular and recurrent, of the alternate prominence of high culture and then of pop culture.

But even in this domain, we are not dealing with a 'closed' or 'limited' field, since over time and continuing into the present day, we can witness several types of reception of ancient Egypt, some of which compete while others coexist simultaneously, but all of which are definitely interrelated.

Reception/Receptions of Ancient Egypt

Egyptology can broadly be defined as the academic discipline especially dedicated to the scientific study of ancient Egypt across different fields (including archaeology, history, language, literature, art, religion, and culture, among others) with origins that date back to the beginning of the 19th century. Many related dimensions stem from it or are associated with it which we could loosely group and define as Egyptomania and Egyptophilia. Egyptomania is the fascination, obsession (which may be pathological, at times), or fanciful enthusiasm for the ancient Egyptian civilisation — its culture, values, and material elements — which leads to the the emulation, adaptation, reuse, and reinterpretation of aesthetic shapes and Egyptian decorative motifs that may have no relation to their original use or purpose (Fazzini and Mckercher 2001: 458-465; Aufrère 1997: 25-40). It is a mental framework of acceptance and reconstruction, more or less creative, of the Egyptian past. Egyptophilia can be defined as the intense interest in, esteem, affection, liking, or appreciation for Egypt and all things Egyptian. It is more generalised, abstract, and theoretical and does not necessarily entail the reuse or application of ancient motifs which is characteristic of Egyptomania. Egyptophilia always prefers the 'original' or 'authentic' to the 'copy' or the 'artificial' (Sales and Mota 2019: 31-37). Viewed without prejudice and from a holistic perspective, Egyptology, Egyptomania, and Egyptophilia are, thus, all expressions of the cultural reception of ancient Egypt.

The Renaissance is usually accepted as a period of intense reappreciation of references to antiquity, including those related to ancient Egyptian civilisation, initiating in Italy and then spreading throughout Europe. In fact, there have been countless testimonies of 'Egyptophilia' since then: the profound consideration of, interest in, curiosity about, and affection for pharaonic Egypt and for the expressions of its civilisation (Bednarski 2010: 1086-1088; Humbert 1989: 18, 19; Sales and Mota 2019: 34-35). In this period, the first great private collections of artistic objects (which became the bases of the future great European museums) appear to indicate simultaneously a taste for the past and the glorification of the temporal and cultural power of the owners.

This generalised opinion should not, however, overlook earlier direct contacts with Egypt during the Christian Middle Ages, via Christianity or Islam, and, consequentially, the pre-existence of a certain vision of the land of the pharaohs in the western collective cultural imagination. This view stemmed from the military concerns of the European West, the descriptions and narratives of the Bible texts and the ancestral wisdom texts (Laboury 2006: 44), and perhaps even from the adaptation or emulation of its aesthetics: the forms, cultural-religious practices and themes of ancient Egypt. This phenomenon of a proto-revivalism dates back historically to the Hellenic and Hellenistic periods, resulting in a 'Egyptosophia' filtered through the Greco-Roman culture, which started with the arrival of the first Greek mercenaries and merchants in Egypt and continued until the time of the Roman Emperors (Lloyd 2010; Fritze 2016; Jarsaillon 2018: 359; Lupton 2013: 2340; Curl 2005: 73).

Herodotus's own report, written after his stay in Egypt during the 5th century BC, can be used as a testimony of the fascination that Egypt, its characters, and its ancient traditions had for ancient Greece. The plundering carried out by Roman and Byzantine Emperors who pillaged monuments, obelisks, sphinxes, and statues, taking them from Egypt to embellish their capitals, Rome and Byzantium respectively, or their personal estates (as in the cases of

Hadrian and Diocletian) ultimately follows the same principle, also contributing to widening the ownership of those ancient relics. Plunder was, in this context, also a way of preserving and a legacy for future generations.

In Europe, from the 15th century to the beginning of the 17th century, there was a proliferatation of systematic attempts to understand and decipher the enigmatic Egyptian hieroglyphic writing. These were motivated by the basic idea that this writing contained a fundamental and secret knowledge, only intended for the initiated, and many of the endeavours were inspired by the 'magical inscriptions' of the obelisks in Rome, especially those undertaken by Horapollo, Pierio Valeriano, Michele Mercati, Francesco Colonna, Alciato, Tommaso Garzoni, and Pietro della Valle (Sales 2007: 18-19, 187).

The rebuilding of Egyptian obelisks in Rome (the 'city of obelisks', in which 13 may still be seen), as material and cultural symbols of pharaonic Egypt, represented an active and rational dynamic in the reappropriation of those monuments and of the management of that archaeological heritage by those new imperial and colonial powers of the 16th and 17th centuries, particularly by the Holy See. Their intention was to consolidate their position of supremacy, domination, and hegemony over the contemporary world and over the Egyptian past (Hassan 2003: 19-20; Habachi 1984: 109; Gorringe 1885: 110-118).

Due to the activities of the adventurers and travellers who went to Egypt (including Benoît de Maillet, Richard Pococke and Frederik Ludvig Norden among others), the interest in the undeciphered hieroglyphs inscribed on those obelisks was augmented by the appearance of other antiquities such as mummies, papyri, and Coptic manuscripts, all of which fostered and amplified the already evident fascination for 'the ancient pharaoh things' (Bednarski 2010: 1087; Fagan 1975: 48-63; Dawson and Uphill 1972: 81-82, 218, 234-235). Gradually, knowledge about ancient Egypt spread mainly amongst the intellectuals and the higher strata of European society.

The hieroglyphs used by ancient Egyptians remained mute for quite some time. We had to wait until the end of the 17th century and for the 18th century for scholars as diverse as the German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, the Englishman John Wilkins, the English bishop William Warburton, the French orientalist Charles Joseph de Guignes, the German theologian and orientalist Paul-Ernst Jablonsky, the French bishop Jean-Jacques Barthélemy, the German geographer Karsten Niebuhr, and the Danish sage Jörgen Zoëga, all of whom put forward various conjectures (some of undoubted importance) regarding the nature of the Egyptian writing. Each of these scholars brought 'sa trouvaille, son hypothèse fructueuse ou son erreur instructive' (Lacouture 1988: 248).[4]

In Europe the appreciation of and attraction towards objects from ancient Egypt undeniably became increasingly popular, with a particular focus on the writing and iconic monuments, although there was still a lack of rational and scientific explanation. Sometimes, the seduction by and, in certain cases, obsession for these wonders and enigmas of Egypt was of an immoderate, extravagant, and eccentric nature. However, we should regard it as an undeniable and, above all, relentless movement of knowledge and understanding about what was native to ancient Egypt, which, thus, became increasingly familiar to Europeans.

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[4] 'His discovery, his successful hypothesis or his instructive error' (Author's translation).

Similarly, alongside the influence of the Renaissance, the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt constituted a milestone with indelible consequences for the scientific rediscovery of the ancient pharaonic civilisation. It had immense repercussions in the political, military, and cultural spheres, and was key to transforming ancient Egypt into a fashion and a prestigious intellectual reference within European cultural thinking (Bret 1996: 215; Laurens 1997; Murat and Weill 1998).

During their stay in Egypt, the large group of scholars who had accompanied the military expedition from France, the *Comission des Sciences et des Arts de l'armée d'Orient*, tried to explore, study, register, describe, and map all aspects of Egyptian life, studying the culture, architecture, fauna, flora, minerals, and much more, looking not only at those of contemporary Egypt but also those from the earlier epochs of its history. The collected data was compiled into a monumental work, published in Paris by Imprimerie Impériale, between 1809 and 1829, in ten folio volumes (comprising more than 7000 pages) with 13 pages of illustrations, including 900 maps and over 3000 drawings, entitled *Description de l'Égypte, ou recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française publié sous les ordres de Sa Majesté l'Empereur Napoléon Le Grand.*

The *Description* became a true encyclopaedia of knowledge about Egypt, contributing hugely to the popularisation of Orientalism in France and, in turn, to a wider rediscovery of pharaonic Egypt, instituting it as a trend in western Europe from the beginning of the 19th century. If the Napoleonic expedition took Europe to Egypt, the *Description*, as the first systematic work dedicated to Egypt, brought Egypt to Europe. It should be said, however, that, as early as 1802, Vivant Denon had already provided the first credible account, for European consumption, of the antiquities of the Nile valley with his illustrated work: *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte.*

Similarly, an inscribed artefact also associated with the Napoleonic expeditions, the Rosetta Stone, which was discovered in mid-July 1799 by the soldiers of the Napoleonic army near Rosetta (present Rachid), turned out to be crucial to the study of Egyptian civilisation and to the start of modern Egyptological science. This was a result of its crucial contribution to the deciphering of hieroglyphic writing (Andrews 1983; Solé and Valbelle 1999).

Copies of the triligual inscriptions on it were sent by Napoleon to European scholars including Silvestre de Sacy, Johann David Åkerblad and Thomas Young, so that attempts to decipher it could begin and, thus, further pry open the door to the interest and study of the ancient Nile civilisation. It was indeed one of those copies that Jean-François Champollion, with his profound knowledge of the ancient language, was using when he achieved the actual decipherment of the writing system of ancient Egyptian on the 14th of September of 1822, almost 23 years after the discovery of the stone.

The decipherment of the hieroglyphic writing two hundred years ago launched modern Egyptology, putting an end to fifteen centuries of silence from Egyptian hieroglyphic writing (Dewachter 1990: 39-55), and marked the transition from an 'Egyptomaniac era' at the beginning of the century of lights to a 'pre-Egyptological era' (founded on Kircher's intuitions, Jablonsky's works, and the suggestions of Warburton, Barthelémy, Guignes, Niebuhr and Zoëga), to which de Sacy, Åkerblad, Young and, mainly, Champollion would, by their investigations, accord genuine scientific status (Iversen 1961).

It is, therefore, possible to say that it was Napoleon's expedition to Egypt that awakened Europe to the scientific study of ancient Egypt, prompting thorough and systematic work in the fields of philology, archaeology, and history, and feeding as never before the intellectual curiosity for 'Egyptian antiquities'. A textbook case is the evocation of Egyptian furniture of the pharaonic era that was introduced into the design of European furniture, especially in the French and English late neoclassical styles, the Empire style and the Regency style respectively. These featured Egyptian ornamental motifs including floral designs, sphinx heads, winged sphinx, lion claws, chair backrest curvatures, the stylisation of pylons, and monument and temple façades, and more, adapted to modern requirements for the use on that same furniture (Humbert 1989: 103).

The consuls and diplomats accredited in Egypt, as well as their agents and other adventurers, were almost like 'technicians' serving the sultan of Constantinople and the vice-king of Egypt, Muhammad Ali. They were supposedly committed to the industrial development of the country, looking for fortune in Egypt and for hire to whomsoever paid the most, and they also played an important role in the popularisation of Egyptian artefacts amongst the European public. These so-called 'collectors' (such as François Sallier, Giovanni Battista Caviglia, Jean-François Mimaut, Heinrich Menu von Minutoli, Bernardino Drovetti, Giovanni Battista Belzoni, Henry Salt, Jean-Jacques Rifaud, Giovani Anastasi, Raymond Sabatier, Giuseppe Luigi Passalacqua, Johan Ludwig Burckhardt, among many others) exhibited an intense rivalry amongst themselves. In unequivocal acts of robbery and looting, endowed with an official permit (called a *firman*), they bought and transported pieces of all types and materials to museums in Europe such as the Louvre, the British Museum, and those in Turin and Berlin. (Vercoutter 1986: 58-82; Dawson and Uphill 1972; Reid 2002: 37-39).

The scandalous, but fruitful, smuggling of antiquities was often carried out with no diligence or respect for the Egyptian heritage that was leaving Egypt through Alexandria, in the early days by sailing boat and, after 1830, by steamboat. On the other hand, the official acquisition and museumisation of these artifacts in Europe resulted in artistic pieces of great quality and refinement (and frequently of considerable dimensions) being on display to thousands of visitors, reinforcing the existing great esteem and admiration for the prestigious past of pharaonic Egyptian civilisation.

Indeed, since then interest in ancient Egypt has never been out of fashion in western culture. On the contrary, with every new discovery and new technique it is reinvigorated, both in scientific terms and in the deepening of the study ('Egyptology') and in the passionate, sometimes unhealthy, and delusional phenomena ('Egyptomania', 'Egyptian Revivalism', 'Pharaonism', 'Nile Style'). The vigour of this singularly unparalleled phenomenon (as if there is a super-Egypt, something considered to be superior and excellent, almost transcendent, and timeless, which imposes itself indelibly in cyclical fashion) has had numerous consequences and has inspired the most extraordinary appreciation(s).

The discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb at the end of 1922 by Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon was one of the biggest archaeological discoveries ever made. It acts as an example to illustrate the reinforced impetus and the popular interest in Egypt and the pharaohs, to which the media (by way of news, reports, and photographs in the mass media and also radio reports and reels of film exhibited in cinemas) added even more enthusiasm, commonly called 'Tutmania'. That

fascination and passion that grew around the pharaoh Tutankhamun after the discovery of his tomb, his spoils, and treasures resulted in almost everything related to this pharaoh being treated as 'mini-mythologies'. This trend was further encouraged by the so-called 'curse or revenge of the mummy' which developed especially after the death of Carnarvon, on April 5th 1923, making king Tut an icon of pop culture worldwide (Day 2006: 3; Lupton 2009: 23; Holt 1986: 62; Wilkinson 2008: 1; Humbert 1989: 30; 2020: 46-51; Sales and Mota 2020).

The resulting global dissemination of news about the 'wonderful discovery' established a deep and (as we know today, one hundred years later) lasting connection between ancient Egypt and contemporary 'pop culture'. We can see the constantly renewed involvement and impact of various mass media outlets in the creation and reproduction of the multiple subsequent narratives found in literature, cinema, television, music, dance, advertisement, fashion, design, exhibitions, games, and videogames, and other areas.

'Tutmania' has further promoted the development of the popular interest in Egyptian mummies: 'Mummymania' (Lupton 2009: 23; Day 2006: 1; 2015: 215-226). Mummies are effectively a topic of interest generated by the fascination for ancient Egypt from the 18th century until today (Moser 2015a: 1286-1287; 2015b: 246-247), and, often, both morbid and scientific curiosity in mummies, and the appeal of talismans, amulets, and miraculous effects, have all merged together.

After a certain period, cinema became the main promoter of this trend on a global scale, helping to reinterpret and reinvent Egyptian mummies and similar topics in the West. Between 1901 and 2023, for example, Hans van den Berg's The Ancient Egypt film site lists 208 'mummy films', either black and white or in colour, silent or with sound, with 22 of them predating the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb and the rest following it.[5] In this long list of almost two films per year over more than a century The Mummy stands out: the American film from 1932, directed by Karl Freund, featuring Boris Karloff as an ancient Egyptian prince named Imhotep who is accidentally resurrected by an archaeological expedition. This film establishes the pattern for all subsequent films based on the theme of the archaeologist who had discovered a tomb, awakening the cursed mummy which then leaves the tomb in search of revenge.

The Paths of Modern Reception of Ancient Egypt

In the 18th and 19th centuries it was European consuls and some private citizens who competed for access to and ownership of mummies, organising large exhibitions in museums and showrooms for the general public, as well as paid sessions involving the 'unrolling' and examination of Egyptian mummies, in veritable performances for public delight (Moshenska 2015: 202-214). In the 20th century it was cinema (especially in fictional films) that was responsible for promoting this cultural generalisation among all social strata and turning 'the mummy' into a key for access to ancient Egypt (Day 2015). Television, both fictional and documentary, and other audio-visual forms, including multimedia educational resources and computer games, have become the most recent channels for attracting vast audiences through their presentations of Egyptian mummies.

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[5] https://www.ancientegyptfilmsite.nl/ (Accessed 27/05/2023).

The number of non-academic audiences that have had contact with ancient Egypt through the various phenomena of 'Egyptomania' is staggering. 'Tutmania' and 'Mummymania' are examples of trends that have made the history, the characters (and in fairness, we can put Akhenaton, Nefertiti, and Cleopatra alongside Tutankhamun), the ambiences and the experiences of pharaonic Egypt accessible for everyone. It is a widespread phenomenon of clear and evident 'popular consumption' (Rice and MacDonald 2009: 21). From an academic perspective, we are aware that the appreciation, evaluation, and comprehension of ancient Egypt, its culture and its products are not always the most adequate. However, their impact on the shaping of the perceptions of these audiences regarding the pharaonic era is undeniable.

Concurrently, throughout the years, the historical novel has also fed the fantasy and imagination of hundreds of writers and millions of readers all round the world, thus globalising, through translations into virtually all languages, the interest in, admiration for, and knowledge of ancient Egypt. There are, in fact, countless examples, from all regions, of novels in which the action centres on the periods and spaces of ancient Egypt, involving the characters, real or fictional, and societies of that era. It is hugely significant that many Egyptologists have explored the route of fictional literature, with guaranteed and almost instantaneous success. Maybe the most well-known and iconic example is that of the French writer Christian Jacq.

Another element of mass communication with a relevant role in the reception and reconstruction of the Egyptian past is comic books. Millions of readers spread across the world admit, without prejudice, that the first contact they had with the world of ancient Egypt was through the friendly but exciting form of comic books. Authors such as René Goscinny and Alberto Uderzo, through the adventures of Astérix (*Astérix et Obélix: Mission Cléopâtre*), Hergé, with the adventures of Tintin (*Les Cigares du Pharaon*) or Edgar P. Jacobs, with the cases of the detectives Blake and Mortimer (*Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide* – 2 volumes),[6] to cite merely the most well-known works, took their vast audiences of almost every age ('from 7 to 77')[7] to ancient Egypt, and influenced their perception of the history and symbolism of that ancient world.

We should also mention animated films, such as *The Prince of Egypt*, by Brenda Chapman, Steve Hickner and Simon Wells, from 1998 – a film that uses computer animation together with traditional techniques as conceived by DreamWorks Animation. The base for its script is the biblical narrative from Exodus, but that does not prevent its directors from taking considerable artistic and historic licence. Aimed mainly at a younger audience, but with a broad appeal, animation shapes the perception of the phenomena and historical characters of the past, which has a ripple effect on the continuous process of reconstructing that memory. Cinema, including animation, is, indeed, a powerful constructor of memory in general and in particular instances.

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[6] It should be noted that after the death of Edgar P. Jacobs, in 1987, the mythical universe of the duo Blake and Mortimer continued with illustrations and text by François Schuiten, in collaboration with Jaco Van Dormael, Thomas Gunzig and Laurent Durieux, four giants of comic books and 'pop culture'.

[7] '*The Magazine for the Youth from 7 to 77*' was how the magazine *Tintin* was introduced to the Portuguese audience. It was launched on the 1st of June of 1968, to showcase the best of French-Belgian comic books. Furthermore, this magazine was originally launched in Belgium, between 1946 and 1993, under the same appealing subtitle. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tintin_(magazine) (Accessed 05/06/2023); https://www.lambiek.net/magazines/tintin.htm (Accessed 05/06/2023).

Mention must also be made of strategy video games played in real time (RTS - Real-Time Strategy). These provide a 'source of knowledge' about ancient Egypt, with very suggestive religious, architectonic, and landscape decors that the player can use in conjuction with certain characters and so experience these rich virtual experiences of the past in a manner that would be impossible to achieve in reality.

The database of the Egypopcult project has been able to list a total of 307 video games by the end of May 2023.[8] Without claiming to be exhaustive, we can cite *Age of Empires* (1997), *Nile: An Ancient Egyptian Quest* (1997), *Pharaoh* (1999), *Cleopatra: Queen of the Nile* (2000), *Assassin's Creed Origins* (2017)[9] and *Builders of Egypt* (demo version of 2020, launch date set for 2023). Another significant element associated with these products is the collaboration of teams of technicians and specialists, including directors, producers, designers, writers, programmers, artists, and musical composers, as well as instructional designers and historical researchers. It is not uncommon that the scientific and historical consultants are, rightly, Egyptologists.

The games with Egyptian themes, intended for both children and adults and to be played on a PC, PlayStation, Xbox-One or in online multiplayer mode, come with designed game environments. They usually have high-quality graphics, animation, and even sound, providing the players with fast and effective instruction on the buildings, life, clothing, insignias, habits, and tools of ancient Egypt. The focus is now centred on the reconstruction of daily life rather than the exploits of the kings or great historical figures. Besides the entertainment and ludic aspect, which is an essential structural component of video games, many include a menu bar with more in-depth information, educationally and scientifically substantiated, about the geographical spaces, fauna, flora, buildings, myths, pharaohs, and divinities, helping, thus, to consolidate knowledge and learning (a good example being *Nile: An Ancient Egyptian Quest*).

The powerful impact of Egyptian iconography, so easily identified and recognisable, lends itself perfectly to use in moving images, sound productions, and the visually created environments of audio-visual expressions. To these we can now add, especially through the role of video games in mass use, the interactivity that places the player/present-day human being as a direct participant in scenes and actions of the past (Moser 2018: 1071). The inherent action of the video games provides a dimension of 'reality' that surpasses the imaginative dimension associated with other ways of representing the past (exhibitions, literature, comic books, music, paintings, etc.). This dimension is also associated with cinematography, as we have noted before.

All of these contributing domains, including cinema, the historical novel, comic books, animation, and video games, are important expressions of the existence and coexistence of multiple ways of reading and perceiving the Egyptian past. They should, therefore, be considered within the scope of the evolution of Egyptomania studies, on one hand, and of Egyptology itself, on the other. We cannot ignore – quite the contrary, we have to recognise – their considerable power in influencing the construction of ideas about and representations

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[8] The web address of this database, under construction at the time of writing this article, is https://www.egypopcult@letras.ulisboa.pt.
[9] See in this same volume Tara Sewell-Lasater, 'Eternally Maligned as the Power-hungry *Femme Fatale*: Kleopatra VII in *Assassin's Creed Origins* and Other Video Games'.

of ancient Egypt and, primarily, their role in the mass globalisation of the cultural knowledge of the pharaonic civilisation: its culture, characteristics, figures, and divinities.

In fact, 'Egyptomania' as a phenomenon of reception, appropriation, and reutilisation of shapes and expressions from ancient Egypt, especially by the West, requires a protracted, proficient, and creative reinterpretation of that civilisation, more or less original, but with new meanings, symbolisms, and values, in accordance with different contexts and sensibilities. As such, it constitutes a mental framework of acceptance and reconstruction of the Egyptian past.

Final Considerations

From antiquity to the present day, the material elements originating in Egypt have spread everywhere, to urban spaces, public museums, and private collections among other places. In addition, the intellectual presence of ancient Egypt, passed on by various means and processes, is a central element in western culture, one in which history, cultural memory, and material culture cross paths. Thus, it is not surprising that the issue of the reception of ancient Egypt through its many forms – although it might in fact be more correct to speak in the plural: the receptions of ancient Egypt – does not result in a uniform and unified approach for studying ancient Egypt. It is, however, the result of numerous methods of seeing, learning, and conceiving of ancient Egypt and the ways in which it was passed on, translated, extracted, interpreted, re-written, reimagined, and represented (Hardwick and Stray 2008: 1).

One thing is clear, 'Egyptology' and 'Egyptomania' respectively, with their different ideas, products, constructions, and representations, to a greater or lesser degree academic or esoteric, erudite or exotic, real or symbolic, have contributed to a continued expansion of the general knowledge about ancient Egypt. In this regard 'mass culture' has had a resounding impact.

The relative importance of receptions of ancient Egypt essentially derives from the scale of the questions and problems which these receptions pose and resolve, from the theoretical and/or methodological scheme of knowledge production they offer, from the critical analysis they establish, and, thus, from the impact that they have in helping us to understand the Egyptian past and in feeding our imagination of the pharaonic culture. The receptions of ancient Egypt, with their inherent weight of tradition, are cultural reactions to that past. They themselves are symbolic constructions developed around ancient Egyptian culture.

Even when the apparent historical knowledge transmitted does not comply with interrogation by the more rigorous and scientific frameworks of study, the historical memory of ancient Egypt is inevitably brought to the forefront of our collective imaginary, establishing an effective communication link with antiquity through which a clear cultural exchange happens, in terms of values and tastes. The powerful fascination with which the pharaonic civilisation seduces the western imagination is, especially in recent decades, strongly amplified by the different forms of mass communication. The impact of these forms on the elaboration and diffusion of the appreciation of, and borderline obsession with, ancient Egypt is undeniable, and has resulted in a significant matrix of global uniformity. In the true meaning of the word, ancient Egypt is a popular subject, beloved of many ('Egyptolophilia' and 'Egyptolatria'), a living world heritage, despite being inspired by what might, by some, be termed a dead civilisation.

Cultural history ('cultural studies', 'cultural and culture history') as a renewed story allows for the accommodation of these (new) objects of culture:

> Elle permet de réintégrer au sein du questionnaire historien les expressions les plus élaborées de la culture et des savoirs sans pour autant négliger les pratiques du plus grand nombre. L'attention portée aux phénomènes de médiation, de circulation et de réception des biens et objets culturels témoigne de la volonté largement partagée d'échapper aux apories de l'ancienne histoire des idées (Poirrier 2015: 333).[10]

Nowadays, it is inevitable to accommodate the impact of consumer society in the study of ancient Egypt.

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[10] 'It makes it possible to reintegrate into the historian's questionnaire the most elaborate expressions of culture and knowledge without neglecting the practices of the majority. The attention paid to the phenomena of mediation, circulation and reception of cultural goods and objects testifies to the widely shared desire to escape the aporia of the ancient history of ideas' (Author's translation).

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The Portrayal of Ancient Egypt in Sir Terry Pratchett's *Pyramids*[1]

Filip Taterka

Terry Pratchett was undoubtedly one of the most prolific and influential fantasy writers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. He is best known as the creator of the Discworld, a fictitious flat world placed on the back of four elephants standing on the carapace of a giant turtle called A'Tuin who endlessly traverses the multiverse. The series was inaugurated with the publication of *The Colour of Magic* in 1983 and was developed for the rest of Pratchett's life with the last, forty-first volume of the series – *The Shepherd's Crown* – having been published shortly after Pratchett's untimely death in 2015. What distinguishes Pratchett's books within the genre of fantasy is the high level of intertextuality, with a variety of sources of inspiration being used by the author in the construction of his world. While classic fantasy as developed by J.R.R. Tolkien, to cite only the most instructive example, is often set in a world blending elements taken from Norse mythology on the one hand and from the Middle Ages in western Europe on the other, Pratchett's world is far more complex. It presents a specific mixture of traditional fantasy elements (magic, fantastic creatures, etc.) with those taken from other spheres of culture. Among the sources of inspiration that can be distinguished in Pratchett's books we can therefore enumerate: classic and fantasy literature, history, philosophy, myths, fairy tales and folklore, popular culture, and scientific theories.[2] These elements usually build up into a reflexive comment upon important aspects of our modern reality, more often than not employing irony, sarcasm, and mockery, which give the books a flavour of Pratchett's characteristic humour (Smith 2013; Haberkorn 2014, 2018). An interesting example of how the history of an ancient culture can be used in order to touch upon an important philosophical question of our modern world can certainly be found in *Pyramids (The Book of Going Forth)*, originally published in 1989 as the seventh Discworld novel. As a stand-alone book in the Discworld series, *Pyramids* has usually escaped the attention of scholars dealing with Pratchett's works in favour of his novels which fall into subseries[3] (just as it has escaped from the scrutiny of most Egyptologists). The aim of the present study is thus to fill this important gap in scholarly literature.

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[2] Some of these have been discussed in Pratchett and Simpson 2008.
[3] With notable exceptions of Rüster (2007: 169–173); Ekman (2013: 117–125), and Burt (2020: 45–48). To illustrate the phenomenon of the scholars' disinterest in *Pyramids* one may refer to the work of Aleksander Rzyman, whose list of 67 case studies of intertextuality in Pratchett's works includes only three examples taken from *Pyramids* (Rzyman 2017: 38–40, 52–54, 61–62, 107–109, 125–127, 139–141). I have also briefly discussed Pratchett's novel as example of the presence of Egyptian influence in popular culture from an Egyptological perspective in Taterka (2016: 208–209).

Summary of the Plot

Pyramids is set in the state of Djelibeybi, which is quite overtly modelled on ancient Egypt (Pratchett and Simpson 2008: 16–18; Ekman 2013: 117). The plot is centred around the figure of Teppic, the crown prince of Djelibeybi (also known as the Old Kingdom)[4] who has been sent by his father, the pharaoh Teppicymon XXVII, to Ankh-Morpork, the most important city on the Disc,[5] in order to receive his training and education in the Assassins' Guild. Immediately after his final exam at the Guild Teppic undergoes a transformation into a miracle-performing god, which makes him realise that his father had died back at home in Djelibeybi and that he needs to return to his homeland to become the new pharaoh. Teppic does not know, however, that his father has not completely gone, but has stayed in ghostly form upon the earth, unseen and unheard by anyone but himself.

Yet, as the only ruler of Djelibeybi to have been educated abroad, Teppic is somewhat reluctant to follow all the traditional customs of his people, which quickly leads him into conflict with the high priest and First Minister Dios, who is so attached to the old traditions that he even avoids the past tense while speaking as this might indicate that some change has occurred in the Djeli ways. One day, while hearing the cases brought before him by his subjects, Teppic learns about Ptraci, his father's favourite handmaiden, who is brought to trial for having refused to drink poison so she might follow her late lord in order to serve him in the Netherworld. Teppic decides to let her go, but Dios twists his words and declares that the king's command is to have her executed. Using the skills which he had learnt at the Assassins' Guild, Teppic helps Ptraci escape from prison, but, when they are eventually caught by the guards in the royal stables as they try to leave Djelibeybi, Dios declares that Teppic is the assassin that killed the king.

Meanwhile, the construction of the Great Pyramid for the late pharaoh proceeds, which creates a serious disturbance in the very fabric of reality as the new pyramid's energy is so great that it interferes with the energy already being produced by the existing monuments. The chaos breaks out just when Teppic and Ptraci are about to be arrested by Dios and his guards, and the distraction allows them to escape on the only animal that is left of what used to be the great royal stables – the somewhat suspicious-looking camel which goes under the name of You Bastard and turns out to be the greatest mathematician on the Disc. In the newly created reality the inhabitants of Djelibeybi discover that all of their mythological beliefs have now come true, with their gods being physically present on earth. What they do not know is that their country has disappeared from the surface of the Disc, only to find itself in its own dimension, and the only people who can do something about it are Teppic and Ptraci, who had managed to leave the valley of the Djel river before the country disappeared.

Together they arrive at the neighbouring country of Ephebe, where they encounter a group of philosophers who invite Teppic to join their symposium. One of the philosophers, the geometrician Pthagonal, reveals the true nature of Djelibeybi's situation to Teppic: the pyramids constructed by the inhabitants of the valley of the Djel absorb all the new time and

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[4] To avoid confusion with a period of ancient Egyptian history, this denomination will not be used in this study.
[5] For a brief overview of Ankh-Morpork, see Pratchett and Briggs (2012: s.v. Ankh-Morpork). It is interesting to note that the very name of Ankh-Morpork (and of the city's river Ankh) immediately brings to the mind of every Egyptologist the Egyptian term *ankh*, which meant 'to live' and 'life'. Perhaps this is more than just a mere coincidence.

flare it off during the night, which leaves only past time for the people of Djelibeybi to use over and over again. The construction of the Great Pyramid caused a fracture in reality, moving all four dimensions by 90 degrees, which resulted in Djelibeybi being stuck in its own dimension. Teppic also learns that the disappearance of Djelibeybi has provoked imminent war between Ephebe and Tsort as these two countries, which had been at enmity since time immemorial, are no longer separated by the buffer zone of Djelibeybi. When, later on, Teppic has a dream vision of Khuft, the founder of Djelibeybi, he decides to come back to his homeland to save it.

Meanwhile, the priests of Djelibeybi are confused as they observe their gods struggling for power over the land. Moreover, the deceased King Teppicymon XXVII, Teppic's father, has now recovered his body, which means that he can be seen and heard by humans. He recruits the master embalmer and his apprentice to help him to free his ancestors lying in the pyramids from their tombs.

Having tricked the Sphinx into letting him pass, Teppic finally manages to get back to his kingdom. He realises that things have changed there and that now he has the divine powers which a true king of Djelibeybi should have, according to the myths of his country. He decides to destroy the Great Pyramid in order to restore equilibrium to Djelibeybi. Meanwhile, his father has managed to free all the ancestors from their pyramids. Together they arrive at the oldest pyramid and discover that it is empty. They join their forces in order to read the inscription they find there to discover to whom the monument originally belonged and, to their surprise and anger, they discover that the pyramid has been used by Dios to keep himself alive over the centuries so he could continue to serve the kingdom as counsellor to all subsequent rulers.

Teppic decides to climb up the Great Pyramid to flare it off, hoping that it would make the monument explode. As Dios tries to prevent this from happening, Teppic is supported by his ancestors and finally manages to flare the pyramid off with his assassin's knife. When the monument explodes, normality is fully restored: the gods and undead kings disappear and Djelibeybi returns to its original location on the surface of the Disc. Teppic decides to abdicate and leave the throne to Ptraci, who, as they both discover, is in fact his half-sister. To the despair of the priests, who were hoping for an easily manipulable ruler, Ptraci decides to implement important reforms, which drastically abandon the limitations of ancient tradition and introduce Djelibeybi to the challenges of modern times. At the end of the novel we also learn that the explosion of the Great Pyramid pushed Dios back in time to the moment when Khuft, the camel-herdsman who was soon to become the first king of Djelibeybi, enters the valley of the Djel for the first time. And so Dios picks up his staff, ready to advise the king as he has always done.

Djelibeybi Is Egypt... But Not Quite

The very title of the novel immediately suggests that Pratchett used ancient Egypt as the source of inspiration for his book (which is also clear from the synopsis of the plot given above). Pyramids remain among the most widely known monuments of antiquity, inextricably associated with ancient Egypt, even if some of the monuments of other civilisations can also be called pyramids (usually, however, because of their resemblance to their Egyptian counterparts). The subtitle of the novel, *The Book of Going Forth,* is also meaningful as it alludes

to the Egyptian name of the so-called *Book of the Dead* (which was actually called the *Book of Coming Forth by Day*; Ekman 2013: 122), although, as we will see, Pratchett imbues this with a completely different meaning.[6]

The plot is set in the fictitious state of Djelibeybi, which is, indeed, a meaningful name, and in a twofold manner. At the very beginning of the novel we are informed by a short footnote (an element quite characteristic of Pratchett's writing style; Rana 2018: 6) that the name's literal meaning is 'Child of the Djel' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 20),[7] i.e. of the river on which the kingdom was entirely dependent. This is certainly an allusion to Egypt being a gift of the Nile, an idea which is based on a common misinterpretation of Herodotus's description of Egypt.[8] But at the same time the name of Djelibeybi forms a pun alluding to a jelly baby, a small soft sweet with the flavour of fruit, even if this particular layer of meaning, contrary to the previous one, does not seem to have any bearing on the subsequent development of the plot, but is rather an expression of Pratchett's omnipresent humour.

The importance of the river Djel for the kingdom of Djelibeybi is revealed through the description of the country's shape, it being '[a] kingdom two miles wide and one hundred and fifty miles long, which was almost entirely under water during the flood season' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 20). This quite accurately reflects the reality of ancient Egypt, which did not encompass all the territory of modern Egypt, but was indeed limited to the valley and delta of the Nile.

There are also other elements which make us immediately recognise Djelibeybi as the Discworld's equivalent of ancient Egypt. For instance, the king of Djelibeybi is often explicitly referred to as pharaoh, a title which is used exclusively with respect to the ruler of Egypt. He is also considered to be a god on earth just as his Egyptian counterparts were believed to be incarnations of the god Horus and sons of the sun-god Ra. When he dies his spirit is manifested in the form of a bird (a seagull; Pratchett and Simpson 2008: 17–18) – an idea which is based on the Egyptian representations of the *ba*, which is not exactly a spirit, but rather 'impressiveness' or a way in which someone or something manifests him-, her-, or itself (Žabkar 1968). The dead king is then mummified, with his internal organs being placed in the Canopic jars (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 83) so that he might rest in his pyramid. In fact, as the title of the novel makes explicit from the outset, the plot of the book is centred specifically around the pyramids.

Yet, even at the very basic level of the names borne by the characters appearing in the book, we can identify some strikingly non-Egyptian elements. In fact, almost none of these names seem to be even remotely based on the Egyptian originals. This is true of the names

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[6] The titles of the four parts (or rather books, as the author calls them) of *Pyramids* are also quite meaningful. These are: *The Book of Going Forth*, *The Book of the Dead*, *The Book of the New Son*, *The Book of 101 Things a Boy Can Do*. The first two of them clearly allude to the Egyptian *Book of Going Forth by Day*.

[7] Whenever novels are cited in this paper, the first date refers to the edition used by the present author, while the date in square brackets refers to the original date of publication. All emphasis in quotations from Pratchett's books are his own.

[8] In Herodotus's book 2 (Herodotus, *Historiae* 2.5.1) the phrase 'gift of the river' (and not 'of the Nile') referred to the Delta, which, according to this author, was alluvial, making it thus a literal creation of the Nile's inundation (most likely Herodotus has taken this view from the lost work of Hecataeus; Griffiths 1966). Already in antiquity the phrase came to be applied to the whole of Egypt and understood as a metaphor for the importance of the Nile in the emergence of the Egyptian civilisation (cf. Arrian, *Anabasis* 5.6.5; Strabo, *Geographica* 1.2.29, 15.1.16).

of the members of the royal family (Khaphut, Kheneth, Pteppic/Teppic, Teppicymon, Vyrt), the aristocracy (Imtebos), priests (Dios, Hoot Koomi[9]), artisans (Dil, Gern, Grinjer, Ptaclusp, Rthur[10]), peasants (Ktoffle, Ptorne, Rhumusphut), and servants (Jahmet,[11] Ptraci). It is equally true of the names of the Djeli gods: Bast, Bin, Bunu, Cephnet, Cephut, Chefet, Dhek, Fhez, Fon, Hast, Hat, Herpentine Triskeles,[12] Io, Jeht, Juf, Ket, Khefin, Nesh, Nept, Net, Orexis-Nupt, Ptooie, Put, Sarduk, Scrab, Set, Sessifeth, Silur, Sot, Syncope, Teg, Thrrp, Tzut, Vut, What, and Yay.[13] There are only a few names of kings of the distant past which sound like Egyptian, or rather to be Egypt-inspired: Ashk-ru-men-tep, Far-re-ptah, Kha-leon-ra-pta, Khuft, Psam-nut-kha and Pta-ka-ba, and the same is true also of the name of Teppic's aunt Cleph-ptah-re (perhaps echoing Cleopatra?). It is, however, interesting to note that many of these names present a juxtaposition of two consonants, namely P and T, which is most likely meant to allude to the name of the Ptolemies. When Teppic introduced himself for the first time at the Assassins' Guild he gave his name in a correct Djeli form as Pteppic, which his masters at the Guild were, however, unable to pronounce (just as in English the Greek name of Ptolemy is pronounced as /ˈtɒləmi/, without the initial P). As a result, he became Teppic (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 28–29). On the other hand, the foreign accent of Ptraci while speaking Ephebian is marked by the addition of an initial P in words starting with a T (e.g. 'ptraditional' instead of 'traditional' or '[p]thank you' instead of 'thank you'; Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 274). All this implies that combining these two consonants, otherwise widely associated with ancient Egypt in European culture,[14] was a deliberate procedure.

Even if we assume that most of the general public would not be able to differentiate between a historical Egyptian name and one created to evoke Egyptian culture, some of the most commonly known names (like Ramesses, for example)[15] might well have been used by the author, especially as in the very same novel we encounter names which quite explicitly do allude to real ancient names. This is the case of the inhabitants of Ephebe, one of Djelibeybi's neighbours, which is modelled on ancient Greece, or more precisely on the city of Athens in Greece's Classical Period (Pratchett and Briggs 2012; s.v. Ephebe). There we encounter, for example, the philosopher Xeno (i.e. Zeno) or the teller of fables Iesope (i.e. Aesop). A similar procedure could have been employed in the case of the Djeli names, and yet it was not. The reason for this choice seems to lie in the fact that Pratchett's book is not a historical novel *about* ancient Egypt, but is set in a country *modelled on* ancient Egypt, in order to tell a story of its own. In doing so Pratchett used a number of stereotypes concerning both ancient Egypt in particular and oriental monarchies in general, which, mixed up with allusions to other cultural texts and phenomena, resulted in a profound meditation on transgressing the limitations of

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[9] This name is certainly based on the semi-mythical figure of Koot Hoomi who is said to inspire the founding of the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875.

[10] Most likely this name should be pronounced just as its English model, Arthur.

[11] This name seems to be based on the Arabic name Ahmed (or more correctly Aḥmad), very popular in modern Egypt.

[12] This name seems to allude to the figure of Hermes Trismegistus (Bull 2018).

[13] The only exception being Bast, the Cat-Headed God (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 186), which is certainly based on the goddess Bastet; note that in a later work Pratchett referred to the same deity as the 'Cat-Headed Goddess of Things Left on the Doorstep or under the Bed' (Pratchett and Simpson 2008: 17). It is also possible that the deity called Set alludes to the Egyptian god Seth.

[14] Cf. Mozart and Schikaneder's *The Magic Flute* (1791) whose Egyptian protagonists are called Tamino and Pamina; Assmann 2005; 2014: 107–109.

[15] Although we should note that the sounds made by the flaring pyramids of Djelibeybi unite in 'Cheops', i.e. the Greek rendition of the name of Khufu, the constructor of the Great Pyramid at Giza (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 167–168).

outdated customs. In the following paragraphs I will try to identify these stereotypes and allusions (together with some elements which are, deliberately or not, accurate) in order to show how they conjoin to inform the discussion on the role of tradition in modern world. It needs to be emphasised, however, that I am not going to criticise Pratchett for using historically inaccurate information, which would be nonsense, given that we are dealing here with a fantasy novel with no pretensions to writing history of any kind.[16] My point is rather to identify these elements in order to show that a proper understanding of their use can not only add new meaning to the interpretation of the novel but also allows the readers to fully appreciate Pratchett's creative talents. Moreover, for purely educative purposes, it will enable the readers less versed in ancient cultures to gain a more accurate picture of them.

As the plot is intentionally set in a country modelled on ancient Egypt, it is quite logical to start the analysis with Egyptian stereotypes that can be perceived in the book.

Egyptian Stereotypes

Egyptian stereotypes should be understood as elements which are included in a work of art (in this case a novel) concerning or inspired by ancient Egypt, because they reflect the popular idea of what is characteristic of the pharaonic civilisation. They are usually incorporated in order to make it easier for the recipient of the work to recognise the culture being referenced as that of ancient Egypt or because the author genuinely, yet in most cases wrongly, believes that the Egyptian elements that (s)he includes in a given work are indeed accurately derived from historical ancient Egypt.[17]

In discussing Egyptian stereotypes used by Terry Pratchett in his *Pyramids* it is most natural to start... with pyramids. The most iconic monuments of ancient Egypt have been chosen by the author as the pivotal element of his novel. Just like their ancient Egyptian equivalents the pyramids of Djelibeybi were conceived of as tombs,[18] basically for the kings, but small pyramids for cats are also mentioned in the course of the story (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 20). But the Djeli pyramids have one distinguishing feature – they flare at nights. This is due to the particular function of these pyramids, which is described by the narrator in the following way:

> Pyramids are dams in the stream of time. Correctly shaped and orientated, with the proper paracosmic measurements correctly plumbed in, the temporal potential of the great mass of stone can be diverted to accelerate or reverse time over a very small area, in the same way that a hydraulic ram can be induced to pump water *against the flow*.
>
> The original builders, who were of course ancients and therefore wise, knew this very well and the whole point of a correctly-built pyramid was to achieve absolute null time in the

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[16] Which is why I deliberately withhold from commenting on things like offering chickens to the gods of Djelibeybi; in a historical novel set in ancient Egypt it would be a striking anachronism, but in an imagined world it is as good as anything else. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind Pratchett's own words regarding his *Pyramids*: 'I bought a half a shelf of books on Ancient Egypt, and after a while I decided to make things up, because when you got down to details the real thing was just too weird' (Pratchett and Simpson 2008: 18).

[17] For an overview of the Egyptian stereotypes in European culture, see the seminal work by Humbert 1989. See also Curl 2005; Taterka 2016: 205–221; Zinkow 2016: 193–204.

[18] It should be mentioned, however, that ancient Egyptian pyramids were part of larger funerary complexes rather than stand-alone monuments as portrayed in Pratchett's novel. For the pyramids in Egypt, see especially Lehner 1997.

central chamber so that a dying king, tucked up there, would indeed live forever – or at least, never actually die. The time that should have passed in the chamber was stored in the bulk of the pyramid and allowed to flare off once every twenty-four hours (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 184–185).

As the time went by this mysterious knowledge, the narrator follows, and the art of the pyramid building, became nothing more than a bunch of misunderstood rules, whose original significance and importance had been forgotten. Therefore, instead of preventing the deceased kings from dying, the pyramids of Djelibeybi absorbed all the present time, which resulted in the country being stuck in a never-changing past. Eventually, the construction of the Great Pyramid disrupted the very structure of reality[19] and only by destroying the monument was Teppic able to free Djelibeybi from being suspended in its own dimension, and finally put an end to its never-changing situation.

In Pratchett's novel pyramids represent one of the essential elements of tradition, which are being perceived not only as indispensable but also as sacred and venerable by the people of Djelibeybi, even if, at the end of the day, their effect on the country's wealth is more negative than positive. When Teppic's father ponders on his dislike of the pyramids he concludes that he might have been influenced by his foreign wife as in Djelibeybi disliking pyramids 'was like disliking breathing' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 21). And all this despite the fact that '[p]yramids had bankrupted the country, drained it drier than ever the river did' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 20).

Pratchett's description of the pyramids is a particular mixture of the true historical nature of these monuments (as basically, although not exclusively, royal tombs) and some common stereotypes which continue to surround them. The latter encompass the popular opinion that such massive and monumental edifices as the pyramids could not have been mere tombs but must have served higher purposes. This view is based on a popular misconception that we do not know how the pyramids were actually constructed, which continues to feed numerous more or less fantastic 'theories' on pyramid building. These imply the use of advanced technology, usually due to extra-terrestrial intervention, with professional Egyptologists' opinions being, in the best scenario, completely ignored or, in the worst scenario, accused of being based either on ignorance or of serving governmental propaganda, which allegedly seeks to hide the truth about the aliens from the public opinion.[20]

The mystic nature of the pyramids in Pratchett's novel is quite explicitly expressed in the above-quoted passage, which informs us about the role of the pyramids in preventing the death of the entombed king. This is based on the myth of 'pyramid power', i.e. the purported ability of the Egyptian pyramids and similarly shaped objects to produce a variety of positive effects. Originally it was believed that pyramids were able to preserve food from decomposing – an idea

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[19] Rüster (2007: 169, n. 183) sees the Great Pyramid as the reminiscence of the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, whose construction, according to Genesis 11:1–9, also caused a serious disruption in peoples' lives. It is, however, unsure if this biblical story was indeed what inspired Pratchett in this case. For other, more explicit, references to the Bible in *Pyramids*, see below.

[20] I deliberately refrain from citing any particular publications to avoid equating pseudoscience with professional scholarship. For a critical analysis of these 'theories', exposing their underlying racist prejudice, especially in the US, which is often unconsciously received in other countries, see https://jacobin.com/2017/03/jason-reza-jorjani-stony-brook-alt-right-arktos-continental-philosophy-modernity-enlightenment/ and https://hyperallergic.com/470795/pseudoarchaeology-and-the-racism-behind-ancient-aliens/ (Accessed 06/03/2023).

put forward in the 1930s by a French ironmonger and pendulum-dowsing author, Antoine Bovis, who is said to have been inspired by the sight of undecayed animal remains inside the King's Chamber of the Pyramid of Khufu (*c.* 2589–2566 BC)[21] at Giza. In fact this very story is just as mythical as the theory of pyramid power, since in his own works Bovis explains that his 'discovery' was made in Europe, based on reasoning and experiments with a dowsing pendulum (Bovis [no date]). Later on Bovis's revelations inspired a Czech inventor, Karel Drbal, who in 1949 applied for a patent for what he called a 'pharaoh's shaving device' – a small pyramid-shaped container, which could allegedly keep the razor blades sharp (Drbal 1985; for a scientific refusal of this conclusion, see Simmons 1973). His invention became popular in the West after the publication of the book on paranormal discoveries in 1970 by Sheila Ostrander and Lyn Schroeder, in which chapter 27 is dedicated to pyramid power (Ostrander and Schroeder 1970: 358–367). The belief in the power of the pyramids continues to be vivid to this very day – and Pratchett explicitly refers to the razor-sharpening myth in his description of the function of the pyramids of Djelibeybi (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 185).

Despite the fact that the people and (especially) the priests of Djelibeybi perceive the pyramids as a pivotal and indispensable element of their culture, the narrator suggests that there is also a dark side to the construction of the pyramids, which is for the first time expressed by Teppicymon XXVII's reflections and later on is corroborated by the subsequent development of the plot. The pyramids are thus presented as what has been ruining the kingdom in a political, an economic and, eventually, a metaphysical sense. This is based on a stereotype which goes back to antiquity itself. The idea that constructing pyramids caused ruin and misery in Egypt is expressed for the first time by Herodotus: in his account King Cheops is portrayed as a ruthless tyrant who would not hesitate to put his own daughter in a brothel so she could earn money to enable him to finish his monument (Herodotus, *Historiae* 2.126). Later on, Pliny the Elder would describe the pyramids as 'a useless and foolish exhibition of riches by kings' (*regum pecuniae otiosa ac stulta ostentatio*; Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 36.75). All these views have found their way into scholarly publications, with some Egyptologists readily embracing the idea that as pyramids do not serve any practical purpose their constructors should be understood as tyrants (Cooney 2021: 51–99).

It should be emphasised, however, that such an interpretation is somewhat over-simplistic. The very fact that Egyptian society subscribed to different social, religious, and ethical values to the ones that are familiar to us in the modern world does not make the Egyptian values worse and ours better, because sometimes they are neither better nor worse, but simply different (Taterka 2022: 64). As a result, pyramid building should not be readily dismissed as a sign of tyranny, especially as many popular myths regarding their construction (such as their having been constructed mainly by slaves) are directly contradicted by the available evidence (Lehner 2015). Moreover, contrary to the oft-repeated opinion, no Egyptian source can be cited from which it would straightforwardly follow that any of the pyramid-building kings has been perceived as a tyrant by his own subjects or by later generations of Egyptians (contra Cooney 2023: 53–56). In fact, all such descriptions were produced by representatives of different cultures, who interpreted Egyptian reality through their own cultural lens, which more often than not involved a lack of proper understanding of the Egyptian customs and

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[21] All dates have been based on I. Shaw (2002: 480–489). The dates following the names of Egyptian rulers refer to the period of their reigns and not to their lifetimes.

resulted in their misinterpretation. This is not to imply that no Egyptian king was tyrannical but rather to suggest that even if they were it is extremely difficult to perceive this in the available material, as describing the Egyptian kingship in terms of tyranny is an etic rather than an emic concept. Egyptian material from various periods suggests that the inhabitants of the Nile valley were fond of both the pyramids and the kings who ordered their construction (Ryholt 2009, cf. also Navrátilová 2007).

In Pratchett's novel the pyramids were principally reserved for the kings of Djelibeybi, which is one of the marks of their special status. Just as were their ancient Egyptian counterparts, these kings are described as gods on earth, who transcend the limitations of mere humans in both metaphysical and socio-ethical terms. As the king is believed to be a god, most of his subjects (except for the high priest) are afraid not only of speaking to him, but even of looking at him. This is why his words need to be interpreted by the high priest, who additionally ornaments them with a complex titulary in order to emphasise the unique position of the pharaoh. There are also many official insignia which the king of Djelibeybi is supposed to bear when appearing before the public on official occasions (such as judging the cases put forward by his subjects). The most important of these insignia is the gold mask of the kings of Djelibeybi, which presented the official image of kingship to the people, while making the individual features of each king disappear. The same is true of the official depictions of the king, both the ones made during his lifetime and after his death, which to a greater or lesser degree amend reality instead of presenting the actual physiognomy of the rulers.

It is certainly true that the Egyptian way of representing kings does not take their individual physical appearance into account, putting more emphasis on the timeless nature of kingship (Bonhême and Forgeau 1988: 23–31), which looks all the same to the general public, while specialistic knowledge enables Egyptologists to identify particular kings based on various factors, such as accompanying inscriptions, stylistic features, provenance, etc. The gold mask of the kings of Djelibeybi is quite obviously modelled on the famous mask of Tutankhamun from the 18th Dynasty (*c.* 1336–1327 BC), one of the most iconic artefacts ever to be discovered in Egypt. However, unlike the mask of Djelibeybi's kings, it was not intended to be worn on public occasions nor was it meant to be inherited by one king from another, but it was destined to be a part of the royal funerary equipment.

The special status of the kings of Djelibeybi is additionally emphasised by the fact that in order to maintain the purity of royal blood they are not only allowed but even expected to marry their own relatives, which comes as a shock to Teppic when he becomes the new ruler. This is based on a common stereotype that ancient Egyptian rulers regularly married their relatives, while in fact for most of ancient Egyptian history the practice was extremely limited, mostly involving half-siblings (Manniche 1987: 29). Some kings are known to have married their own daughters but in these cases it is very difficult to be certain whether such marriages were actually consummated or rather were thought of as a magical support for the king (Obsomer 2012: 260). The very concept of the royal blood is also quite problematic as far as ancient Egypt is concerned as there is nothing in the Egyptian historical material which could corroborate the existence of such a notion in ancient Egypt. Consanguineous marriages among Egyptian rulers became more widespread in the Ptolemaic Period (332–30 BC), starting with Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BC) who married his own sister Arsinoe II, with their example later to be followed by other Ptolemies (Ager 2021). Such marriages had become quite common in

the Roman Period (30 BC–AD 395) among ordinary people as well, usually in order to keep the land undivided within the same family (B.D. Shaw 1992; for the evidence from earlier periods, see Robinson 2020).

When a king of Djelibeybi dies, he is made into a mummy in order to be buried in a pyramid, as the people of Djelibeybi believe that a person can only live after death if (s)he had been mummified. This reflects the common misconception that an Egyptian needed a perfectly preserved body in order to enter the Netherworld, while in fact the aim of mummification was not so much about preserving the body as it originally looked while living on earth, but rather about creating a new body, which would survive for the whole eternity enabling its owner to continue his or her existence in the afterlife (Taylor 2001: 46–48). Mummies should thus be understood as vessels to which the spirits of the deceased can return in order to receive the offerings made for them.

The servants of the king are supposed to follow him to the Netherworld to continue to serve him in the afterlife. In order to do this they are expected willingly to drink poison – a thing which Ptraci fervently refuses to do. This motif might have been based on the custom attested in Egypt in the period of the 1st Dynasty (*c*. 3000–2890 BC), when royal tombs at Abydos were surrounded by numerous burials of royal servants of both genders, but the issue of whether we should treat it as human sacrifice remains somewhat controversial (for a discussion, see Campbell 2023).

As one of the most common stereotypes relating to ancient Egypt is certainly associated with the idea of the alleged omnipresent worship of cats, it is inevitably also included in Pratchett's novel. And so we read of the late queen Artela, Teppic's mother, that '[s]he'd liked cats. She didn't just venerate them – everyone in the kingdom did *that* – but she actually liked them, too' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 25). This stereotype dates back to the very antiquity. Diodorus Siculus recounts a story in which a Roman legate was killed by the mob in Alexandria in the reign of Ptolemy XII (80–51 BC) for having accidentally slain a cat (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 1.83.5–9). Although Diodorus asserts that he has witnessed the event with his own eyes, the reliability of the story is rather questionable (contra Burton 1972: 241). Contrary to the satirical opinions of the Graeco-Roman authors (e.g. Juvenal, *Saturae* 15.1–8; Lucian, *Deorum concilium* 10–11), the Egyptians did not worship any particular species as such: a given species could have been chosen as the symbol of a particular deity if its characteristics were deemed most suitable to express that deity's nature. But this does not mean that every representative of the species was believed to be divine as only one individual representative of the species could have been chosen, after fulfilling a number of requirements, to be the manifestation of the divinity. The best example is the Apis, a bull chosen by the priests as an incarnation of Ptah (Herodotus, *Historiae* 3.28.2–3): there was only one Apis at any one time and only after his demise was another bull sought out to become the new incarnation of the deity.

The idea that cats were particularly venerated by the Egyptians is based on the fact that from the Late Period (*c*. 747–332 BC) onwards cat mummies were often presented in temples as votive offerings. But for the most part of the pharaonic period we simply do not see any particular veneration of the cat. Feline deities of course exist, but they are associated rather with wild cats (especially lionesses and female leopards) than with domestic cats, and the cat-

goddess Bastet, although certainly important, does not seem to be at the top of the Egyptian pantheon.[22]

As far as Egyptian rulers are concerned, references to two historical figures can be found in Pratchett's novel. When Teppic is advised by Dios to marry his aunt to preserve the purity of the royal blood, he learns about a peculiar episode in his family's history:

> 'Your great-great-grandmother once declared she is king as a matter of political expediency and I don't believe the edict is ever rescinded.'
>
> 'But she *was* a woman, though?'
>
> Dios looked shocked. 'Oh no, sire. She is a man. She herself declared this' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 96).

This is quite obviously an allusion to Hatshepsut, the female pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty (*c.* 1473–1458 BC), who, after having been a queen-regent in the early years of King Thutmose III (*c.* 1479–1425 BC), decided to become a king, which most likely took place in regnal year 7 of Thutmose III. From that moment on, up to regnal year 20/21 of Thutmose III, Egypt was ruled by two kings reigning together, even if Hatshepsut's pre-eminence was usually emphasised with varying degrees of subtlety. A popular misconception has it that in order to become the king of Egypt Hatshepsut needed to conceal her original sex and gender since she could not have ruled as a woman. This misconception in based on the existence of official images of Hatshepsut in which she is depicted as if she was a man. The problem is that in most cases Hatshepsut is clearly identified as female in the accompanying inscriptions by both the elements of her fivefold titulary (including the name Hatshepsut itself which means 'Foremost of noble women'; Robins 1999) and titles, most of which had been feminised. The so-called 'male' images of Hatshepsut, which begun to appear in the later part of her reign, were supposed to enable Hatshepsut's image to comply with the demands of official decorum rather than to express the female pharaoh's personal wish to change her sex and gender (Matić 2016).[23]

Another allusion to a historical figure is made in the final part of the novel when, after the destruction of the Great Pyramid, Teppic sits on the throne giving his last orders before his abdication. Suddenly his old friend Chidder arrives at the court with a rolled up carpet in which Ptraci is hiding (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 361–363). Obviously this is a parody of the meeting of Cleopatra VII (51–30 BC) with Julius Caesar as recounted by Plutarch (Plutarch, *Caesar* 49.1–2).[24] Later on, when Ptraci eventually becomes the new pharaoh, she orders the new high priest to make sure that plumbing is installed in the palace, which stupefies him as he is apparently unable to understand how plumbing might help in filling the queen's bathtub with asses' milk (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 369). This is apparently another allusion to Cleopatra who is commonly believed to have been accustomed to taking baths in asses' milk. However, this motif is not mentioned in any ancient source dealing with Cleopatra – it appears for the

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[22] For more information on the role of cats in ancient Egypt, see Malek (1993).

[23] This point will be further developed in a separate study which is being prepared by the present author.

[24] It should be mentioned that Plutarch does not describe Cleopatra as being rolled up in a carpet, but in a στρωματόδεσμον, i.e. 'a leathern or linen sack in which slaves had to tie up the bedclothes' (Liddell and Scott 1996: s.v. στρωματόδεσμον). In European representations of Cleopatra this was changed into a carpet which was more in line with oriental stereotypes and easier to represent, cf. e.g. Jean-Léon Gérôme's painting *Cleopatra and Caesar* (1866).

first time in Hollywood movies, but, quite surprisingly, not in connection with Cleopatra.[25] The last queen of Egypt is portrayed for the first time as taking a bath in asses' milk in Gerald Thomas's movie *Carry on Cleo* (1964), from which this image, through an unknown number of intermediaries, found its way into common belief and, eventually, into Pratchett's novel.[26]

Oriental Stereotypes

As in many other works of culture inspired by the civilisation of ancient Egypt, in Pratchett's *Pyramids* we can discern a number of oriental stereotypes, i.e. elements which are included because they reflect the western idea of how oriental cultures should look like. Just as in the case of the Egyptian stereotypes these are included either in order to make the described culture immediately recognisable as oriental or, sometimes, because the author genuinely believes that these elements are accurate features of the culture (s)he portrays.[27] What differentiates the oriental stereotypes discussed in this section from the Egyptian ones dealt with in the previous section is that while the latter specifically concern ancient Egypt, the former could have equally well been applied to any culture of the Near East, not necessarily an ancient one.

One of the most important oriental stereotypes pertaining to ancient cultures is the issue of the role of religion and priesthood in their societies. With the advent of the European Enlightenment philosophers, scholars, and authors came to believe that ancient Near Eastern cultures were ruled by priests who kept the true knowledge of nature to themselves while revealing only a carefully chosen portion of it to the people, usually in form of easily imaginable tales and pictures, which we call religion (de Condorcet 1822 [1975]: 54–58; Assmann 2010). In theory this was done with the intention of maintaining the social order, but in practice it enabled the priests to manipulate the people to do whatever they were told. This view is commonly held in eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works, including Egyptological publications, where it can sporadically be encountered up to this day. It is thus no wonder that it also found its way into Pratchett's novel.

One feature that immediately strikes the reader of *Pyramids* is the distinctive nature of the gods of Djelibeybi as compared to those in the other novels of the Discworld series. I am not referring to the particular form of these gods, portrayed as animal-headed humans, as this is obviously modelled on the Egyptian way of representing their deities. The difference between the gods of Djelibeybi and other gods of the Discworld lies in the fact that while the latter are explicitly described as real and existing beings (Pratchett and Simpson 2008: 9–35),[28] the gods of Djelibeybi are referred to as distant entities, which appear in Djelibeybi only after the fracture in reality is caused by the Great Pyramid. In fact the appearance of the gods is welcomed with great surprise by the people of Djelibeybi, and no-one's surprise is greater

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[25] This motif appears for the first time in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Sign of the Cross* (1932), where the emperor Nero's wife Poppea Sabina (portrayed by Claudette Colbert) takes a bath in asses' milk (Kulpa 2021: 190).

[26] Perhaps there is also another allusion to a popular image of Cleopatra in Pratchett's *Pyramids*. When Dios commands the architects to complete the Great Pyramid in three months (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 112) this recalls the bet between Cleopatra and Caesar in René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo's *Asterix and Cleopatra* (1963) that Egyptians are able to constructs a palace for Caesar in exactly the same period of time.

[27] For a critical analysis of the oriental stereotypes and Orientalism, see the seminal work of Said (1985).

[28] The problem of the existence of gods and the role of religion in people's life is also elaborated in *Small Gods* (Pratchett 1993 [1992]).

than that of the priests. This is clearly indicated by the high priest of Cephut, who addresses his priestly colleagues in the following terms:

> 'It's not possible, is it? Not really? We all must have eaten something, or been out in the sun too long, or something. Because, I mean, everyone *knows* that the gods aren't... I mean, the sun is a big flaming ball of gas, isn't it, that goes around the whole world every day, and, and, and the gods... well, you know, there's a very real need in people to *believe*, don't get me wrong here––' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 242).

Other priests immediately grab him and throw him into the water where he is eaten by the crocodiles, but the terrible truth has been spoken aloud: the gods do not really exist, but were invented to satisfy the people's need for religion and to maintain the social order. This idea is explicitly confirmed by Dios when he ponders on the gods trying to stop Teppic from destroying the Great Pyramid:

> Chefet, the Dog-Headed God of metalwork, was growling and attacking his fellows at random with his hammer; this was Chefet, Dios thought, the god that he had created to be an example to men in the art of wire and filigree and small beauty (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 348–349).

Thus the ordinary absence of gods in Djelibeybi is here explained by the fact that all of them have been created by the priests, or more precisely by Dios as the original advisor to the founder of the Djeli state.[29] In fact the true nature of the gods is a double secret in Pratchett's novel: the fact that the gods do not really exist is a closely guarded secret among the priests – so closely kept that they would not even be allowed to speak it out loud. But even the high priests of the kingdom do not know that it was Dios himself who actually invented all the gods to organise the kingdom properly at its humble beginnings.[30]

It should be emphasised that portraying the priests as a kind of collective *eminence grise* in ancient Egypt (or any other oriental monarchy) is nothing more than a stereotype, which reflects modern discussions on the role of religion in any given society rather than the actual structure and functioning of the Egyptian priesthood. The latter did not form a unified organisational structure, or even a homogenous group united by a common cause, which would be intended to ensure their political influence. In fact, the ancient Egyptian priesthood was a highly fragmented group, divided into small clusters centred around particular temples. In addition, until the New Kingdom period (*c.* 1550–1069 BC) there was actually no priesthood understood as a separate social group, instead priestly functions were performed by various state officials.[31] Therefore, the priests were eager to struggle for power with other priests and temples rather than with kings, since the granting of a privilege to a particular temple was not necessarily welcomed with joy by the entire priesthood, but quite the contrary – it could have created discontent among other priestly colleges which were not so generously

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[29] This explains why Dios is portrayed as a man who 'wasn't naturally religious', yet who thinks that 'gods were necessary' and who believes in the importance of ritual rather than genuine faith (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 74).

[30] In popular culture the motif of the invention of the gods by priests occurs, for example, in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956), in which King Ramesses II, portrayed by Yul Brynner, when approached by the high priest and told that people are turning from the gods because of the plagues sent by Moses, responds: 'What gods? You prophets and priests made the gods that you may prey on the tears of men'.

[31] For the priesthood in Egypt, see most recently Escolano-Poveda (2020).

supported by the king.[32] Hence, as far as ancient Egypt is concerned, the institutional conflict between the State and the Church simply did not exist as there was neither State (understood as a sphere totally independent from religion) nor Church (understood as an institution granted full autonomy as far as religious matters are concerned). This is not to deny that there were conflicts between particular priests and other representatives of the elite,[33] but rather to suggest that they should be viewed as expressions of the individual ambitions of particular persons involved in the discord rather than of a general struggle between conflicting visions concerning the functioning of the state.

It is also important to note that the common stereotype that ancient priests had a different kind of knowledge which they readily used to manipulate the people is simply not true. Obviously the general understanding of the world by an educated priest (or any other state official) was higher than that of a simple peasant, but it does not mean that ancient priests had the kind of knowledge that we are taught today in modern education, when basic elements of various disciplines are presented to us. Although priestly knowledge was often referred to as secret by the Egyptian (and other) sources, the real difference between this knowledge and that of the ordinary people lay in quantity rather than in quality of the knowledge. As a result, ancient priests could have had advanced astronomical knowledge at the same time believing that it is the gods who are ultimately responsible for astronomical phenomena. The popular vision of ancient priests as holders of a secret knowledge of reality is thus a stereotype which is based on the information transmitted to us by the Graeco-Roman authors relating to ancient mysteries, which became particularly popular in eighteenth-century Europe with the creation of many secret societies (Hornung 2001: 116–127; Assmann 2014: 95–112), rather than on the actual knowledge possessed by Egyptian priests which we can reconstruct mostly, but not exclusively, from the written material at our disposal.

Another element based on oriental stereotypes is illustrated by the sequence in which Teppic gives court verdicts (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 149–157). Although it is true that in some monarchies, both ancient and modern, there is no separation between legislative, executive, and judicial powers, which results in kings occasionally performing the duties of a judge, this was certainly not limited to oriental monarchies, but appeared in western ones as well (Weiler 2009). But ironically enough, Egypt stands as an exception to the general rule as the sources seem to indicate that the pharaoh did not participate in the judicial proceedings, with verdicts being given by specially appointed tribunals of magistrates (Candelora 2019: 101–102) or, from the New Kingdom (*c.* 1550–1069 BC) onwards, by the priests through divine oracles (Kessler 2011). When the matter was particularly delicate the case might have been conferred to particularly trusted officials, as attested by the self-presentation of Weni, who was entrusted to examine the case of a harem conspiracy against Pepy I of the 6th Dynasty (*c.* 2321–2287 BC; Sethe 1933: 100,13–101,7; Kanawati 2003: 16). Therefore, the scene in the novel with Teppic giving judgements does not even remotely reflect any genuine Egyptian practice, but is rather modelled on the famous biblical episode of King Solomon, as we will see below.

Another important stereotype related to the Orient concerns the royal harem. Harems did exist in ancient Egypt but the picture of the harem as presented by Pratchett reflects a

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[32] See, for this, the so-called Petition of Petiese known from Papyrus Ryland IX (Vittmann 1998).
[33] Cf. for instance the so-called war of the high priest Amenhotep at the end of the reign of Ramesses XI of the 20th Dynasty (*c.* 1099–1069 BC; Rummel 2014).

western idea of a harem rather than the historical reality. In Pratchett's *Pyramids* the harem is basically filled with beautiful young maidens whose training is limited to giving pleasure to the king by either sexual intercourse or peeling grapes for him. In ancient Egypt, just like in other cultures, the harem was, however, far more than that. It has been rightly observed that members of the harem were expected to spend their time productively as weavers (Redford 2002: 49–71). A royal harem was also an area of important political games, which could be used for the benefit of the king, or at times, turn against him (Cooney, Landis, and Shayegan 2023).

Last but not least we should also mention another stereotype, which is also quite widespread in modern popular culture, including books, cinema, and TV productions, namely the alleged use of camels by the ancient Egyptians. Nowadays dromedaries can be seen almost everywhere in Egypt, particularly around monuments frequented by tourists from all over the world, as well as in other North-African and West-Asian countries. It is quite natural that this has led to a widely-held belief that camels must already have been popular in Egypt in ancient times. This is, however, only partly true. Although there is some evidence suggesting that camels might have been known to the Egyptians as early as the Predynastic Period (*c.* 5300–3000 BC), they do not seem to have been widely or even sporadically used as pack animals for the most part of the pharaonic history. This situation began to change in the Late Period (*c.* 747–332 BC) when, following first the Assyrian and later the Persian conquests, camels started to appear in Egypt. However, this was still relatively rare and only with the advent of the Greeks and Macedonians were camels employed in greater numbers as they could now be bred in Egypt (Paprocki 2019: 65–78). Just as in other examples discussed in this section, the employment of this element in Pratchett's novel reflects the commonly shared stereotype of Egypt as an oriental monarchy rather than genuine Egyptian practice.

Other Allusions

Besides the above-described Egyptian and oriental stereotypes Pratchett's novel also includes a number of allusions to other works or cultural phenomena. Among the most important ones we can enumerate are references to the Bible, Greek philosophy and mythology, and modern science.

Two biblical episodes are explicitly parodied in the novel, namely the judgment of Solomon (1 Kings 3:16–28) and the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites under the leadership of Moses (Exodus 13:17–14:31). The first case has already been touched upon in the section dedicated to the oriental stereotypes. The allusion to Solomon can be found in the first case heard by Teppic in which two peasants argue about an ox (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 149–152). Teppic decides that the animal should be killed and cut in two, just as Solomon did in the case of two mothers arguing over a child. Teppic finds his own verdict very just, in fact he believes 'they're really going to remember this judgment' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 150).The difference between the biblical episode and its Discworld equivalent lies in the fact that while Solomon's verdict ends up in a positive resolution exemplifying the king's outstanding wisdom, Teppic's verdict is twisted by Dios to such an extent that it does not resemble his original words at all (the ox is to be slaughtered and sacrificed to the gods and both sides are commanded to work for three days in the royal fields in order to pay for their case being heard). Instead of serving as an example of the individual qualities of the king as in the original story, the parody concentrates on the struggle between the king who wants to be a good ruler and the high priest who does not allow anything to be changed in even the slightest manner.

The second case involves the parody of the crossing of the Red Sea, a motif which quite frequently occurs elsewhere in various humoristic works, especially those inspired by antiquity or involving the Christian God as one of the characters.[34] When Teppic comes back to Djelibeybi for the second time (after the kingdom had disappeared from the surface of the Disc), from the height of the balcony of the royal palace he sees the priests approaching the crowd of his undead ancestors. When he descends to the riverbank, he is informed by the people watching this spectacle that all the boats have been taken by the priests. In a brief moment of self-confidence Teppic realises that in this new reality the old belief of his people that every king of Djelibeybi is a god has suddenly become true. And so he extends his hand and makes the water of the river Djel part in front of him, to the amazement of the people on the riverbank and the surprise of the crocodiles in the waters (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 327–331).

Other allusions to the Bible appear in the novel but they are less developed and usually only receive a brief mention. And so the architect Ptaclusp informs his sons that if either of them disobeys him he 'will be cast into the outer darkness where there is wailing and crashing of teeth' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 123–124), which is a direct quote from the Gospel of Matthew (8:12; 22:13–14; 25:30). In another instance a reference to the pillar of salt, a motif known from Genesis (19:26) is made (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 353). There is also a recurring reference to the dream of seven fat cows and seven thin cows (known from Genesis 41), which, as Teppic learns from Khuft, is a well-known ancestral dream for the kings of Djelibeybi (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 289, 365). Once again, this motif is parodied in Pratchett's novel since the actual meaning of the dream is unknown to all those who dream it and, moreover, one of the cows is always credited with a special yet rather astonishing activity, even if 'everyone sees it a bit differently' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 365). Those who have the dream describe it variously as 'playing a trombone' (126, 365), 'riding a bicycle' (357), 'smoking a cigar' (289), or 'grinning and playing a wimblehorn' (365). At times Djelibeybi is also described as the land of 'milk and honey' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 88, 290) and in one instance while Teppic reflects upon his country's history he remarks that the version he remembers should probably be ornamented with 'more yeas and a few verilys' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 88), apparently mimicking the biblical style of the English translations of the Gospels. Other allusions to the Bible include a reference to the Plague of Frog (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 23; cf. Exodus 8:1–10) or to moving mountains by the force of belief (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 239; cf. Mark 11:22–23; Matthew 21:21–22; Rzyman 2017: 38–40). In addition to that, an allusion to the flood narrative (Genesis 6–9) can be found in the description of the myths concerning the founding of Ankh-Morpork (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 65).

References to Greek philosophy and mythology are essentially limited to three main sequences: Teppic and Ptraci's meeting with the philosophers in Ephebe (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 233–239, 249–255, 262–278), Teppic's encounter with the Sphinx (309–317), and the subsequent war between Ephebe and Tsort (332–333, 335, 337–338, 358–360), the neighbours of Djelibeybi.[35] Among the philosophers we encounter some figures who are immediately recognisable as being modelled on their historical counterparts, such as the already mentioned Xeno or Iesope, as well as others who are not as explicitly yet still easily identifiable, like Antiphon, Copolymer, Phtagonal, or Ibid.

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[34] E.g. Mel Brooks's *History of the World, Part I* (1981) or Tom Shadyac's *Bruce Almighty* (2003).
[35] As a sidenote, we might also mention the brief reference to the founding of Ankh-Morpork by two orphaned brothers who had been suckled by a hippopotamus (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 65), which is a clear allusion to the founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus who were said to have been suckled by a she-wolf.

Xeno is undoubtedly modelled on Zeno of Elea, which is clear both from his name (which is pronounced in exactly the same way as that of the historical figure, despite the difference in spelling) and his interest in demonstrating that movement is logically impossible, the idea for which the original Zeno is most famed (Reale 1987: 134–137). Unlike his historical counterpart, Pratchett's Xeno understands the anti-movement paradoxes quite literally, which is why he tries to prove them by shooting arrows into tortoises, because he believes it absolutely certain that the arrow cannot reach the animal, and the fact that none of his experiments prove him right does not seem to discourage him. Nor is another experiment in which he tried to prove that the tortoise can beat the hare in a race – in this case the experiment went well only because the hare was dead, having been shot by the philosopher, who was 'trying to combine two experiments' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 238) for both practical and economic purposes.

As for Iesope and Antiphon, the first one is certainly modelled on Aesop, which is clear from both his name and the fact that he is referred to in the book as 'the greatest teller of fables in the world' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 264), and the other on Aristophanes as he is described as 'the greatest writer of comic plays in the world' (1990 [1989]: 264). However, their part in the actual plot does not go much beyond these mere mentions while the character Copolymer has a more significant role. The latter, described as 'the greatest storyteller in the history of the world' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 262), recounts the history of the Tsortean war to the philosophers assembled at the symposium. This enables us to recognise Copolymer as the Discworld equivalent of Homer, although, unlike the Greek poet and in spite of his reputation as the one who 'remembers every tiny detail' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 264), Copolymer confuses almost everything in his story, which increases the humour of the situation. At the same time we learn from Copolymer's tale that while Ephebe is to be understood as the Discworld equivalent of ancient Greece (particularly of Athens in the Classical Period; 480–323 BC), Tsort should be seen as the equivalent of Troy. In fact, the Tsortean war is clearly based on the Trojan war, a reference which is elaborated further in the later sequence of the war between Ephebe and Tsort which is caused by Djelibeybi's disappearance. In this case both sides are trying to outsmart their opponents by constructing huge wooden horses, just as the Ephebians did during the first war with Tsort, which is obviously based on the famous episode from the Trojan war briefly mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey* (4.271–273, 8.492–495) and later expanded upon in Virgil's *Aeneid* (2.13–49). In the same sequence we find a humorous reference to the battle at Thermopylae (480 BC) when the Ephebian sergeant commands one of the younger soldiers: 'Go, tell the Ephebians––', but finds himself unsure as to what exactly should be told them (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 332–333).[36]

While Pthagonal, the philosopher known for his expertise in geometry who explains to Teppic the true nature of the pyramids, is quite easily identifiable with Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras, the last of the aforementioned philosophers, Ibid, is certainly the most enigmatic figure. The information which we can extract on him from *Pyramids* and from one of the subsequent Discworld novels, *Small Gods*, in which he reappears, suggests that he is to be understood as a generic philosopher, a construct of various elements related to both Greek and later thinkers, who is not to be identified with just one historical figure.[37] This

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[36] This alludes to the inscription carved on the monument erected at Thermopylae as recounted by Herodotus (Herodotus, *Historiae* 7.228.2).
[37] In *Pyramids* Ibid features as the author of a work entitled *Principles of Ideal Government* (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 252) whereas in *Small Gods* his *Discourses* are mentioned (Pratchett 1993 [1992]: 184); these titles might allude to Plato's

is evident also in his name: Ibid, which comes from the abbreviation of the Latin *ibidem*, the use of which is a pun making Ibid someone who thinks he is 'the biggest bloody authority on everything' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 239), because the abbreviated form, '*ibid.*', can appear in virtually any scientific or scholarly publication, irrespective of the discipline.

Having left Ephebe, Teppic finally arrives at the borders of his kingdom, which he realises are now guarded by the Sphinx. In Pratchett's version the well-known theme of the Oedipus myth is parodied by the fact that, unlike Oedipus, Teppic is actually unable to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, but instead manages to outsmart the creature by making it reveal the solution without harming Teppic. It should also be mentioned that Pratchett portrays the Sphinx as the same being as the one which is represented in statuary in Djelibeybi, while the fantastic creatures of Egypt and Greece do not have much in common despite being called by the same name. In Egypt a sphinx was a hybrid form usually consisting of a lion's body and a human head. In this form it represented a king or, less often, a queen (Valloggia 2011: figs. 11–13), although some instances of them might have been believed to be incarnations of deities. This is the case of the Great Sphinx at Giza, originally representing one of the kings of the 4th Dynasty (most likely Khafra; *c.* 2558–2532 BC), which, by the New Kingdom (*c.* 1550–1069 BC), had come to be understood as the manifestation of the god Horemakhet (Harmakhis; Lehner 1997: 127–133). A particular form of sphinx is the so-called criosphinx, a hybrid creature with a lion's body and a ram's head, which specifically represents the god Amun-Ra (Gabolde 2018: 561–564). In Greek mythology, on the other hand, the Sphinx is a unique creature of female gender (whose name means 'female throttler'), which is a hybrid with a woman's head and breasts, a lion's body, and an eagle's wings, whose tail is a serpent (e.g. Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.5.8). As such, the Greek Sphinx was thought of as a demon of destruction and bad fate. Yet, Pratchett did not decide to merge these two mythological creatures out of ignorance (as is clearly visible from Pratchett and Simpson 2008: 132–135) – it was, rather, a deliberate choice in order to reinforce the humorous effect of the sequence.

Last but not least, the recurring references to science (i.e. quantum mechanics and mathematics) in *Pyramids* should also be noted. Most of the former appear in the context of the pyramid building, although none of the characters seem to be sure what 'quantum', as they call it, actually means.[38] An explicit reference to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle is also made in one of the footnotes in order to introduce a joke concerning the identity of the fastest animal on the Disc (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 237). The refences to 'quantum' in the context of pyramid building are used to contrast the more traditionally minded architect Ptaclusp with his educated son Ptaclusp IIb, which, in microscale, reflects the main topic of the book, the struggle between outdated traditional customs and modernity (Ekman 2013: 119–120). On the other hand, references to mathematics are embodied in the character of the camel You Bastard, which is described as the greatest mathematician on the Disc, because, we are told, 'camels have a natural aptitude for advanced mathematics' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 203). This is designed to increase the humorous effect by introducing logic where it is not expected, a technique often employed by Pratchett in his books (Pratchett 2014: 80–81).

Republic or John Locke's *Two Treatises on Government* in the former and Epictetus's *Discourses* in the latter case. In *Small Gods* Ibid makes also a statement which clearly alludes to the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (Pratchett 1993 [1992]: 153).

[38] When Ptaclusp IIa asks his brother what quantum actually means, IIb responds: 'It means add another nought' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 124).

Not Everything Has to Be Wrong

We have seen above that in constructing his fictitious state of Djelibeybi Terry Pratchett used a number of stereotypes, both Egyptian and oriental, in order to make it immediately recognisable as being modelled on ancient Egypt. It is important to point out, however, that at the same time he included some elements in the novel which quite accurately reflect ancient Egyptian reality. Unfortunately, we are unable to say if this was a deliberate decision or rather a result of his accidental choice of elements which simply fitted both the plot and/or his idea of how this imaginary state should look if it was to be based on ancient Egypt. Yet the presence of the elements discussed in this section suggests that Pratchett must have used some reliable sources of information concerning ancient Egypt. This problem is especially interesting as Pratchett rarely specified particular sources which inspired him while composing his Discworld novels, and in some cases he explicitly claimed to be unable to say if there ever was a particular source.[39] We do know that one of Pratchett's favourite sources of inspiration was *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (Pratchett 2000: 161), but in the particular case of Pratchett's Egyptian inspirations our knowledge is extremely limited. In one of his later texts Pratchett admits to have bought 'half a shelf of books on Ancient Egypt' (Pratchett and Simpson 2008: 18), but it is impossible to say which books he actually read. In another text he confesses to having read an unspecified number of books by Margaret Murray during his childhood (Pratchett 2000: 161), but we do not know if these were the ones dedicated to ancient Egypt or rather to the history of witchcraft, for which the author is also famous. Of course, any information obtained from these publications was supplemented by other reading (and by other works of culture such as movies and, in the case of ancient Egypt, perhaps also documentary shows?) as well as by common knowledge of unspecified provenance (the latter being particularly true of the stereotypes analysed in previous sections), as well as Pratchett's own imagination.

And so, when the narrator describes the customs of Djelibeybi, he states that 'Like many river valley cultures the Kingdom has no truck with such trivia as summer, springtime and winter, and bases its calendar squarely on the great heartbeat of the Djel' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 112).

This is inspired by the actual calendar of Egypt which, unlike modern calendars in countries with a temperate climate, did not divide the year into four seasons based on the relative positions of the earth and sun, but into three seasons defined according to the agricultural cycle, determined by the rhythm of the seasonal flooding of the Nile. Therefore, instead of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, in Egypt there were the seasons of inundation (*akhet*), growing (*peret*), and harvest (*shemu*). It is important to note that this example shows that Pratchett must have had more than just a superficial understanding of the Egyptian practice, especially as in many modern translations the names of the seasons are quite inappropriately translated as 'winter' (*peret*) or 'summer' (*shemu*) to give modern readers a general idea concerning the times of the year to which the Egyptian names correspond.

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[39] Note e.g. Pratchett's remark concerning the idea of the world placed on the back of a giant turtle, otherwise central to his Discworld: 'the idea that the world goes through space on the back of the turtle, as the Discworld does, is found in many cultures. It is either very old indeed or we just naturally have a turtle-shaped hole in our consciousness. It's most developed in Hindu mythology; I don't recall ever *learning* about it, it being one of those things you grow up knowing without any apparent source, but it's an image that often appears in books of popular astronomy and I suppose I must have got it from one of them when I was a child' (Pratchett 2000: 160).

An interesting observation is also made when Pratchett describes the nature of Djelibeybi's religion:

> The crumbling scrolls of Knot said that the great orange sun was eaten every evening by the sky goddess, What, who saved one pip in time to grow a fresh sun for next morning.[40] And Dios knew that this was so.
>
> *The Book of Staying in The Pit* said that the sun was the Eye of Yay, toiling across the sky each day in His endless search for his toenails.[41] And Dios knew that this was so.
>
> The secret rituals of the Smoking Mirror held that the sun was in fact a round hole in the spinning blue soap bubble of the goddess Nesh, opening into the fiery real world beyond, and the stars were the holes that the rain comes through. And Dios knew that this, also, was so.
>
> Folk myth said the sun was a ball of fire which circled the world every day, and that the world itself was carried through the everlasting void on the back of an enormous turtle. And Dios also knew that this was so, although it gave him a bit of trouble.
>
> And Dios knew that Net was the Supreme God, and that Fon was the Supreme God, and so were Hast, Set, Bin, Sot, Io, Dhek, and Ptooie; that Herpentine Triskeles alone ruled the world of the dead, and so did Syncope, and Silur the Catfish-Headed God, and Orexis-Nupt (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 117).

Paradoxically, this is quite an appropriate description of how ancient Egyptian religion actually did present many versions of the same mythical events which strike modern observers as contradictory[42] but which were viewed as complimentary by the Egyptians who considered that they highlighted different aspects of the same phenomenon (Allen 1988). Moreover, creating a new concept concerning the nature of the divine did not mean giving up on the concepts already existing. This idea, based on many-valued logic, described as henotheism by Erik Hornung (1982: 227–240), lay at the heart of the Egyptian religion just as it apparently lies at the core of its Discworld counterpart.

Another key aspect of Djelibeybi's religion is the belief that life on earth is fleeting, and what really matters is the eternal life in the Netherworld. As Teppic articulates it in response to the condolences expressed by his colleagues at the news of his father's demise:

> 'Oh, no. It's not like that. It's what he would have wanted. I think he was rather looking forward to it. In our family, death is when you really start to, you know, enjoy life. I expect he's rather enjoying it' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 82).

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[40] It should be mentioned that this element is based on the Egyptian iconography of the goddess Nut, who is indeed often portrayed as eating the sun in the evening only to give birth to it in the morning (Wilkinson: 2003: 160–163). Similarly, the reference to a giant beetle pushing the sun to the sky (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 9) is also based on the mythology of the god Khepri (Wilkinson 2003: 230–233), with the exception that the Egyptians believed that Khepri, as the sun-god's morning incarnation, was responsible for the reappearance of the sun and not that there was any giant beetle living at the eastern horizon who actually pushed the sun to the sky.

[41] Here we find Pratchett's footnote: 'Lit. "Dhar-ret-kar-mon", or "clipping of the foot". But some scholars say it should be "Dar-rhet-kare-mhun", lit. "hot-air paint stripper"' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 117).

[42] But perhaps should not be as shocking to us in the modern times, since, as Pratchett rightly observes, similar mechanisms can be perceived in advanced physics (Pratchett and Simpson 2008: 17; Ekman 2013: 119–120).

This once again seems quite adequately to capture the attitude of the Egyptians to life and death. Contrary to the common stereotype the Egyptians were not obsessed with death itself, but rather with what happens next, as is clearly demonstrated by the following passage from the Middle Kingdom (*c.* 2055–1650 BC) didactic text known as the *Instructions of Djedefhor* (§ 2.1–4):

> 'You should build your house for your son, for I have made the place which you are in. Prepare your house of the necropolis and perfect your place of the West! Receive (these words) as the death is bitter for us, receive (them) as life is exalted for us, for the house of death is for life!' (translation after Helck 1984: 6–7).

In order to keep their pharaohs alive in the Netherworld the people of Djelibeybi, as has already been mentioned, construct the pyramids. As we learn from the novel, the task of the actual construction of these monuments, from time immemorial, has been entrusted to the family of Ptaclusp, the architect. There is one important detail in the way Pratchett describes the organisation of work at the construction site which is, however, easy to overlook: the pyramids of Djelibeybi are not constructed by slaves but by more or less qualified workers, who receive payment for their work. This is clear from the concern of Ptaclusp's son, Ptaclusp IIa, regarding how much the pyramid would cost (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 118–124), from Ptaclusp's own vision of how the actual costs could be reduced when the Great Pyramid starts to mess with reality by creating time loops (141–144), and from Ptaclusp IIa's idea to reduce the costs by paying the wages with a multiplied coin which is in fact one and the same coin at five minute intervals (another disruption of reality caused by the Great Pyramid; 182–184). The fact that, as Ptaclusp IIa asserts, the royal family never actually pays for their monuments (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 118) does not change the most important fact: pyramid builders, both the chief architects and simple workers, are not treated as slaves but as contractors and subcontractors respectively, who should get appropriate wages for their work.

This stands in clear contrast to the commonly held misconception that the pyramids of ancient Egypt were constructed principally, if not exclusively, by slave labour. Despite the development in Egyptological research, including important discoveries made in the cemetery of the pyramid builders at Giza, corroborating that the pyramids were not in fact constructed by slaves (Lehner 2015), the idea, reinforced by a misinterpretation of the biblical account of the Exodus (although this, it should be added, does not make any mention of pyramids), is still quite widespread among the general public, which makes Pratchett's description of the pyramid-building activity (originally published in 1989) even more astonishing.

When Teppic visits the construction site for the first time he wants to appear more human to his subjects than any former king ever has (and his behaviour may partly be inspired by the easy-going attitude of the British King George III with respect to his subjects). However, he underestimates the power of tradition, being unwilling or unable to see that the worker to whom he tries to talk is so terrified that he cannot even properly give his name when explicitly asked. When Teppic joyfully shakes the worker's hand, the poor man is so frightened that he decides to cut it off to avoid any harm that touching the divine flesh of the king could do to him. We also learn that if he had not cut his hand off himself, other workers would have certainly done it (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 132–136).

Interestingly, this sequence finds a parallel in an episode described in the self-presentation of Rawer, an official who flourished in the reign of King Neferirkara of the 5th Dynasty (*c.* 2475–2455 BC). According to this text, during a ritual procession the king accidentally touched Rawer with his staff and immediately spoke protective words so that the incident would not result in any harm to Rawer. The event was of such great importance that Rawer decided to have it included in his self-presentation inscribed on the walls of his tomb (Sethe 1933: 232; Taterka 2016: 208–209).[43]

The last element connected with pyramids which is certainly based on ancient Egyptian reality concerns the technique of pyramid building. When Teppic visits the construction area, he learns that the top of the pyramid – the capstone in Pratchett's book or the pyramidion in Egyptological literature – is made of electrum. In a later sequence he is explicitly instructed by the architects that electrum is an alloy of gold and silver (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 339). Egyptian sources inform us that the pyramidion of a pyramid could indeed have been gilded with electrum as attested by a scene represented on the walls of the causeway in the funerary complex of Sahura of the 5th Dynasty (*c.* 2487–2475 BC) at Abusir. This shows a group of workers dragging an unpreserved object which, as the accompanying inscription reveals, was originally a pyramidion gilded with electrum (El Awady 2016: 189–194, pl. 11). Pratchett may not have known this particular scene, but his inclusion of the capstone of electrum is such a hermetic detail that it must have been drawn from an Egyptological publication, either specialistic or popular.

One final element which seems to accurately reflect Egyptian culture is the sequence in which the ancestors line up in chronological order to read the inscription in the most ancient of pyramids in Djelibeybi (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 331–332). Humorous as this sequence is, it demonstrates the author's awareness of a very important phenomenon, namely that language changes over time which makes understanding its earlier phases extremely difficult, if not totally impossible. Ancient Egypt was no different in this respect: nowadays scholars are able to distinguish various phases in the language of the Egyptians known as Early, Old, Middle, and Late Egyptian, followed by Demotic and Coptic, each one being markedly different in both grammar and vocabulary as well as in spelling conventions, including, in the case of Demotic and Coptic, the use of an entirely different script. Contrary to an opinion expressed in some popular publications, it would not have been readily possible for an Egyptian living in, say, the Ptolemaic Period (332–30 BC), to read an Old Kingdom (*c.* 2686–2160 BC) inscription, just as modern Italians are not readily able to read Latin inscriptions unless they have special training. It is also noteworthy that Pratchett portrays the kings of Djelibeybi as literate, which once again, although this time by accident rather than by intention, reflects ancient Egyptian reality (Taterka 2017).

Why Ancient Egypt?

Terry Pratchett, just as other fantasy writers, suffers from being underappreciated by both literary critics and the scholarly community who tend not to treat him as a serious author because fantasy has not widely been deemed to be a serious subject for study and Pratchett, in particular, as an author who made wit and humour his trademark, cannot be treated as

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[43] For a different interpretation of the episode described in Rawer's self-presentation, see Allen (1992).

a serious writer. But, as scholars who are working on Terry Pratchett have unanimously emphasised in recent years, nothing can be further from the truth (Smith 2013; Haberkorn 2014, 2018; Douglas 2018; Scholz 2018).

Pratchett's books, especially those belonging to the Discworld series, are highly intertextual as they employ references to other works of the fantasy genre, classic literature, philosophy, science, folklore, and popular culture, all of which are often parodied to enhance the humour within the novels. Pratchett's unique wit allows the reader to enjoy the books even without knowing the original cultural text that is being parodied or referenced in the Discworld novels, but it is important to emphasise that in such instances the reader misses an important dimension of the books (Haberkorn 2018: 139; Rana 2018: 5). For example, the dialogue of Xeno and Ibid in *Pyramids* about the tortoise being (un)able to beat the hare in a race makes reader laugh due to the way it has been presented by Pratchett, even if the reader does not realise that the sequence has been based on the paradoxes developed by Zeno of Elea. But when the reader does realise this, it not only becomes funnier, but at the same time allows the reader to fully appreciate the author's erudition while, at the same time, reassuring the reader of his/her own capacity to grasp such allusions.

But the Discworld novels are not mere parodies expected to win popularity among the readers by making them laugh. Instead they are carefully constructed satires in which the author often takes a stand in current debates on important issues in the Roundworld (i.e. our own world).[44] He does it through his wit and humour, which should be understood as a tool rather than an aim in itself. It enables the author to acquaint the reader with a complicated problem in an easily consumed, yet quite thought-provoking, manner. In doing so Pratchett often tries to either heal or punish, as rightly observed by Gideon Haberkorn (2018: 146–150). He aims to show how a person's actions often rely on unconscious and uncritical acceptance of wrong beliefs and assumptions, which can be changed if only people start to reflect on what they do, or on deliberate and dishonest manipulation which are beyond amendment and need to be punished by being turned into ridicule. The same procedure has been employed in *Pyramids*, which seems to be no less engaged in contemporary discussions of the Roundworld than any other Discworld novel.

The main subject of *Pyramids*, which can be interpreted as a *Bildungsroman*, is the struggle between modernity and tradition, the former being represented by Teppic and the latter by Dios. The motif of a young pharaoh, eager to introduce much needed reforms, and a high priest who does his best to stop it from happening, was known to literature long before Pratchett. In the 19th century the Polish writer Bolesław Prus had made it the central element of his novel *The Pharaoh and the Priest,* set at the turn of the New Kingdom (*c.* 1550–1069 BC) to the Third Intermediate Period (*c.* 1069–747 BC). In this case the plot is centred around the fictitious prince Rameses, soon to become the new king under the name of Rameses XIII, who tries to reform Egypt against the will of the high priests led by Herhor (a figure inspired by the high priest of Amun and the pharaoh Herihor). After a series of manipulative schemes Rameses eventually fails, being overthrown and killed, with Herhor emerging as the new pharaoh, who, quite surprisingly, decides to instigate all the reforms planned by Rameses to which he so vehemently opposed while being a priest (Prus 1902 [1897]; Popielska-Grzybowska and

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[44] E.g. on the role of ecology (Oziewicz 2009; Villiers 2014), gender equality (Martins 2002; Nuttall 2018; Rana 2018), multiculturalism (Gibson 2018), war (Smith 2012), or the role of the elders in society (Santaulària i Capdevila 2018).

Zinkow 2022). This makes of Prus's novel a bitter meditation on the hypocritical nature of power and the role of political and religious manipulation in gaining and keeping it.

It is not known if Pratchett knew of Prus's work (which is, however, not impossible, given the popularity which the book's film adaptation, *Pharaoh*, 1966, by Jerzy Kawalerowicz, won in the West, following the Oscar nomination in the same year).[45] But even if he did not know it, he certainly drew on the same theme, sharing many of Prus's observations on the role of religious tradition in modern society, expressing them in no less bitter, but often harsher and more explicit, terms.

As the only member of the ruling dynasty of Djelibeybi educated abroad, Teppic finds the old customs of his homeland to be inappropriate and incompatible with what he had learnt and experienced in Ankh-Morpork, with some of them being mere inconveniences (like stone pillows or the absence of plumbing), while others are simply shocking (as when he is advised by Dios to marry his own aunt). This is a direct result of his foreign experience as it was in Ankh-Morpork that Teppic realised for the first time, with an equal shock, that while he might have been a god in his homeland, nobody really cared about it in Ankh-Morpork, and especially in the Assassins' Guild, where all students were equal (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 28–29). Eventually, when Teppic comes back to Djelibeybi, his old home feels strange to him, to the extent that he thinks of Ankh-Morpork as his true home and needs to be reminded, first by himself and later also, more harshly, by Dios, that where he comes from is Djelibeybi and not Ankh-Morpork (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 134).

The same feeling of unease with respect to ancient customs is expressed by the undead King Teppicymon XXVII, Teppic's father, who begins to question the validity of tradition, which he can now view from the new perspective of the (un)dead (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 67–72, 97–100). Prior to that, criticism of the Djeli ways has been expressed also by Teppic's late mother Artela who was, which needs to be stressed, of foreign origin (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 20–21).[46] Some criticism may be perceived also in the attitude of Ptaclusp's sons: Ptaclusp IIa is not happy that his father agrees to construct the Great Pyramid because, as an accountant, he puts numbers and money (i.e. the company's wealth) over the tradition of the pyramid building, while Ptaclusp IIb would prefer to construct aqueducts instead of pyramids, as these would be far more useful to the people of Djelibeybi than the old monuments (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 118–124). In all instances, the critique of the Djeli customs is voiced by the characters associated with either foreignness or education (or sometimes with both), i.e. with an outsider's perspective, which enables them to clearly see the inconsistencies and weak points of the tradition, which the insiders are unable to perceive (Ekman 2013: 124).[47]

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[45] In theory it is also possible that Pratchett did read Prus's book as its English translation has been repeatedly reprinted and is still available to readers in English-speaking countries.

[46] Ekman (2013: 122) speculates that for her critical attitude towards Djelibeybi's traditions Artela was killed by Dios or at his command. He bases his argument on the fact that Teppic's mother has been devoured by crocodiles, while thoughtlessly swimming in the Djel, while other sequences in the novel portray throwing someone to crocodiles as a traditional punishment for religious crimes. It should be emphasised, however, that although such an interpretation is very ingenious, there is nothing in the novel's text which could ultimately corroborate it.

[47] For Pratchett's views on the importance of proper education reflected in his Discworld novels, see Steinbrück (2018).

On the other side of the scales there is the rest of the Djeli population, which, however, is not a homogenous group as it consists of the high priests and the general populace of Djelibeybi. For all of them tradition is inextricably associated with Djelibeybi's well-being, but whereas the priests, as has been explained above, treat tradition as a tool which allows them to manipulate the people (for the country's sake in the case of Dios or for reasons of personal interest in the case of his rival Hoot Koomi), the people treat it as an absolutely obvious way of life. This is clearly visible in the above-discussed sequence in which one of the workers cuts off his own hand which Teppic kindly although rather unthinkingly shook, as well as in another sequence in which Teppic frees Ptraci from prison. There he meets another prisoner who has been put into custody for having spoken blasphemy against the king, when he had accidentally dropped a rock on his foot. When Teppic asks if the man is imprisoned because one of the priests had heard his unintentional blasphemy, he finds out that it was the man who turned himself in to the priests because '[s]uch words should not go unpunished' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 161). When the man realises that Teppic wants to free him, he calls the guards to stop him from doing so. Ptraci is also quite reluctant to escape from prison, because, as she has been sentenced to death by the king (even if only through the twisting of Teppic's words by Dios), such an escape would be an act of disobedience and '[i]t's wrong even to think of disobeying the king' just as '[i]t's wrong not to want to die' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 162). All this is summarised by Teppic with a bitter comment that '[w]e're really good at it (...). Mere animals couldn't possibly manage to act like this. You need to be human being to be really stupid' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 161). Equally telling is the later sequence in which Dios announces to the guards who have captured Teppic and Ptraci that Teppic is the assassin who killed the king. When reminded by Teppic that he is the king, Dios replies with utmost confidence: 'No. I have a very clear picture of the king. You are not the king' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 199).

While he is in Ephebe, Teppic has a most revealing dream in which he sees Khuft, the founder of Djelibeybi, and to his shock he discovers that this much revered ancestor was in fact a simple criminal, who did not have to flee from persecution, but rather from the people whom he had deceived (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 288–292). Later on, when Teppic returns to Djelibeybi for the second time he finds the palace empty as all people are now watching the gods who have unexpectedly come to be physically present in the world. While walking through the throne room, Teppic sees the gold mask, one of the most important symbols of the Djeli kings, lying around and discovers that it is not made of gold, but of gilded lead. This leads him to another bitter constatation that: 'It was probably very symbolic of something or other. Perhaps not even symbolic *of* anything. Just symbolic, all by itself' (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 327). Through these two sequences Teppic (and with him the reader) discovers that the sacrosanct tradition of Djelibeybi was from the very outset based on a fraud and a lie.

This is, indeed, a very harsh judgment concerning the role of old tradition, one that recurs also in other novels by Pratchett.[48] It is important to note that Pratchett's critique does not

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[48] Especially in *Small Gods* (Pratchett 1993 [1992]) and *Carpe Jugulum* (Pratchett 1998), where religious fanaticism resulting from misinterpretation of religious texts is criticised as well as in *Thud!* (Pratchett 2005), where the immemorial hatred between dwarfs and trolls is portrayed as resulting from a falsified account of what happened at the Koom Valley (Webb 2014; Gibson 2018: 59–60). It should also be mentioned that the critique of the old tradition in *Pyramids* might be to some extent connected with the discussions on the role of the monarchy in modern society, which started to be voiced in the United Kingdom in late 1980s and early 1990s, when the novel was first published.

concern tradition as such, since in other novels he presents it as a means of social integration, which unites people and gives them a sense of shared identity – an idea which is elaborated most fully in Pratchett's *Nation* (2008), which does not belong to the Discworld cycle (Deszcz-Tryhubczak 2018),[49] but which is also present in the Tiffany Aching subseries within the Discworld series (Santaulària i Capdevila 2018; Steinbrück 2018: 98–101). What Pratchett criticises is the elevation of tradition above all else, irrespective of the well-being of the (individual or group of) people or simply of common sense, an action which brings nothing but misery in the name of an idea which not only does not do good to anyone (Leverett 2018: 160, 171), but more importantly is often based on a lie, manipulation, or fraud. This pertains to all kinds of tradition, including religious fundamentalism which may lead to suffering and persecution (criticised in *Pyramids* as well as in *Small Gods*),[50] jingoism (criticised in *Jingo*),[51] racist and nationalistic prejudices (criticised especially in the City Watch series),[52] or gender stereotypes (criticised in *Equal Rites*).[53] The only question that remains to be answered is why Pratchett chose to set the plot of his seventh Discworld novel in a state modelled on ancient Egypt.

In a commonly shared opinion ancient Egypt embodies the omnipresence and omnipotence of an unchangeable tradition. To an untrained, non-specialist eye, all representations of Egyptian kings look exactly the same since the traditional style of representing the king was far more important than recording any of their individual traits. At the same time ancient Egypt is popularly perceived as a civilisation in which religion is more important than anything else, causing the kings to make what, from our modern perspective, seem to be impractical and incomprehensible decisions aimed only at satisfying the gods, such as building monumental tombs and temples. Notwithstanding the fact that this common perception of ancient Egypt is significantly inaccurate, it is the view of ancient Egypt taken by many Greek and Roman authors, whose opinions lay at the foundation of stereotypes regarding Egypt shaped over the following millennia, only to be reinforced, in recent decades, by popular culture. Viewed as such, ancient Egypt was a perfect setting for a novel whose plot is centred around the theme of the struggle between tradition and freedom/modernity, be it by the nineteenth-century Polish writer Bolesław Prus or the late twentieth- to early twenty-first century British author Terry Pratchett. In both instances ancient Egypt was chosen in order to universalise the issue advanced in the novels to show that societies have been struggling with it from the very outset of recorded history. While Prus explicitly set the plot of his novel in Egypt, Pratchett chose to set his in a fictitious world which is clearly identifiable as modelled on the pharaonic civilisation, which allows the readers to draw the intended conclusion for themselves, by recognising the original culture on which Djelibeybi was modelled.[54] While both authors agree in their criticism of the abuse of tradition in order to gain and retain power through a deceptive manipulation, the difference between them lies in their views of how this

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[49] This motif is also present in another novel not included in the Discworld series, namely *Johnny and the Dead* (Pratchett 2006), as rightly pointed out by de Villiers (2014) and Fateha (2018).

[50] It has been rightly pointed out that, unlike J.R.R. Tolkien or C.S. Lewis, Pratchett composed all his novels from a decidedly atheistic point of view. See, for this, Scott (2018).

[51] Pratchett (1998), cf. also Smith (2012: 33–35); Gibson (2018: 60–61).

[52] Webb (2014); Gibson (2018).

[53] Pratchett (1989), cf. also the analyses of this motif in other Discworld novels by Martins (2002); Nuttall (2018), and Rana (2018).

[54] Which is why I am reluctant to call *Pyramids* a parody of ancient Egypt for this would mean missing the whole point. Ancient Egypt is here used for a more important agenda and it is our behaviour which is being criticised by Pratchett, not that of the Egyptians.

can be countered. Whereas Prus presents a highly pessimistic view of human nature, Pratchett seems to be more optimistic about humanity's fate. While Prus's Rameses is overthrown by the priests and eventually killed, Pratchett's Teppic manages to destroy the Great Pyramid (as well as other pyramids), which embodies all the distortions caused by the blind following of outdated customs, and to send Dios, the personification of these customs, back to his original time.

Moreover, the example of Ptraci, who gradually changes her views about the validity of Djelibeybi's tradition under the influence of Teppic and Chidder only to become the new ruler of Djelibeybi after Teppic's abdication, shows that change is indeed possible. Moreover, from the very outset of her reign Ptraci is determined to reform the country, at the same time showing disrespect for old traditions. And it seems that the people of Djelibeybi, despite some uncertainty, welcome her decisions with hope (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 369–372). It is particularly noteworthy that although one of Ptraci's female predecessors, as we have seen, needed to change her gender in order to rule, Ptraci does not even think about it. Apparently, a considerable change has already happened in the valley of the Djel.

It is not by accident that Pratchett chose to subtitle his novel *The Book of Going Forth*, based on the Egyptian title of the *Book of the Dead*, i.e. *The Book of Going Forth by Day*. Just like the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, *Pyramids* is about going forth to a new life, yet not in the afterlife, but here on earth. This going forth is achieved by abandoning outdated customs in order to see the world as it truly is: diverse and unlimited. Instead of blindly observing traditions whose origin is long forgotten we should concentrate on making our lives better and we should do it here while still living, because we cannot know what, if anything, will happen afterwards.[55] This task is entrusted to everyone, because, in Pratchett's view, fighting evil is a social responsibility (Oziewicz 2009; de Villiers 2014; Burt 2020). As the author asserts through the mouth of Lord Vetinari in one of his later novels: '[people] accept evil not because they say yes, but because they don't say no' (Pratchett 2009 [1989]: 391). *Pyramids* can thus be seen as an encouragement to say 'no' whenever necessary, a 'no' which has a power to instigate changes even when it seems theoretically and practically impossible. Yet, the freedom one gets by overcoming the bounds of tradition should not be taken for granted as the threat of losing it is constantly present in the background. This is suggested by the novel's epilogue, in which we see Dios thrown back in time to the very beginning of Djelibeybi. When he sees the approaching Khuft, the camel-herder, soon to become the first king of Djelibeybi, he picks up his staff, decorated with an image of a snake eating his own tail (i.e. the Egyptian symbol of everlasting cyclicity, known as the Uroboros), and decides to (re)start his duty as the royal counsellor so that the story could happen all over again (Pratchett 1990 [1989]: 377–380). Despite the initial optimism, there is some bitter reflection in this ending, which seems to underline that the struggle is never actually ended, hence we should keep fighting, because this is the only way to make a difference (Ekman 2013: 124–125).

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[55] In this Pratchett's *Pyramids* is similar to the idea expressed in ancient Egyptian *Song of the Harper from the Tomb of King* (*Intef*)|, which states: 'There is no-one who would return from therein (i.e. the Netherworld), who could recount their state, who could recount their affairs, so he could set our heats at ease before we part to the place which they had gone to. You should rejoice your heart because of it for forgetfulness of heart is profitable to you, so follow your heart as long as you exist' (pHarris 500, 6.8–9; translation after Müller 1932: pl. 12).

Conclusions

Terry Pratchett's novels are carefully constructed comments on the reality that surrounds us. By setting the plot in an entirely or partially alternative universe, he is able to pinpoint various elements of our world that need to be emended. His critique is reinforced by his unique wit and humour, which, paradoxically, make his observations all the more serious. Moreover, his books are usually a mixture of references to various media, which enhance the humour of his parodies and satires.

The seventh novel of the Discworld series is centred on the struggle between blind observance of outdated and unreasonable traditions and customs on the one hand and embracing freedom of self-expression and commodities provided by modernity on the other. Pratchett deliberately chose to set the plot of his book in a fictitious state which is clearly recognisable as modelled on ancient Egypt. In doing so, Pratchett employed a number of commonly held stereotypes pertaining to both ancient Egypt and oriental monarchy, not because he was unable to include historically accurate information (and some of the above-discussed examples demonstrate the exact opposite), but because there was no point in doing it otherwise. Pratchett did not wish to write a scholarly publication, nor did he try to write a historical novel. As a fantasy author, he wrote a fantasy novel based on a model which he wanted his readers to recognise immediately, which is why, in the process of its composition, he used elements which could be easily understood by everyone. This recognition was meant to provoke the reader to a constatation, that the problems he discusses in his novel are real and that they have accompanied humanity from the very outset of history, even in cultures as markedly different from our own as ancient Egypt. This, in turn, should incite the readers to reflect upon the author's vehement critique of the abuse of tradition and to take it seriously, despite, or rather due to, the humorous way in which this critique is expressed.

In theory, one could argue that as Pratchett's construction of ancient Egypt was drawn on stereotypes, it is not as valid as the author would like it to be, because no civilisation in human history was so strongly enslaved by tradition. Yet, Pratchett's critique is not directed against ancient Egypt but against our modern world. Djelibeybi is, of course, a fictitious state, built up on hyperbole and exaggeration, but, at the end of the day, are the attitudes portrayed in the novel really so different from our own? Stereotypes of Egypt and of oriental monarchies certainly do not do justice to their cultures, and might perpetuate some of these stereotypes in the common imagination, making it even more difficult for Egyptologists and other scholars to eradicate them for good. But this need not to be viewed as the dark side to Pratchett's otherwise noble intentions in criticising those elements of our society which require emendation as it is equally possible that *Pyramids* will inspire its readers to take an interest in historical ancient Egypt (Taterka 2016: 215–217), resulting in the abandonment of precisely those stereotypes which Pratchett drew upon while composing his book, metaphorically throwing away the ladder after having climbed up it. Only time will tell whether this is a realistic or a vain hope, just as it will show to what extent Pratchett's message will be applied in reality by the his ever increasing readership across the world, where many societies are still affected by the problems which inspired his critique more than thirty years ago.

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Pauline Gedge's Hatshepsut: *Child of the Morning*

Maiken Mosleth King

Introduction

Canadian fiction writer Pauline Gedge, who was born in 1945, has published a number of historical novels set in ancient Egypt. Her novel *Child of the Morning* was originally published in 1977; several editions have been released in the decades since, and the novel has been translated into dozens of languages. Since writing *Child of the Morning*, she has also published the standalone novel *Scroll of Saqqara* (1990), the series *Thu's Houses* (1994-196), as well as the trilogies *Lords of the Two Lands* (1998-2000) and *The King's Man* (2007-2010); all follow real historical figures and are set in the Egyptian royal court during the late Second Intermediate Period or the New Kingdom.[1] Although Gedge has largely shunned media attention and has rarely given interviews, she has stated that her historical novels are meticulously researched and driven by her life-long passion for ancient Egypt; as an author, she takes the approach that academic historians concern themselves with events and facts, whilst fiction writers concern themselves with characters and their inner worlds.[2] As such, Gedge's historical novels do not represent attempts to undermine or invalidate scholarship; instead, they serve a complementary function and encourage readers to consider why historical figures did the things they did.

Child of the Morning is set in Egypt during the early 18th Dynasty in the 15th century BC and follows Hatshepsut as she grows from royal princess to female pharaoh. Hatshepsut and her reign have been the subject of much discussion and speculation since her mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri on Luxor's West Bank was explored by Napoleon's expedition in 1799. After having deciphered the hieroglyphic script in 1822, Jean-François Champollion visited Hatshepsut's temple in 1829 and was puzzled by the obscure ruler who was referred to in the surviving inscriptions as both 'king' and 'daughter of the sun' (Champollion 1868: 244). Deir el-Bahri was first systematically excavated in 1875, and the findings were published in a monograph by Auguste Mariette (1877); much fieldwork has been undertaken at Deir el-Bahri in the years since, and details of Hatshepsut's life and reign have gradually come to light.

As in Gedge's novel, the historical Hatshepsut was the daughter of king Thutmose I, a former army general who may have been of non-royal origins (Bennett 1994; Manassa Darnell 2015: 658; Stiebing 2016: 175), and his queen consort Ahmose; the couple also had an elder daughter named Nefrubity, who died young (Bryan 2000: 221). Thutmose I had a son, who later ascended to the throne as Thutmose II, by another wife named Mutnofret (Bryan 2000: 221, 227–228). Hatshepsut married her half-brother and spent his reign holding the titles of Great Royal Wife and God's Wife of Amun;[3] she also gave birth to a daughter named Neferura,

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[1] https://paulinegedge.com/about/about-pauline/ (Accessed 04/04/2023)
[2] January Magazine, 1999, Interview Pauline Gedge, https://www.januarymagazine.com/profiles/gedge.html (Accessed 04/04/2023).
[3] In Gedge's novel the reign of Thutmose II lasts for a decade, although more recent scholarship has proposed a reign of no more than three years (Bryan 2000: 226).

who predeceased her mother.[4] During the reign of Thutmose II, Hatshepsut's cultic position secured her relationship with the priesthood of Amun at Karnak and gave her access to both significant landholdings and her own retinue of officials (Moreno García 2013: 582–583). As dowager queen Hatshepsut had no sons, Thutmose II was succeeded upon his death by his infant son Thutmose (III), whose mother was Iset, another wife of non-royal origins (Van De Mieroop 2021: 163). In Gedge's novel Hatshepsut is also the mother of Meryet-Hatshepsut, who married Thutmose III and gave birth to his son and successor Amenhotep II. After the novel's publication, however, Gay Robins (1982: 82–83) identified Meryet-Hatshepsut as the daughter of a royal nurse named Huy. Due to Thutmose III's young age at the death of his father, Hatshepsut was appointed regent on the boy's behalf, and the position of co-ruler provided a steppingstone that enabled Hatshepsut to assume the position of pharaoh approximately seven years after the death of Thutmose II (Gabolde 2005: 151); as we will see below, this unorthodox move has caused many modern scholars to view her as an illegitimate usurper.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how Hatshepsut is portrayed in Gedge's novel and how this portrayal relates to both contemporary feminist discourse and academic scholarship on Hatsheput's reign.[5] As I show in this text, Gedge's narrative represents a fictional re-imagining of Hatshepsut's life, emphasising her legitimacy and capability as a ruler. This portrayal draws heavily on Hatshepsut's own inscriptions, as well as scholarly assessments of Hatshepsut as a strong counterpart to her weak and ineffective husband. The novel is influenced by second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s and seeks to challenge patriarchal ideals that present political power as a male prerogative. As I will show below, the novel also forms part of a contemporary trend of historical fiction focusing on women; however, the narrative distinguishes itself from many other works by the minimal focus on romance and sexuality. Finally, I demonstrate in this chapter that Hatshepsut is portrayed in the narrative as an exceptional woman who accomplished exceptional things in a patriarchal society, effectively presenting her as an ancient predecessor to twentieth-century women and their fight for gender equality.

Hatshepsut's Legitimacy

Gedge was not the first fiction writer to present a narrative account of Hatshepsut's life and reign. In 1920, British theatre producer Terence Gray published a drama titled *The Life of the King of the South & North Kamari'a, Daughter of the Sun, Hatshepsut*. Whilst this work pre-dates the second-wave feminist movement by many decades, Gray was similar to Gedge in that he aimed to move away from the notion that Hatshepsut was nothing more than an illegitimate usurper.

The legitimacy of Hatshepsut's kingship and her father's role in her rise to the throne have been debated issues since the early days of Egyptology. She is attested up to and including regnal year 22 of Thutmose III, which suggests that her regency and co-regency lasted for

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[4] She is attested as late as regnal year 11 of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III as God's Wife of Amun and Great Royal Wife, which has been taken as evidence for a marriage between Neferura and Thutmose III (Hawass and Saleem 2016: 44). An alternative explanation is that Neferura symbolically acted as Great Royal Wife to her mother in religious rituals that required the presence of a queen, as Hatshepsut could no longer perform this function due to her new masculine role as king (Robins 1993b: 76). Gedge's narrative follows the premise that Hatshepsut simply passed her feminine titles to her daughter upon her formal coronation as pharaoh.

[5] Post-1970s scholarship on Hatshepsut is largely irrelevant to Gedge's novel and will thus not be the focus here.

more than two decades in total and well into Thutmose's adulthood (O'Connor 2006: 5). The *damnatio memoriae* that was carried out at some point following her disappearance from historical record has been assumed by many scholars to have been an act of vengeance by Thutmose III, in retaliation for Hatshepsut having usurped his throne.[6] It now seems clear, however, that the attack took place no earlier than regnal year 42 (Dorman 1988: 46–65), and some have suggested that it was largely Amenhotep II, the son of Thutmose III and Meryet-Hatshepsut, who was responsible for the attacks on Hatshepsut's memory (Laboury 2006: 265–266). Whether it was Thutmose III or his successor who was primarily responsible, the motivations for erasing Hatshepsut from history are unclear. We may speculate that the purpose was to avoid any potential legitimation issues for Amenhotep II, as Thutmose III's position as Hatshepsut's co-regent rather than sole ruler may have cast doubt over the line of succession, especially if any other descendants of Thutmose I were still alive (Laboury 2006: 265–266).

Gray's narrative presents Hatshepsut as a brave and heroic woman, who was appointed rightful heir to the throne by her father Thutmose I in the following speech:

> Verily, I have faith in My beloved daughter more than in any other in the Entire Land. Wise is she, and of rare intelligence, full of wisdom and resource is she, swift and capable in decision, strong and unhesitating in action, howbeit she is yet but a child. Verily she is the true offspring of her Father, and the veritable daughter of Ri'a. In her hands I could leave My empire with peace of heart, and in the hands of none other. Therefore is My Majesty unwilling that Tahutmosis [II] should be Associated to the end that he may receive My power. (Gray 1920: 18).

The speech composed by Gray appears to be inspired by a speech attributed to Thutmose I, which forms part of the 'coronation inscriptions' carved on the northern walls of the middle colonnade of Hatshepsut's mortuary temple (Naville 1898: pl. 61; Sethe 1906: 257–261). In the following speech, Hatshepsut is presented as having been publicly appointed as her father's heir in his lifetime:

> His Majesty said before them: 'This daughter of mine, Hatshepsut United-With-Amun (may she live!), I will put her on my throne. She is the one who will be upon my throne. Indeed, it is she who will sit upon my marvellous throne. She will govern the people in all the places of the palace. Surely, she will lead you! You will listen to her words, and you will unite on account of her decree. He who will praise her will live, and he who will speak evil (words) in conspiracy against Her Majesty will die'.[7]

The speech makes no reference to Thutmose II, and does not explain their father's rationale for choosing Hatshepsut over her brother. Gedge follows Gray's premise of Thutmose I favouring his daughter over his son, exemplified by the king's announcement to queen consort Ahmose:

> I will not have Thothmes, my brainless, soft, mother-loving son, to sit on my throne and govern my country into shambles. And I will not put an irksome bridle such as he on my little Hat. The chains she shall wear shall be golden. She is Maat. She, more than I, more

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[6] See for example Edgerton 1933: 26; Naville 1895: 36; Wilson 1951: 176.
[7] Author's own translation after the hieroglyphic edition by Sethe (1906: 257–259).

than stupid Thothmes, is the Child of Amun. I will have her for Crown Prince. (Gedge 2010: 72)

Hatshepsut's claim that her father chose her, and not her brother, as his successor has been met with both rejection and acceptance by scholars. Many scholars have taken the view that she cynically used her role as regent following the death of Thutmose II as an opportunity to usurp the throne from his son Thutmose III and retroactively claim legitimacy.[8] This is exemplified by the words of William Hayes:

> At the beginning of the reign Hat-shepsut allowed herself to be represented on public monuments standing behind her stepson [...] It was not long, however, before this vain, ambitious, and unscrupulous woman showed herself in her true colours. (Hayes 1953: 82)

John Van Seters (1997: 174) has opined that Hatshepsut's claims regarding her father were entirely fictitious and that 'no other reign is so filled with propaganda'. James Henry Breasted (1906: 54, 95) insisted that her claims were 'an artificial creation, a fiction of later origin, prompted by political necessity'; he was also of the opinion that Hatshepsut's supporters had 'forced her upon Thutmose III' as a co-ruler. By contrast, Gedge's narrative echoes scholarly sentiments that Hatshepsut was the real power behind the throne even before the death of her husband:

> Even during his life (=Thutmose II), Hatshepsut appears to have taken the leading part; as she well might, being so much older than he, and having been associated on the throne before him. (...) From his mummy it seems that he was not healthy, nor of a strong frame like that of his father or brother. And his early death bears this out. (Petrie 1896: 75–76).

> But if the king actually did take this course he had good grounds for doing so. His son, Thothmes II was a weakling, who seems to have suffered from some complaint which brought him to an early end. On the other hand Hatshepsut was a woman of the greatest energy and capacity... (Brunton 1924: 68).

Petrie and Brunton both accepted the possibility that Thutmose I had indeed publicly chosen Hatshepsut as his legitimate heir due to weakness on the part of her brother Thutmose II; he is similarly described as a 'weakling' and 'frail' by Breasted (1906: 41), E. A. Wallis Budge (1893: 52), and Hayes (1953: 78). This characterisation seems to have influenced Gedge's portrayal of Thutmose II, although his weakness is presented in the narrative primarily as indolence and lack of fitness, rather than any physical frailty. In order for Gedge's narrative to function effectively as a critique of patriarchal power structures, Hatshepsut's reign must be presented as legitimate rather than a result of usurpation. In the novel, Hatshepsut becomes her father's co-regent five years before his death. Gedge may have taken inspiration here from Naville (1894: 15) and Budge (1893: 52), who both favoured this scenario based on their interpretations of Hatshepsut's inscriptions from her mortuary temple. The co-regency between Hatshepsut and her father thus functions as a plot device for firmly establishing Hatshepsut's legitimacy in the eyes of the reader.

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[8] See for example Bothmer 1967: 59; Winlock 1942: 147.

Within the narrative, the co-regency of Hatshepsut and her father also functions as a starting point of conflict with Thutmose II, whose jealousy of Hatshepsut causes him to oppose her political ambitions out of petty spite. Following their father's death, he dismisses Hatshepsut's coronation as 'the dream of an old man with a favourite child' (Gedge 2010: 185) and pressures her into marriage by promising to provide her with an heir. Their marriage results in a *de facto* co-regency, with queen consort Hatshepsut as the real power behind the scenes. This arrangement continues for a decade until he dies of smallpox, and Hatshepsut muses at his funeral that he was in death 'as ineffectual and weak as he had been in life' (Gedge 2010: 275). As such, his character functions both as a representative of the oppressive patriarchy that Gedge seeks to criticise, and as a literary foil for Hatshepsut (Auger 2010: 114); his negative qualities thus serve to contrast with and accentuate the positive characteristics of the heroine.

The novel does not present Hatshepsut's appointment as heir as an idiosyncratic whim on the part of her father; her position as heir to the throne is also affirmed by Amun's oracle, which addresses her as the deity's daughter (Gedge 2010: 151–152, 166). Gedge draws here on surviving inscriptions that frame Hatshepsut's legitimacy around the so-called 'royal birth myth' depicted on the walls of her mortuary temple. In these reliefs, queen Ahmose is shown seated on a bed with Amun, who has assumed the likeness of her husband, and this union results in Hatshepsut's conception (Naville 1896: pl. XLVII–LII). Hatshepsut's reliefs represent the earliest known complete example of this myth, which was re-used later in the 18th Dynasty by Amenhotep III in the Luxor Temple (Bell 1997: 137–144). The basic principles of the narrative were not Hatshepsut's own invention, as 12th Dynasty fragments of a similar narrative are known from the pyramid complex of Senwosret III at Dahshur (Oppenheim 2011: 171, 183). As such, it appears that Hatshepsut was simply reproducing a now time-honoured practice of evoking the divine parentage of every Egyptian pharaoh, rather than making any particular protestation regarding her gender or her legitimacy. Indeed, Egyptian kings had carried the title 'Son of Ra' since the Old Kingdom (Sabbahy 2020: 40). Furthermore, the Middle Kingdom literary narrative of Papyrus Westcar presents the three 5th Dynasty kings Userkaf, Sahure and Neferirkare Kakai as triplets resulting from a union between the sun god and a priest's wife (Parkinson 1997: 102–130); this union is, however, not described. Gedge's novel never explicitly articulates the birth narrative, and the question of whether it represents anything akin to propaganda is never addressed. Instead, Hatshepsut's belief in her own divine conception is presented as unquestionably sincere, and the truthfulness of this belief is left up to the reader's own imagination.

In the novel, conflict between Hatshepsut and Thutmose III arises once he reaches adolescence. Unlike his father, he is characterised as strong and capable, with military prowess; he is also portrayed as headstrong and impatient, and Hatshepsut compares him to an unruly horse that must be curbed (Gedge 2010: 318). Within this narrative, Hatshepsut is ambivalent about handing over her kingdom to the young prince, and the co-regency comes to an end with bloodshed: Thutmose and his supporters assassinate Hatshepsut's loyal officials, including Senenmut, which puts an effective stop to her rule. In this regard the narrative uses some creative licence for dramatic effect, as many of Hatshepsut's officials are known to have continued to serve Thutmose III after her death (Moreno Garcia 2013: 583–584). Whilst Thutmose acknowledges that Hatshepsut had been an efficient and legitimate ruler, he also expresses the view that her reign was an anomaly, and that Egypt must return to orthodoxy

with a male pharaoh. In Gedge's novel, the patriarchy that Hatshepsut spends her life fighting against ultimately prevails.

Both Gray and Gedge published their works of fiction before the female mummy from KV60, a woman who died from cancer in her early 50s, had been putatively identified as Hatshepsut (Hawass and Saleem 2016: 43–61). If this identification is correct, Hatshepsut's reign ended due to natural causes. The unknown circumstances surrounding the end of her reign allowed Gray and Gedge to engage in creative speculation. The ending of Gedge's novel implies that Hatshepsut is poisoned by order of Thutmose III, who resents her for having overshadowed him throughout his childhood and youth. By contrast, Gray's narrative (1920: 242–250) ends with Hatshepsut acquiescing to Thutmose III's demands that she step down from her public duties and resign from her position as his co-ruler, and there is no attempt to speculate as to how and when she died. Whilst these authors present different endings, both narratives end with Hatshepsut's defeat and disappearance from the political scene, and the return to a more traditional form of government with a male monarch.

Hatshepsut and Gender Discourse

Historical fiction with female protagonists has often been associated with a female audience, with love and romance being central themes (Cooper and Short 2012: 2). A prominent example of this type of literature is the medieval 'bodice-ripper', aimed at female audiences, that has been popular since the 1970s. In such fiction, the historical setting provides an exotic backdrop to sexually explicit content (Burge 2012: 95–114). By contrast, these themes take a back seat in Gedge's narrative, allowing Hatshepsut's political achievements to take centre stage. Senenmut, a commoner who rose through the ranks to become Hatshepsut's architect and advisor (Dorman 1988), is presented in the novel as Hatshepsut's true love; Gedge seems to draw here on scholarly theories that Senenmut and Hatshepsut had a sexual relationship (Keller 2006: 295). Their physical relationship begins late in the novel, many years after the death of Thutmose II. This has the effect of affirming Hatshepsut's heteronormative sexuality in the eyes of the reader, without portraying the protagonist as engaging in anything akin to adultery.

Hatshepsut's gender identity and sexuality have attracted some scholarly debate since the 19th century due to her use of both masculine and feminine pronouns, i.e., she variously referred to herself in inscriptions both as 'she' or 'he', and her portrayals in sculpture and relief are also frequently androgynous or masculine. Psychiatrist Edward Margetts (1951: 559, 561) described Hatshepsut as having a 'deviant personality' and a 'pathological drive towards male impersonation', and, as we will see below, he was not alone in taking a negative view of Hatshepsut and her reign. Suzanne Ratié (1979: 316) assumed that Hatshepsut must have dressed in men's clothing and taken on a 'masculine' personality in real life, thus creating psychological conflict and gender confusion. More recently, Uroš Matić (2016: 810–831) has drawn on queer theory to reject any notions of Hatshepsut's 'gender confusion'. He argues that Hatshepsut's iconographic representations as a male figure were cultic in function and served to establish her link to the distinctly masculine divine kingship, whilst her use of feminine pronouns and imagery maintained her relationship with her physical body. Gedge's narrative, which portrays Hatshepsut as female-presenting and heterosexual, can be viewed as a literary antithesis to negative evaluations of Hatshepsut and a type of 'feminist

intervention', i.e., an attempt to bring historical women out of obscurity through fictional re-imaginings of their lives (Cooper and Short 2012: 3). Literary intervention of this kind is associated with second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, which focused on issues of equality and discrimination (Osborne 2001: 26–31). In archaeology, second-wave feminism resulted in a newfound awareness of male domination in the field and the subsequent lack of visibility of women in history (Sørensen 2000: 17). The situation was described succinctly by Margaret Conkey and Janet Spector:

> The male perspective is taken to be representative of the culture, whereas the female view is typically portrayed as peripheral to the norm or somehow exceptional or idiosyncratic. In the male-centric view of culture, women are often described primarily in terms of their lack of male characteristics. (Conkey and Spector 1984: 4)

The 1970s also saw an academic re-evaluation of Hatshepsut's reign in more positive terms, exemplified by the Francophone monographs published by Suzanne Ratié (1979) and Roland Tefnin (1979).

Child of the Morning was published only three years before another prominent example of literary feminist intervention in historical narrative, namely Jean Marie Auel's novel *Clan of the Cave Bear* (1980). The narrative is the first of the *Earth's Children* series (1980–2011) set in continental Europe during the Last Glacial Period, which revolves around the premise that Cro-Magnons lived in matriarchal tribal societies and worshipped a 'Great Goddess'. The concept of a prehistoric matriarchy has been challenged by Cynthia Eller (2000), amongst others, and does not need to be addressed here; it will suffice to note that, in Auel's narrative, protagonist Ayla accomplishes great things precisely because of her stereotypically feminine traits, e.g., heteronormative sexuality, maternal instincts and empathy (Magoulick 2022: 138–147). *Clan of the Cave Bear* represents a backlash against patriarchy, which is exemplified in the novel by the Clan, i.e., the Neanderthals, and reimagines the palaeolithic Cro-Magnon society as a lost feminist utopia. By contrast, *Child of the Morning* is set in a patriarchal society where political power and agency are male privileges. This necessitates that Hatshepsut embraces stereotypically masculine traits such as physical strength, assertiveness, and emotional ruthlessness; at the same time, her physical appearance is presented as distinctly feminine. She is described in the novel as having a slim figure, brown skin, thick black hair, and large brown eyes framed by kohl and coloured eyepaint. Although she is not overtly sexualised, it is likely that Gedge's conception of Hatshepsut's appearance was influenced by the 1963 film *Cleopatra*, starring Liz Taylor as the eponymous queen,[9] as well as by ancient Egyptian images of queens. As such, the novel juxtaposes Hatshepsut's conventionally feminine appearance against her masculine traits, and other characters in the narrative often express their surprise at this dichotomy.

Gedge's Hatshepsut takes on the role of a subversive heroine, who resists the gendered ideals and restrictions imposed upon her. Other characters in the narrative continuously reinforce the notion that Hatshepsut's biological sex is an obstacle to her ambitions, and a problem that must be rationalised and solved. When Thutmose II spitefully points out that the divine

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[9] This film is an example of women's rule being portrayed in Hollywood cinema as exotic, 'other', and even temporary until order is restored by the return of men to power; see A.I. Fernández Pichel, M. Orriols-Llonch, 'Sex, Gender and Sexualisation: Ancient Egypt in Contemporary Popular Culture' in this volume.

creator Amun made Hatshepsut female rather than male, she reasons that the deity 'wished to have a pharaoh who was more beautiful than any other being on the earth' (Gedge 2010: 184). In Gedge's portrayal, Hatshepsut attempts to break free of the traditional binary gender categories by stating that she 'rules as male' and emphasises that her biological sex has no bearing on her ability to rule as effectively as a man. Drawing on the depictions of Hatshepsut's conception and birth from her mortuary temple, which show her Ka, i.e., vital essence and spiritual double, as a male figure (Naville 1896: pl. XLVIII), Gedge's Hatshepsut describes herself as a gender-ambiguous figure with a female body and a male Ka (Gedge 2010: 184–185).

The character of Hatshepsut's father, Thutmose I, functions as a vehicle for expressing Gedge's opposition to the rigid patriarchal system. War veteran Thutmose is portrayed as disapproving of his son, who feels entitled to the throne by virtue of his biological male sex rather than any personal characteristics or leadership skills. According to his father, Thutmose II does not fit the ideal of the intelligent, studious, brave, pious, and physically fit military pharaoh; the attempts to instil military discipline in the boy are unsuccessful due to his indolence and lack of physical strength. By contrast, Hatshepsut conforms to this ideal in every aspect except for her biological sex, and Thutmose I therefore chooses Hatshepsut rather than Thutmose II as his heir. In her father's eyes, Hatshepsut is something of a child prodigy who transcends the limits of her sex and stands in sharp contrast to other female members of the royal family and court. This literary portrayal of the relationship between Thutmose I and Hatshepsut is based on Hatshepsut's coronation inscriptions from her mortuary temple. As we have seen, many scholars have taken the view that this represents fiction and propaganda created by Hatshepsut after her father's death. Gedge takes Hatshepsut's inscriptions at face value and uses Hatshepsut's self-described political trajectory as an opportunity to promote second-wave feminist discourse on gender equality and women's participation in the political sphere. The reader is encouraged to conclude that Hatshepsut was just as suited to rule as any man; at the same time, the narrative emphasises Hatshepsut's 'otherness' and thus implies that Hatshepsut was suited to rule precisely because she was not like other women.

Although Gedge's novel emphasises the patriarchal nature of ancient Egyptian society, the narrative also perpetuates the idea that Egyptian pharaohs had to legitimise their rule by marrying royal women. The theory that royal women were the carriers of the pharaonic bloodline,[10] which in more recent years has been rejected (Robins 1983: 67–77), was developed by scholars as a way of explaining the Egyptian royal practice of sibling marriage (Robins 1993a: 27). Donald Redford (1967: 71–72, 84–85) took this theory a step further and suggested that Hatshepsut had planned to appoint her daughter Neferura as heir to the throne and establish a matriarchal dynasty of female pharaohs ruling entirely without male co-regents. The matriarchal transmission theory is incorporated into Gedge's narrative by presenting Thutmose I as having married royal princess Ahmose in order to legitimise his own rule. As king, he secretly arranges for their eldest daughter Nefrubity to be poisoned in order to prevent Thutmose II from consolidating his claims to the throne by marrying her. Perhaps directly drawing on Redford's theory, Gedge's Hatshepsut plans to make her daughter Neferura heir to the throne and entirely bypass Thutmose III; the plan ultimately fails due to Neferura's premature death. This serves to portray Hatshepsut as a radical visionary ahead of her time, who dreams of abolishing the patriarchy and creating a matriarchal utopia. However, this

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[10]   See for example Breasted 1906: 58; Hornblower 1932: 270–2; Murray 1924: 63.

dream remains unfulfilled due to opposition from both influential male figures and the other royal women, who have internalised patriarchal gender ideals to the extent that questioning the status quo is unthinkable.

In Gedge's narrative, Hatshepsut's mother Ahmose is amongst the most vocal opponents of Hatshepsut's appointment as heir. The queen's objections are of a religious nature, centred on her belief that a female pharaoh goes against Ma'at, i.e., the divine order of the world; she subscribes to traditional gender roles in which women's primary roles are those of wife and mother. Similarly, Mutnofret's sense of identity is entirely tied up in her position as the wife of Thutmose I and the mother of Thutmose II. Hatshepsut's sister Nefrubity dreams only of a quiet life as a wife and mother and, to Hatshepsut's great disappointment, Neferura later displays a similar disposition and has no interest in her mother's political plans for her. Hatshepsut's co-wife Iset is portrayed as scheming and greedy, caring only about attaining status as King's Mother. Finally, Meryet-Hatshepsut is portrayed as interested only in clothes, gossip, and boys. By contrast, Hatshepsut has no interest in marriage, is unwilling to perform the submissive feminine role expected by society, lacks maternal instincts, avoids gossiping with the other women, and is largely uninterested in clothes and jewellery. She is thus continuously juxtaposed against the other female characters in the narrative, and it is precisely this otherness that allows her to circumvent the cultural restrictions imposed on the female gender and step into the male-oriented role of pharaoh.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, *Child of the Morning* represents a type of feminist literary intervention, attempting to portray Hatshepsut as a legitimate and adept ruler through a fictional re-imagining of her life. This portrayal, which seeks to challenge patriarchal ideals, is strongly influenced by the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, which resulted in a proliferation of historical fiction featuring female protagonists and an increased academic focus on women in history. The novel, however, departs from the contemporary trend of using historical periods as exotic settings for romantic and erotic plotlines, and Hatshepsut's physical relationship with Senenmut only occasionally drives the plot.

Gedge's narrative presents Hatshepsut as a legitimate and capable ruler, departing from earlier scholarly views of Hatshepsut as a usurper. However, the novel incorporates scholarly notions of Thutmose II as a weak and ineffective ruler who was overshadowed by Hatshepsut. This overall positive evaluation of Hatshepsut's reign resembles Gray's play script from 1920; it also draws on Hatshepsut's own inscriptions, in which she proclaimed herself her father's officially chosen heir and divinely ordained pharaoh. As the novel presents Hatshepsut as the legitimate heir of her father Thutmose I, his character functions as a literary representative of Gedge's views on gender equality. Other characters, such as queen Ahmose, Thutmose II and Thutmose III, function as literary embodiments of patriarchal power structures, and thus actively challenge and oppose Hatshepsut's political ambitions. Whilst the protagonist is described as conforming to feminine beauty standards, the narrative continuously emphasises her differences from other women, which effectively expresses the notion that only exceptional women can circumvent established gender ideals.

The novel represents a criticism of patriarchal power structures that keep women in submissive and subordinate positions. In this context, Hatshepsut essentially becomes a 'modern' character, acting as a precursor and ally to twentieth-century women and their fight against gender inequality. Gedge's novel is not unique in this regard: the association between Hatshepsut and the modern feminist movement is made even more explicit in the fantasy novella *The Haunting of Tram Car 015* by P. Djèlí Clark (2019): the plot is set in early twentieth-century Egypt, where suffragettes have adopted Hatshepsut as a symbol of female empowerment. Hatshepsut also features in the fantasy TV series *Theodosia* (2022), which is also set in the early 20th century and centres on a curse set in motion by a legendary Egyptian artefact. The eponymous protagonist uses her Egyptological knowledge and magical skills to communicate telepathically with Hatshepsut in order to stop the curse. The 1999 film *The Mummy*, which takes place in the 1930s, is another example of how fiction allows the boundary between historical and modern characters to be blurred: Rachel Weisz's character Evelyn O'Connell, who challenges the notion of scholarly knowledge as a male prerogative, is the reincarnation and likeness of an ancient Egyptian princess named Nefertiri, who appears in flashback scenes. What these narratives have in common is that ancient Egyptian women are transformed into allies of the modern feminist movement, and function as symbols of female autonomy. Whilst Gedge's novel ends with the suppression and death of Hatshepsut, the reader has the benefit of hindsight and knows that Hatshepsut's dreams of female empowerment would become a reality several millennia later.

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The Persistent Pyramid: Exploring the Creation of Egypt as Religious Foil in Marie Corelli's *Ziska*

Sara Woodward

The allure of empty sarcophagi and resurrected mummies has haunted popular public perceptions of ancient Egypt for nearly two hundred years. While cult classics such as the *The Mummy* (1999)[1] offer one of the most recognisable modern representations of such tropes, the roots of ancient Egypt's supposed knowledge of the secrets of life and death stretch back all the way to Egyptomania's earliest days. Indeed, as Stephanie Moser (2015: 1264) has noted, popular receptions have themselves contributed to the 'creation of knowledge about Egyptian antiquity', making it difficult to unpick fact from fiction. Egypt, both ancient and modern, was cast in many different roles for the 19th century. One such role which is often overlooked when examining the origins of popular tropes is the complex way in which Egypt was used within nineteenth-century theology and how this influenced nineteenth-century fiction. This chapter explores the creation of ancient Egypt as a dangerous, occult Other in nineteenth-century Egyptianising fiction as a means for authors to explore their own religious doubts and anxieties, the legacy of which can still be seen in popular reception of ancient Egypt today.

In the 19th century, scholarly exploration of the language, culture, and artefacts of ancient Egypt occurred alongside the creation of a body of myth in popular fiction: throughout such fiction, Egypt became a signifier for ancient, arcane wisdom, sometimes elucidating, sometimes dangerous. Aidan Dodson (2019: II) has noted how historical understandings of ancient Egypt, by both scholars and broader audiences alike, are only ever hypotheses that must be looked at afresh as further advances are made. However, many inaccurate or outdated 'zombie hypotheses' or 'zombie facts' still persist in history. Like the undead mummy itself, the fictional portrayal of ancient Egypt as a land with secret power has become a 'zombie fact' which continues to attach itself to popular reception of ancient Egypt.

The Egyptianising fiction of nineteenth-century authors such as Jane Loudon, Edgar Allan Poe, Théophile Gautier, H. Rider Haggard, Guy Boothby, Marie Corelli, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Bram Stoker, among others, conceived of Egypt as a repository of forbidden knowledge of life and death, often via the figure of a resurrected mummy, who was sometimes friend and sometimes foe. Building on the critical work of Maria Fleischhack (2015), Ailise Bulfin (2018), Roger Luckhurst (2012) and Olav Hammer (2004), this chapter argues that Egyptianising fiction uses Egypt's supposed knowledge as a means for western authors to explore questions surrounding death, the afterlife, and the role of religion in society. After briefly exploring the different ways Egypt was used and created as a religious Other in both wider nineteenth-century culture and Egyptianising fiction specifically, I focus on Marie Corelli's (1855-1924) use of ancient Egypt to define her own theology, known as 'electric

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Christianity', in *Ziska, the Problem of a Wicked Soul* (1897). *Ziska* has received little attention in readings of Egyptianised fiction, but it represents a prime example of how popular culture has received and continues to receive Egypt as a mystical, dangerous Other in an effort to define the self.

Egyptianising Fiction in Nineteenth-century Britain

Fiction that made use of ancient Egypt was a key part of a wider nineteenth-century cultural discourse through which constructed versions of Egypt came to be understood as true. The use of the term 'Egyptianising' is thus intentional here. Drawing on the work of Edward Said, Fleischhack (2015: 20) defines Egyptianising literature as 'fiction which features aspects of ancient Egypt, which describes it and makes use of it'. The term has also been used more widely. James Curl (1982: 1) uses 'Egyptianising' to describe art and architecture which is designed in an Egyptian style, otherwise known as 'Egyptian revival'. Hammer (2004: 111) also refers to certain 'Egyptianizing' elements present in the history of western esotericism. The term can therefore be understood to relate to the wider, Saidian understanding of Orientalism, how the West conceived of the Orient as 'an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West' (Said 1995: 5). Thus, Egyptianising, more widely, makes use of what it perceives to be 'Egyptian', regardless of whether such motifs have any factual base in Egyptian history, architecture, or religion.

The various ways that Britain engaged in this Egyptianising in the 19th century have defined popular reception of Egypt ever since. After interest in Egypt was sparked by Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt in 1798, Giovanni Battista Belzoni's 1821 Egyptian Hall Exhibition in London further authorised a portrayal of ancient Egypt as a land of sublime spectacle to be consumed (Glithero-West 2019; Thomas 2012).[2] This was furthered in the ways Egypt was articulated through various exhibitions and world fairs throughout the century (Driver 2001; Luckhurst 2012; Mitchell 1991; Reid 2002; Thomas 2012) and the popular performance of mummy unwrappings (Classen 2014; Moshenska 2014; Rogers 2016). Early Egyptological societies, such as the Egypt Exploration Fund (EEF) and the Society of Biblical Archaeology, also used the sublimity of ancient Egypt but did so as a means to shore up faith in Christian scriptures that had come under criticism from Germany's Higher Critics (Davis 2004; Magus 2017; Woodward 2020). Through publications detailing their archaeological expeditions, the EEF and Society for Biblical Archaeology positioned ancient Egypt as an important authority in pre-Christian history; by connecting familiar biblical narratives and figures, such as Moses and the Exodus story, to ongoing excavations, these societies could garner support from their Christian audience keen to prove the accuracy of biblical history (Woodward 2020). At the same time, however, Egypt could also be cast as a foil, a less evolved religious Other in the journey to Christian monotheism. Montserrat's (2000) work reveals this happening simultaneously as Victorian Egyptologists excavating in Amarna lauded the pharaoh Akhenaten for what they viewed as a westernised move towards monotheism, which Othered Egypt's former polytheistic history. Egyptianising also took place in Egypt itself, where the tourist industry, under the auspices of Thomas Cook & Co. and Shepheard's hotel, turned Egypt into a destination primed for the British traveller (Hunter 2004). From the exhibition space to the built-up facades of

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[2] Belzoni's 1821 Egyptian Hall Exhibition used elaborate staging and design to evoke the grandeur of the Egyptian antiquities from Belzoni's excavations and was a key point in the history of nineteenth-century British Egyptomania.

Cairo, the many versions of Egypt created by the West continually articulated Egypt as an alluring, sublime Other.

There has been a consistent rise in publications exploring the ways in which ancient Egypt was represented by nineteenth-century British, French, and American authors (Bastawy 2020; Brio 2018; Burrow 2013; Corriou 2019; Day 2004; Dobson 2020; Gange 2013; Moody 2006; Parramore 2008; Woodward 2020). The works of Bulfin (2018), Bradley Deane (2008), Luckhurst (2012), and Fleischhack (2015), in particular, have specifically noted how the creation of an occult Egypt in such fiction — known alternately as 'mummy fiction', 'Egyptian gothic', or 'Egyptianising fantastic fiction' — functioned to assert the West's imperial authority. More recently, Dobson (2017, 2022) has connected this same phenomenon to wider nineteenth-century ways of articulating science. While these scholars have explored the important connection between science and the supernatural, the role of such knowledge in addressing religious doubts regarding death and the afterlife has received less attention.

The *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Hanegraaff *et al.* 2006: 328) refers to this creation of Egypt as a religious foil, specifically an esoteric one, as a specific type of Egyptomania known as 'Egyptomania of the esoteric type' which 'belongs within a more general context: that of the place of the Orient in Western esotericism'. Erik Hornung (2001) has argued that this construction of an imagined Egypt as a repository of arcane lore is an important means of understanding the West's perception of Egypt throughout history. He defines this view as 'Egyptosophy' which is: 'the study of an imaginary Egypt viewed as the profound source of all esoteric lore' (2001: 3).

This Egyptosophy was pursued in nineteenth-century occult societies, such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (Faivre 1994), some more specific Masonic circles (Goodrick-Clarke 2008; Hornung 2001), and, most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, Theosophy (Blavatsky 1906; Godwin 1994; Hammer 2004). Founded in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, and William Quan Judge, among others, the Theosophical Society played a crucial role in uniting multiple esoteric currents. It brought together a philosophy which incorporated wisdom narratives from many ancient and mythical cultures, and religions from Hermeticism to Buddhism. Hammer (2004: 170) notes that Theosophy disembedded and reembedded elements of ancient and mythical cultures to build 'an ageless wisdom, a *philosophia perennis* that has been accessible to the initiates of all times and places'. Theosophy's famous figurehead, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), herself claimed ties to arcane Egyptian wisdom, which she explicated in her *Isis Unveiled* (1877).

This ageless wisdom popularised by nineteenth-century occultism, and its purported connection to ancient Egypt, was an important influence for Egyptianising fiction. Indeed, authors of Egyptianising fiction, such as H. Rider Haggard and Marie Corelli, themselves articulated complex theologies which drew heavily on a mysticised view of ancient Egypt (Magus 2022; Woodward 2020), representing it as a land of secret knowledge and wisdom, and then used that invented wisdom to authorise their own beliefs. Egyptianising fiction presents Egypt as inherently esoteric or occult, an orientalised representation that reimagines the country as a repository of forbidden knowledge of life and death. While important divisions between spiritualism, occultism, and esotericism were maintained both by their followers during that period and in subsequent scholarship, Egyptianising fiction gives these divisions

little notice. Instead, this fiction perpetuated the western construction of ancient Egypt as a source of primordial, secret wisdom.

The inherent Othering of Egypt which such stereotypes produced was not always used to cast Egypt in a negative light. Jane Webb Loudon's (1827) text *The Mummy! A Tale of the Twenty-Second Century*, regarded as the first piece of Egyptianising fiction, and Edgar Allan Poe's (1845) short story 'Some Words with a Mummy' give their mummies a light-hearted, satirical voice. H. Rider Haggard's oeuvre of Egyptianising fiction, including *Cleopatra* (1889), *Morning Star* (1910), *Moon of Israel* (1918), and *Queen of the Dawn* (1925), positions ancient Egypt as a positive esoteric model of religious liberalism which blended elements of Christian afterlives with the possibility of reincarnation, in what J. Jeffrey Franklin (2008: 107) refers to as a 'hybrid religion' (see also Magus 2017; Woodward 2020). However, much of late nineteenth-century Egyptianising fiction, such as Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Ring of Thoth' (1890) and 'Lot No. 249' (1892), Richard Marsh's (1897) *The Beetle*, Marie Corelli's (1897) *Ziska*, and Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903), portray Egypt as a land of dark, occult forces. This shift towards a darker portrayal of Egypt's supposed power occurred alongside Britain's ever-more-tenuous imperial involvement in Egypt (Deane 2008; Fleischhack 2015; Luckhurst 2012; 2013). Representations such as these served as the archetype of Egyptian curse narratives and the earliest onscreen depictions of mummies, cementing the stereotype of ancient Egypt as a dark, occult Other which still persists today. Corelli's (1897) *Ziska* in particular is a key example of the way in which ancient Egypt was used as a foil to define what the author's religious beliefs were decidedly *not*. In so doing, *Ziska* acts as a mirror reflecting the ways in which popular reception of ancient Egypt often still participates in this same act of Othering as a means of asserting self-identity.

Corelli's Electric Christianity

Between 1886 when her first novel, *A Romance of Two Worlds* (hereafter referred to as *Romance*) was published, and 1925, the year after she died and in which her final novel and volume of poetry appeared in print, Corelli published over 36 works of fiction, pamphlets, and articles including *Vendetta* (1886), *Ardath* (1889), *The Soul of Lilith* (1892), *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895), *The Mighty Atom* (1896), *The Master Christian* (1900), *The Treasures of Heaven* (1906), and *The Secret Power* (1921). Christine Ferguson (2006: 57) notes that '[s]he characterized her own writing as an attempt to re-establish forgotten spiritual truths that had been lost as a result of decadent and sloppy representation'. In an article for *The Idler* in 1894 entitled 'My First Book', Corelli (1894: 239) explains how she viewed herself as fulfilling the self-proclaimed role of medium of religious truth. In the article, she claims that her goal in writing her first novel, *Romance*, was to communicate 'a simply-worded narration of a singular psychical experience, and included certain theories on religion which I, personally speaking, accept and believe' (1894: 239).

Interpretation of Corelli's work has recently shifted, with scholars moving from viewing Corelli as a melodramatic author of ephemeral fame to a more nuanced understanding of her as keenly alert to the popular interests of her readers. Hammer (2004: 158) specifically noted the importance of *Romance* to the history of western esotericism, claiming it as one of many 'esoteric adventure stories that are said explicitly or implicitly to convey spiritual truths'. This scholarship has begun to recognise Corelli's role in producing literature that negotiated an esoteric worldview that participated in but was also distinguished from the wider nineteenth-

century occult milieu, which included spiritualism and Theosophy, specifically a Theosophy spearheaded and shaped by Blavatsky (Dixon 2010; Federico 2000; Ferguson 2006; Galvan 2003; Hutchison 2015; Kowalczyk 1974). Corelli specifically distanced her esoteric Christian beliefs from a Blavatskyian view of Theosophy, resisting the difference between occultism and occult science which Blavatsky defined for the 19th century. Instead, within her works, Corelli carefully positioned a theology of her own, with its own definitions of occultism and occult science which the ancient Egypt portrayed in *Ziska* juxtaposed.

In her preface to the second edition of her first novel, Corelli (1888: 5) refers to 'disciples of "occultism"' as 'persons who are generally ready, nay, even eager to be deceived'. This type of occultism appears to include, perhaps even revolve around, spiritualism, which gained popularity in the period through the rise of Modern Spiritualism from 1848 onwards (Oppenheim 1985; Owen 2004a, 2004b).[3] Corelli (1888) mocks the physical manifestations of spirits in spiritualist seances, decrying Spiritualism as 'a "craze"' (1888: 7) and noting the specifically unscientific quality of the 'skipping about of chairs and tables' (1888: 5) and 'dematerialisation of matter' (1888: 5) which allows spirits to be seen 'jumping through a ceiling without making a hole in it' (1888: 5).

Instead, Corelli thought occult science was the appropriate method to understand what appeared to be supernatural phenomena. Spiritualism, for Corelli (1888: 12), was a species of occultism, and she contrasts this with what she refers to as 'the secrets of occult science' in which 'the teachings of Christ' can be found. Her occult science demonstrates

> (...) spirituality that has nothing to do with a morbid imagination and a debilitated or diseased physical frame, but that, on the contrary, is strong and calm, useful and beneficial wherever it works [...]. Such spirituality, the outcome of the electric spirit of Divinity in man, corresponding to the supreme centre of Divinity in the Creator, can see and converse with angels—can heal the sick and console the afflicted [...] and even retain youth much longer than materialists dream of (1888: 12-13).

Corelli's use of the term 'occult science' functions as her way of demarcating the esoteric elements of her electric creed from Theosophy, spiritualism, and the other practical occult rites and rituals she deplores. She draws a clear line between her occult science and occultism, rooting her creed in the occult science of what she calls Christianity's 'electric principles', and dismissing the rest as deluded charlatanism.

Her occult science is presented most clearly in *Romance*, which conveys the story of an unnamed heroine suffering from depression who is cured by electrical remedies administered by Casimir Heliobas, a 'Chaldean' holy man. Heliobas, along with his sister Zara, teach the protagonist the tenets of their electric creed, known as the 'Electric Principle of Christianity' (Corelli 1888: 228), and restore her to full health and spiritual belief. According to this Electric

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[3] The rise of Modern Spiritualism in the 19th century is considered to have been instigated by the Hydesville Rappings in New York in 1848; the term 'rappings' refers to the raps or knocks the two Fox sisters, Margaretta (Maggie) and Kate, claimed were communications from spirits. Interest in psychical phenomena—particularly mediums, seances, and automatic writing—quickly gained momentum throughout Britain through societies such as the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain (1872), The Society for Psychical Research (SPR, 1882, to which Arthur Conan Doyle belonged before he began to very publicly disagree with their methods of validating psychical phenomena), the British National Association of Spiritualists (1883), and the London Spiritualist Alliance (1884).

Principle, recognising God's electric force is the means to unlocking higher realms of thinking and being both on this earth and in the realms between earth and the electric circle of heaven. God comprises and lives within an electric ring of light which forms the basis of the human universe and means of divine communication. Heliobas's creed, which he calls 'purely scientific fact' (Corelli 1888: 97), remains bound up in vague religious language, which roots the source of electricity and the intricacies of its workings in a heady vision of God's ultimate electric power. Corelli's approach to science is not derived from any particular body of scientific knowledge. Instead, it is what Hammer (2004: 206) calls 'scientism', using scientific language to validate esoteric beliefs while, at same time, 'reenchanting science' (2004: 323-324). In this way, as Hammer (2004: 218) notes, '[e]soteric spokespersons can construct a dichotomy between positive/spiritual and negative/materialistic forms of science'. In *Ziska*, Corelli not only participates in this scientism, she Egyptianises it, linking the authority of Egypt's supposed esoteric wisdom with scientific ideology popular in the period to validate her personal theology.

Ziska's 'Impenetrable Darkness'

Ziska, however, muddies Corelli's usually clear distinction between occultism and occult science. The novel tells the story of British travellers vacationing in Egypt who encounter the reincarnated Ziska-Charmazel, an ancient Egyptian dancer who had been murdered by her lover. Ziska seeks to avenge her death by killing her lover and murderer, Araxes, who has been unwittingly reincarnated as the French painter Armand Gervase. Joyce Gutzeit (1965: 51) refers to Ziska herself as a 'passionate Gothic villainess [...] who precipitates a series of wildly melodramatic events that defy acceptance even in a Marie Corelli setting'. This contrasts with more contemporary readings of *Ziska* which view the title character as a strong, female figure. Sharla Hutchison (2015: 32) views Ziska as a model of a 'sexual liberation feminist' whose

> (...) vengeance acted out in her violent murder of Armand, becomes an act of karmic retribution sanctioned and orchestrated by greater spiritual powers, imbuing her character with a frightening but intoxicating new power.

In bringing about the death of her former lover and murderer, Ziska is indeed a powerful agent, but it is unclear who or what exactly she liberates or indeed where the source of her power lies. The lack of resolve in the novel is important here; it represents a key trope in popular reception of ancient Egypt which is the depiction of ancient Egypt as a vaguely, or sometimes explicitly, threatening power source that can never be fully understood or contained.

The English travellers attempt to understand Ziska by assimilating her into British society. In contrast, Dr. Maxwell Dean, who initially seems to be a stock Corellian scientist, aptly placed to promote the principles of her occult science, appears to recognise and appreciate the wisdom to be found in the careful study of ancient Egypt. However, he attempts to understand Ziska's supernatural identity through the lens of Corellian scientism. While his scientism allows for the reality of the occult, it still forces the occult to speak through the West's understanding of science and religion. The novel's vague ending stresses the importance and power of the unknowable which cannot, and perhaps more importantly, should not, be understood.

Ziska initially sets up a reading of Egypt—both ancient and modern—from the perspective of a middle-aged newspaper editor, Sir Chetwynd Lyle, whose goal in coming to Egypt is to marry

off his two daughters, Muriel and Dolly. Instead of functioning as a means of setting the scene of the novel, the opening of *Ziska* satirises the British view of Egypt. The reader is quickly taught *not* to view Egypt as a savage land by suggesting that imposing British expectations on Egypt aids in 'reducing the city [...] to a more deplorable condition of subjection and slavery than any old-world conqueror could ever have done' (Corelli 1897: 11). In subjugating Egypt by imposing 'the heavy yoke of modern fashion' (1897: 11), much is missed:

> [T]he English 'season' whirls lightly and vaporously, like blown egg-froth, over the mystic land of the old gods—the terrible land filled with dark secrets as yet unexplored,—the land 'shadowing with wings', as the Bible hath it,—the land in which are buried tremendous histories as yet unguessed,—profound enigmas of the supernatural,—labyrinths of wonder, terror and mystery,—all of which remain unrevealed to the giddy-pated, dancing, dining, gabbling throng of the fashionable travelling lunatics of the day (1897: 17).

Modern Egypt is colonised by the British descending upon its hotels and imposing the English season, but in acting as the coloniser, the British, in turn, condemn themselves to a vapid, unenlightened existence. Thus they can sit at the very feet of an emblem of esoteric knowledge, the Sphinx, and merely view it as 'a fine target for empty soda-water bottles' the 'granite whereof the ancient monster is hewn is too hard for [them] to inscribe [their] distinguished name thereon' (1897: 13, explanatory notes mine). They cannot inscribe their own mark on the Sphinx because they do not understand its significance. Although the tourists attempt to make Egypt speak by imposing British social standards, Egypt resists, protecting itself through its inscrutability. Only those who are willing to understand the importance of Egypt's impenetrable stones, and respect the wisdom that lies within, can hope to learn something of Egypt's ancient wisdom.

Dr. Dean, in contrast to the other British characters in the novel, believes in the value of studying Egypt. He understands that Egypt is more than a holiday destination, and readily acknowledges that there is much that he does not yet know. Denzil Murray, meanwhile, who falls madly in love with Ziska and does not recognise her true identity, admits that he 'never was very much interested in those old times,—they seem to me all myth. I could never link past, present and future together as some people can' (1897: 239). In contrast, Dr. Dean, as an occult scientist, understands the importance of viewing history as being interconnected. He knows that his society is not any greater or more lasting than those that came before it, suggesting instead that '[a]ll history from the very beginning is like a wonderful chain in which no link is ever really broken, and in which every part fits closely to the other part' (1897: 190). Yet for all his knowledge, there are still gaps in his understanding. He quickly concedes that 'why the chain should exist at all is a mystery we cannot solve' (1897: 190-191). He also fails to realise that there are secrets still left within the pyramids, claiming that they 'have been very thoroughly explored [...] [n]othing of any importance remains in them now' (1897: 73). The novel ends with the meaning of Ziska's and Gervase's deaths enclosed within the Great Pyramid as Egypt once again resists being spoken for.

Dr. Dean takes strides of which his proud countrymen, convinced of their British superiority, are incapable, and therefore comes far closer to achieving a higher form of knowledge. He is the only character to recognise Ziska's true identity: he aptly identifies her as 'an Egyptian. Born in Egypt; born OF Egypt. Pure Eastern!' (1897: 75, emphasis Corelli's), saying '[t]here is nothing Western about you' (1897: 75) where other characters assume she is of European

descent. His scientific language also mirrors Ziska's own when he discusses his understanding of the soul. Ziska offers her own insights into a scientific understanding of the universe, claiming that:

> [t]he Soul begins in protoplasm without conscious individuality. It progresses through various forms till individual consciousness is attained. Once attained, it is never lost, but it lives on, pressing towards perfection, taking upon itself various phases of existence according to the passions which have most completely dominated it from the first (1897: 140).

Dr. Dean uses the same concept when describing his own views: he suggests that the soul:

> commenced, of course, originally in protoplasm; but it must have continued through various low forms and met with enormous difficulties in attaining to individual consciousness as man — because even now it is scarcely conscious' (1897: 165).

Both Ziska and Dr. Dean emphasise the development of the soul through various forms. Their use of the term protoplasm suggests a connection to late nineteenth-century theories of heredity, such as Ernst Haeckel's (1834-1919) theory of recapitulation, and August Weismann's (1834-1914) theory of the germ-plasm (Stanford 2006). This is a further example of Corellian scientism, where popular theories of heredity are evoked to bolster Corelli's creed.

Ziska thus reappropriates the theory of germ-plasm in protoplasm and provides a scientific rationale for reincarnation whereby the soul passes down information from generation to generation, attaining higher and higher levels of consciousness. While Dr. Dean looks back to where the soul originated, and follows this up until the point where the soul attains consciousness, Ziska looks beyond the current underdeveloped phase of the soul, suggesting that it will continue to seek perfection through further phases of existence. In asserting that the soul has undergone transformation through various phases and still requires further perfecting, Dr. Dean shows that he understands the role of reincarnation as a means of transformation. However, he misidentifies the source of the soul's power in relation to Ziska. While Dr. Dean's occult science allows him to identify Ziska's true nature as a reincarnated Egyptian, the force behind her spirituality is not what he expects.

Dr. Dean believes that Ziska acts as an agent of God's vengeance. He claims that she is a 'scientific ghost', a being which he defines as an outworking of the 'Spiritual law of vengeance' (Corelli 1897: 102). Dr. Dean approaches the supernatural through the lens of science, using logic to explain the unexplainable and link it to Christianity. This allows him to immediately identify Ziska as something otherworldly, unlike the other characters who are mystified by her. Hutchison (2015: 41) labels Dr. Dean's philosophy a 'weird mix of psychic research and theosophy' which 'act as a mouthpiece for a range of popular beliefs about psychic research and spiritualism, ideas that blend the scientific dignity of the psychic detective with the mysticism of Madame Blavatsky's theosophy'. However such a reading conflicts with Corelli's clear attempts to distance her creed from both spiritualism and, specifically, Theosophy (Hallim 2002).

The more Dr. Dean pursues his scientific theory, however, the more Ziska resists his categorization. The narrative continually pushes towards obfuscation rather than clarification, and the only mystery that is solved is the revelation that the mysterious exists. Towards the end of the novel, Dr. Dean begins to doubt that Ziska works on behalf of God to enact just vengeance. He explains to Gervase that he is attempting to 'analyze the nature of the particular desire that moves her, controls her, keeps her alive' (Corelli 1897: 243). He is confident that 'it is not love [...] and it is not hate,—though it is more like hate than love. It is something indefinable, something that is almost occult, so deep-seated and bewildering is the riddle' (1897: 243). All he can conclude is that 'the Princess is *not human*' and 'has the soul of a fiend' (1897: 243, emphasis Corelli's). As Dr. Dean pushes to analyse Ziska, he is continually faced with something indefinable and occult. His discoveries only serve to unsettle his scientific theories and force him into an uncomfortable position of unknowing.

Ziska initially appears to fit the description of Corelli's spirituality as described earlier, which is above and beyond the physical, benefits whatever it encounters, and is able to transcend death. Yet the novel's vacillation between positive and negative descriptions of Ziska leave her character in a state of tension. That this tension is never reconciled attests to the importance of recognising the occult and its power. Dr. Dean is fearful of this power because he has not understood it and, in this fear, he attempts to read Ziska's powers as connected to Egypt specifically. Whereas at the novel's start, Dr. Dean is eager to learn from Egypt and study it, by the novel's end, he views Egypt as the abject Other, seductive and dangerous, and seeks to distance himself from the occult power he cannot define and control. He suggests to Denzil Murray that they should return to England as soon as possible because '[w]e shall all be better away from this terrible land, where the dead have far more power than the living!' (1897: 305). Dr. Dean's earlier insistence that scientific ghosts work at the behest of God is abandoned here in his moment of fear.

The ambiguity of Ziska's colouring also reveals that she cannot be so easily identified as one of Corelli's heroines of occult science. She is alternately described in the novel as being 'so white, so light, so noiseless and so lovely' (1897: 39) and as 'a very dark woman' (1897: 120) with 'dark eyes' (1897: 53, 58, 127, 180, 190, 193, 238, 261) or the 'eyes of a vampire bat' (1897: 70) and 'dark hair [...] like the black remnants of a long-buried corpse's wrappings' (1897: 8). When Gervase attempts to paint Ziska's portrait he notes that '[i]t is difficult to find the exact hue' of her skin as 'there is rose and brown in it; and there is yet another color which I must evolve while working,—and it is not the hue of health. It is something dark and suggestive of death' (1897: 133). Jill Galvan (2003: 88) notes a connection between a character's relationship to Christianity and their complexion and colouring in *Romance* and *Lilith*: 'non Christians are drawn with tritely dusky, sinister features, Easterners steeped in Christianity have attributes more obviously appropriate to their white companions'. Ziska's colouring, however, resists such a clear reading. She possesses both light and dark features, which simultaneously entice and repel the various characters in the novel. The 'Egyptian cult' (Corelli 1897: 140) to which she claims she belongs, though exhibiting some of the characteristics of Corelli's view of occult science, moves away from the decidedly Christian tone of Corelli's theology.

At the novel's climax in Araxes's pyramid, Gervase struggles to understand Ziska. Prior to realising his identity as the reincarnated Araxes, Gervase describes Ziska's face as,

spectral and pallid as a waning moon [....] thin and skeleton-like [...] he realized at last that no creature of flesh and blood was this that clung to him, but some mysterious bodiless horror of the Supernatural (1897: 297).

Recognising the otherwordly supernatural in Ziska fills him with horror until he understands his kinship to Ziska. Accepting the truth of his reincarnated identity transforms Ziska in Gervase's eyes:

[T]he eyes softened and flashed with love, the lips trembled, the spectral form glowed with a living luminance, and a mystic Glory glittered above the dusky hair! Filled with ecstasy at the sight of her wondrous loveliness, he felt nothing of the coldness of death at his heart,—a divine passion inspired him, and with the last effort of his failing strength he strove to gather all the spirit-like beauty of her being into his embrace (1897: 301).

Knowledge of Ziska's true identity, as well as his own, seems to bring about a form of religious transcendence. Ziska's true 'Glory' is revealed and the 'divine' passion that comes over him gives him strength to embrace her at last. This religious transcendence, if emblematic of the Electric Christianity espoused in *Romance*, should save Gervase, and allow him to transition to another spiritual plane. However, in attempting to embrace Ziska, all he grasps is her 'spirit-like beauty'.

This beauty lasts but a moment; Gervase's realisation of his inner self also means the realisation of his impending death. He remembers the crime he, as Araxes, committed in murdering Ziska-Charmazel and, in so doing, realises that Ziska's intention is for him to die for that crime. Ziska prepares to enact her vengeance, declaring,

[c]losed are the gates of Heaven,—open wide are the portals of Hell! Enter with me, my lover Araxes![....] Die, and pass out into new life again—such life as mine—such torture as mine—such despair as mine—such hate as mine! (1897: 299-300).

In the final moments of his life, Gervase implores Ziska to remember 'Love—Love! [...] Not hate, but Love! Come back out of the darkness, soul of the woman I wronged! Forgive me! [...] Hell or Heaven, what matters it if we are together! [...] Love is stronger than Hate!' (1897: 301). Love is explained earlier in the novel as the thing which is missing from modern society. Addressing the reader, the narrative voice claims that:

the incessant, restless aching of the time, and the perpetual longing for something Science cannot teach,—something vague, beautiful, indefinable, yet satisfying to every pulse of the soul; and the nearest emotion to that divine solace is what we in our higher and better moments recognize as Love (1897: 215).

Grasping this understanding of love appears to save Gervase. As he and Ziska stand together on the brink of death, a voice exclaims 'Peace! The old gods are best, and the law is made perfect. A life demands a life [...] Let them go hence the curse is lifted' (1897: 302). Gervase's body lies on floor of the tomb and a

spectral radiance gleamed, wandered and flitted over all things [...] till finally flashing with a pale glare on the dark dead face [...] it flickered out; and one of the many countless mysteries of the Great Pyramid was again hidden in impenetrable darkness (1897: 302-303).

The blend of religious imagery evoked in Gervase's final moments muddies Ziska's otherworldly power further. The 'old gods' seem a subtle hint towards Egyptian deities, but then Old Testament language is evoked with reference to the 'law' in which 'a life demands a life'. This recalls the language of Leviticus (24:20) 'Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again'. While the language initially seems to suggest the law has been fulfilled, a life given for a life, this too, like the religious transcendence seemingly promised to Gervase, lasts but a moment. The language shifts once more, highlighting not a peaceful afterlife, but a 'dark dead face'. At the end, Gervase's/ Araxes's body lies forgotten in the darkness of an impenetrable pyramid; ancient Egypt once again conceals its mysteries within an inscrutable monument which resists interpretation.

Ziska, then, authorises a view of Egypt as distinctly non-Christian, powerfully occult, and unknowable. By contributing to a body of popular fiction that conceived of occultism as rooted in ancient cults, *Ziska* furthers a connection between practical occult societies and ancient Egypt as the key to releasing wisdom which could illuminate the 'impenetrable darkness' held within the pyramids. What that darkness contains, however, is unclear. *Ziska* never fully reconciles the tensions of its narrative, suggesting that those who impose their own cultural standards upon ancient Egypt will be left wanting. Perhaps ancient wisdom would reveal that love does pardon all or, perhaps, like the dagger lying beside the corpse of Armand Gervase, such knowledge is a double-edged blade.

The Enduring Legacy of Egyptianising Fiction

The trope of ancient Egypt as a land of secret wisdom about life and death, cemented in nineteenth-century Egyptianising fiction such as *Ziska,* has endured ever since. Indeed, Fleischhack (2015) notes that the stereotype of secret Egyptian wisdom continued to grow despite the increasing circulation of evidence that contradicted such wild and fantastic theories, and Nolwenn Corriou (2019: 50) has suggested that, despite the high value placed on Egyptian-style objects, 'they gradually grew to represent an instance of the essential mystery of the Orient in the collective consciousness'. Returning to Said's conception of Orientalism again, the objects that symbolise this perceived mystery have thus become signifiers for ancient Egypt largely due to the role Egypt was given in nineteenth-century fiction, whether they are actually Egyptian or not. Jasmine Day (2006: 2) argues that ancient Egypt is still being manipulated to suit the needs of popular culture and that 'together, people negotiate standard meanings for particular motifs and establish the manner of their use in particular contexts'. While Day suggests that popular images of ancient Egypt in contemporary culture continually manipulate history to serve the purposes of entertainment and notes the origins of the mummy's curse in nineteenth-century Egyptianising fiction, I would argue that these are the same tropes appearing again and again as evidence of the ways in which popular reception of ancient Egypt still persists in this Othering.

From Loudon's (1827) publication of *The Mummy!* through to the present, Egypt has been cast in fiction as a land which knows the secrets of the grave, secrets which are never ultimately revealed and are most often portrayed as dangerous. By creating a body of texts which associated ancient Egypt with esoteric wisdom or occult power, nineteenth-century Egyptianising fiction thus promoted a stereotype of ancient Egypt as a land of ancient curses and superstition that is still seen today. Films such as Grégory Levasseur's *The Pyramid* (2014),

the aforementioned *The Mummy* (1999) film by Stephen Sommers, its subsequent sequel *The Mummy Returns* (2001), and Alex Kurtzman's 2017 remake, as well as popular video games such as *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation* (1999),[4] and *Assassin's Creed Origins* (2017)[5] borrow such stereotypes to create an atmosphere in which the occult powers of ancient Egypt, signified through artefacts or undead antagonists, represent an ambiguous, but often sinister, power. Another example is the figure of Vanessa Ives in *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016). Like Ziska, her character positions Egypt as a land of significant occult power through her connection to the Egyptian goddess Amunet.[6] Such representations have also found their way more subtly into popular reception aimed at younger audiences. The *Night at the Museum* franchise (2006, 2009, 2014) borrows from nineteenth-century stereotypes such as those in *Ziska* through its tablet of Ahkmenrah, which imbues the museum figures with life each night. Throughout the *Night at the Museum* films this power is used alternatively for good and evil by various characters, some Egyptian, some not. Like the 'impenetrable darkness' of *Ziska*'s pyramid, Egypt's persistently ascribed magic resists interpretation.

The ancient Egypt created by authors in the 19th century is thus still the ancient Egypt presented in popular reception of ancient Egypt today. Despite the inaccuracies of such representations, these myths are important to interrogate in order to understand how the dissemination of history changes and morphs through various cultural interactions. In so doing, it becomes clear that the origins of the undead mummy summoned from its pyramid or the occult artefact imbued with ancient power are not rooted in any actual ancient Egyptian occultism, but rather the West's own need for Egypt to have such magic. While there then remain questions around the ethicality of such depictions and whether or not such tropes should be used as a means of engaging audiences in historical discussions, it is important to probe the allure of these tropes themselves. The anxieties behind the persistently opened pyramid have become a part of the study of ancient Egypt itself, 'zombie facts' that require excavating in order to understand how we continue to bury ourselves in the past.

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[4] For further analysis of the representation of ancient Egypt in *Lara Croft* see Mosleth King 2019.

[5] For further analysis on the use of ancient Egypt in *Assassin's Creed* see T. Sewell-Lasater, 'Eternally Maligned as the Power-hungry *Femme Fatale*: Kleopatra VII in *Assassin's Creed Origins* and Other Video Games' in this volume.

[6] *Penny Dreadful*'s use of characters from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, specifically Mina Harker, also call to mind Stoker's own piece of Egyptianising fiction, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, mentioned above, in which the ancient Egyptian figure of Queen Tera possesses the British character Margaret Trelawny.

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Stephen Sommers's *The Mummy* (1999):
Modern Legacies of the Tutankhamun Excavations[1]

Eleanor Dobson

In Stephen Sommers's script for *The Mummy* (1999), loosely based on the 1932 film of the same name directed by Karl Freund, the writer-director presents a world in which the phenomenon known as 'Tutmania' has taken hold. At the port at Giza, where the protagonists are due to board a riverboat to begin their journey to the fictional ancient Egyptian site of Hamunaptra, Sommers sets the scene thus:

> Now we see all of GIZA PORT: Team [*sic*] of explorers swarm the docks. Across the Nile, the PYRAMIDS spike the sky. Evelyn and Jonathan walk along the boardwalk besieged by HAWKERS selling everything from toy tombs to King Tut action figures. (Sommers n.d.)

The majority of the film's action takes place in 1926, four years after the steps down to Tutankhamun's tomb in the Valley of the Kings were unearthed by a team of predominantly Egyptian workers led by the British archaeologist Howard Carter and financed by the 5th Earl of Carnarvon. With the discovery of his tomb, and the global media response that ensued, Tutankhamun became a household name, giving rise to the term 'Tutmania' to describe the widespread cultural enthusiasm for all things 'Tut' whipped up by this event (Fritze 2016: 226; Montserrat 2000: 87). While the 'toy tombs' and 'King Tut action figures' that Sommers originally imagined in the excerpt above did not materialise in the final film, the reference to Tutankhamun here demonstrates that this historic episode was very much in Sommers's mind when conceiving of the cultural backdrop against which the film's events take place.[2]

Allusions to Tutankhamun, in a narrative set in Egypt in the 1920s, are entirely expected given the cultural shockwave that the discovery of his tomb catalysed. Nonetheless, such references are subtler in the final film than in Sommers's script; Tutankhamun is at no point allowed to overshadow the fictional renderings of ancient Egyptian sites and artefacts (both real and invented, including the fictional necropolis of Hamunaptra), perhaps a decision that Sommers and his creative team made as production progressed. It may seem, at first glance, that Freund's 1932 film—which includes a photograph of Tutankhamun's outermost coffin, refers to Tutankhamun directly in the dialogue, and draws several plot points from the history of the excavation—derives more from the modern history of Tutankhamun's tomb than Sommers's more recent take. Indeed, the connection between Freund's movie and Tutankhamun have been comparatively well-documented (Cowie and Johnson 2007: 60-61; Fritze 2016: 358; Glynn 2020: 98-99; Lupton 2003). The indebtedness of Sommers's film to Tutankhamun's tomb are

[2] In his novelisation of the film, based on both the finished movie and Sommers's original script, Max Allan Collins saw fit to reproduce the reference to Tutankhamun. At the corresponding moment, Collins describes 'hawkers peddling King Tut trinkets' (1999: 63). Collins consulted, among other works, *Howard Carter Before Tutankhamun* (1992) by John and Louise James and *Wonderful Things: The Discovery of Tutankhamun's Tomb* (1976) by Tony Allan 'in an effort to provide color and accurate background' (Collins 1999: 257-258).

several, meanwhile, but have mostly been critically neglected (notable exceptions include Hopkins 2002 and Brio 2015). I seek to rectify this in this essay, using Freund's references to the Tutankhamun discovery as a starting point. From here, I demonstrate Sommers's art department's heavy use of the artefacts found in Tutankhamun's tomb as inspiration for the movie's visuals, and the derivation of characters' names from those of historical personages in both movies but particularly the latter film, culminating in a discussion of the significance of the retrospective naming of the 1999 film's Cairo prison warden (played by Omid Djalili) as Gad Hassan, the name of one of Carter's skilled foremen employed on the Tutankhamun excavations.

While the 1999 *Mummy* is subtly threaded with references to Tutankhamun in comparison to its forerunner, collectively such plentiful allusions imbue the film with an air of the grandiose, the wonderful and the supernatural which had characterised Tutankhamun's tomb, its discovery and contents, in the popular imagination for the best part of a century. They also contribute to the reiteration of a romanticised version of events that lauds western archaeologists as heroes, while largely writing out the Egyptian workers who were integral to the discovery, at times falling back on orientalist stereotypes that themselves populate the writings of twentieth-century western excavators. Ultimately, I illuminate how *The Mummy* conjures up the glamour of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, coding reproduction artefacts as 'treasure' and dividing those who seek the material wealth of ancient Egypt between 'goodies' and 'baddies' in a way that conveniently sidesteps European imperialism and the political tensions that served as a backdrop to the Tutankhamun excavations in their own time. The cultural legacies of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb are palpable, but they are—at least initially—partially obscured behind the movie's glossy surface.

Karl Freund's *The Mummy*, Tutankhamun and the Mummy's Curse

References to Tutankhamun in Freund's 1932 *Mummy*, produced by Carl Laemmle, Jr. and featuring Boris Karloff in the title role, are several, as Basil Glynn has summarised:

> *The Mummy* begins in Egypt in the Valley of the Kings in 1921 with a field expedition from the British Museum unearthing the tomb of Imhotep (just one year before Tutankhamun's was actually discovered). 'Permit me to present you with the most sensational find since that of Tutankhamun', the revived Imhotep says eleven years later to the British Museum archaeologists, upon revealing to them the location of the tomb of Anck-es-en-Amon (historically the wife of Tutankhamun).[3] A telegram is sent to Sir Joseph followed by a headline announcing his return to Egypt to supervise the dig (echoing Carnarvon's journey to Tutankhamun's tomb upon being informed of the discovery). Most significantly there is also the curse itself, in the film inscribed on the lid of a small box, no doubt based on the supposed 'swift wings' curse. (Glynn 2020: 99)

The allusions to Tutankhamun at the film's opening as outlined above are indeed so clear that Michael Richardson describes *The Mummy* as beginning 'with a fictionalized version of Carter's discovery' (2021: 28). Such aspects of the film's plot were the work of the screenwriter, John L.

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[3] In this essay, I use 'Ankhesenamun' to refer to the queen who was daughter of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, and the wife of Tutankhamun, 'Anck-es-en-Amon' to refer to the character in the 1932 *Mummy* and 'Anck-Su-Namun' to refer to the character in the 1999 *Mummy*.

Balderston. Carter Lupton claims that, unlike Balderston's earlier scripts for Universal, which had a clear literary point of origin—*Frankenstein* (1931) and *Dracula* (1931)—'King Tut's tomb, along with the curse surrounding it, is [...] the initial and most obvious source of inspiration for the Karloff film' (2003: 24). Balderston's knowledge of Egyptology was derived from his stint covering the excavation of Tutankhamun's tomb as a foreign correspondent in 1925, but he clearly engaged with Egyptological scholarship too, when writing *The Mummy*; the film's 'final script includes notes recommending [the Egyptologist Arthur] Weigall's books as a source for costume designs' (Mank 1989: 22). Lupton posits that 'the curse' was used as a plot device 'to relate to audience familiarity' (2003: 34), explicitly evoking the Tutankhamun excavations. Weigall himself was instrumental in contributing to rumours that vengeful supernatural forces plagued the dig, referring to several narratives of an eerie nature in his book *Tutankhamen and Other Essays* in 1923, though he avowed scepticism as to any otherworldly explanations on his own part (Dobson 2020: 210-211). Evidently, Balderston was interested in a kind of Egyptological authenticity, twinned with an attentiveness to the more fanciful stories that orbited the Tutankhamun excavations that had captured the imagination of newspaper readers worldwide.

The press was of course vital in distributing news of the discovery of and subsequent archaeological project around Tutankhamun's tomb, with Carnarvon having agreed to an exclusive contract with *The Times* to provide reports, information, interviews and images. This was the primary means by which photographs of the dig and the tomb contents—most of them taken by the archaeological photographer Harry Burton—were circulated. This was also, I claim, instrumental in providing source material for Freund's *Mummy*, both in terms of a Burton photograph which appears in a mock newspaper in the film, directly mimicking *The Times*'s distribution of this imagery, and in terms of an approximation of a particular artefact that appears as a prop. Indeed, Burton's photographs provided the basis for the very first replicas of artefacts from the tomb, which were constructed for the mock tomb in the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924, for which Weigall acted as a specialist consultant (Fritze 2016: 239; Heffernan 2020: 16).[4] Carter attempted to stop these replicas being shown, filing a lawsuit which 'claimed that the replicas were a breach of copyright, based on the argument that they could not possibly have been created without access to restricted photographs of the originals', and, conflictingly, that 'the replicas were simply not very good' (Heffernan 2020: 17). Carter lost, and the replicas were shown to great fanfare, the imitation tomb being one of the most popular offerings of the exhibition.

The Wembley replicas anticipated the copies and approximations of the artefacts interred with Tutankhamun that would be used in later entertainments, cinema foremost among them, including the *Mummy* films of 1932 and 1999. The 1932 *Mummy*'s uncredited 'Art Director Willy Pogany designed authentic-looking sets and artifacts' as Susan D. Cowie and Tom Johnson observe (2007: 61-62). Glynn records that 'the facts and aura of the discovery permeate the film, with many props modelled on Carter's finds' (Glynn 2020: 99). One prop in particular, in the part of the film set at the Cairo Museum, owes its authenticity to its evocation of one of Tutankhamun's calcite unguent vases, 'beautifully carved in openwork designs' (Carter and Mace 1923: 99), several of which were found within his tomb, and three of which had been

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[4] These pieces, made by the architectural sculptor William Aumonier Junior and his team, are now part of the collections of Hull Museums.

copied for display at Wembley some years earlier.[5] This example (Figure 1) is propped up against a wall next to a display case in the gallery which, according to a notice painted onto the wall, 'contains the mummy and complete funerary equipment of the Princess *Anck-es-en-Amon*', '[a]ll objects in this room [being] from her unplundered tomb' (*The Mummy*, 1932).[6] There is evidently a design added to the main chamber of the vessel, which appears here without its base; though there is no close-up shot to allow a better view of this prop, if it were copied faithfully this would reproduce Tutankhamun's cartouches. Like the Wembley replicas, this was probably constructed using photographs of the original artefacts as reference material. Perhaps, given its rather unusual placement in the museum, resting against the wall rather than being enclosed within a glass display case, the source was an image of the vases *in situ* taken by Harry Burton (Carter and Mace 1923: pl. xxii; Burton 2006a)—the vases were found clustered together and resting against the wall of the antechamber when the tomb was opened. The placement of the artefact on which the prop is based at the front of the group as captured by Burton (the three reproduced for Wembley are also those most visible at the front of the grouping) further suggests this particular photograph as the basis for this prop. The angle of Burton's photograph might account for the rather squatter rendering in prop form, in addition to the fact that the loops of carved calcite by the vessel's neck in the original are, in the prop approximation, filled in—it is unclear due to the perspective of this specific photograph whether these portions are filled or carved away. As Lise Manniche observes, these artefacts were 'unprecedented in Egyptian art' (2019: 2), and as such are particularly conspicuous when they appear in later visual media. Tutankhamun's tomb is thus an identifiable reference point in the 1932 film, maintaining its status as 'the most sensational

Figure 1. A prop artefact based on one of Tutankhamun's calcite unguent vases in the Cairo Museum collections in The Mummy *(1932). Screenshot by the author.*

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[5] In *The Illustrated London News*, 23 February 1924: *Doubly Interesting since the 'Strike' and 'Lock-Out' at the Tomb: Tutankhamen Replicas for Wembley.*
[6] Despite the assertion that her mummified remains are present in the gallery, we never see Anck-es-en-Amon's body in this gallery setting or elsewhere in the film.

find' in Egyptian archaeology according to the revived Imhotep (Boris Karloff) himself (in the guise of Ardath Bey), against which the discovery of his lover Anck-es-en-Amon's tomb measures a close second. Such artefacts provide an audience with visual markers of intricate and elaborate artefacts that function synecdochally for the sacred tomb space.

The film also makes explicit use of Burton's photographs of artefacts from Tutankhamun's tomb. Accompanying a mock *Egyptian Mail* newspaper article[7] headed 'Tomb of Ancient Princess Uncovered Intact' (Figure 2), we see two images, one of which is a Burton photograph of Tutankhamun's outermost coffin (Burton 2006b; Carter 1927: pl. lxvii), rotated ninety degrees to present the coffin as upright (crucially, how Imhotep's coffin is positioned in the film, and indeed how Egyptian sarcophagi are often depicted in visual media). The image on the left, meanwhile, is of a shabti of Amenhotep II (EA 35365) acquired by the British Museum in 1901. That both of the figures represented are clearly male, denoted as such by their wearing of the *nemes* headdress and false ceremonial beards, perhaps suggests haste on the part of the team who assembled this invented document: clearly, neither could have depicted the princess of the article's title. Nonetheless, the crossed arms of the shabti and the *nemes* headdresses on both communicate a visually recognisable 'Egyptianness' in this fleeting shot. That Tutankhamun had to be edited out of Anck-es-en-Amon's romantic history in *The Mummy* to allow the fictional Imhotep to step in as love interest makes the appearance of a likeness of the pharaoh in this image all the more conspicuous. While the relationship between Tutankhamun and the historic Ankhesenamun is never addressed in the film's dialogue, the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb is explicitly referred to by Imhotep in order to be used as a yardstick against which subsequent discoveries are measured, and the use of

Figure 2. An invented newspaper article relaying the discovery of Anck-es-en-Amon's tomb in The Mummy *(1932), featuring photographs of a shabti of Amenhotep II (left) and Tutankhamun's outermost coffin (right). Screenshot by the author.*

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[7] *The Egyptian Mail* is the name of a real English-language newspaper, founded in 1914.

such a recognisable image here furthers this, calling to mind in a more generalised sense the scale of the fictional discovery being relayed.

Of course, the image of Tutankhamun's outermost coffin may well serve another purpose; being fairly easily recognisable, it conjures up the notion of the mummy's curse, which is first referenced early on in the film when the Egyptologists examine the artefacts found in Imhotep's tomb. The young Ralph Norton (Bramwell Fletcher), who is interested exclusively in 'that box we dug up today with that very peculiar gentleman' (gesturing to Imhotep's body), transpires to be the mummy's first victim after the box is opened and the hieroglyphic inscription on the golden casket within is read by the leader of the expedition, Sir Joseph Whemple (Arthur Byron): 'Death—eternal punishment—for anyone who opens this casket, in the name of Amen-Ra, the King of the Gods. Good heavens, what a terrible curse!' (*The Mummy*, 1932). As head of the expedition, Sir Joseph evokes Howard Carter, particularly at the point when he describes the casket as 'the most wonderful find', his expression of its singular value partially echoing Carter's famous account of first peering into Tutankhamun's tomb and seeing countless 'wonderful things' in the darkness (Carter and Mace 1923: 96). Equally, due to both his title and his death during the film's events, he simultaneously represents Lord Carnarvon, the most famous individual whose demise has been historically attributed to the mummy's curse.

There is no actual curse that plagues the excavators in the film, however, but simply the reanimated mummy himself; it is Norton's reading aloud of the scroll within the casket that awakens the mummy, and it is upon seeing the mummy return to life that Norton loses his sanity (we learn that 'he died laughing in a straitjacket'). Norton expires sometime between the film's first archaeological excavation, of Imhotep's tomb in 1921, and its second, the excavation of Anck-es-en-Amon's in 1932 (meaning that, technically, the inscription on the casket comes true), while a museum guard apparently 'die[s] of shock' having thwarted Imhotep's attempt at stealing the scroll that had awakened him and which he hopes to use to bring Anck-es-en-Amon back to life. That Imhotep deliberately murders Sir Joseph Whemple using his occult powers, appearing to trigger a heart attack in his victim, shows that it is those who stand in the way of his plan to reanimate Anck-es-en-Amon who suffer his intentional violence (Glynn 2020: 99). Press reporting on the supposed curse of Tutankhamun at the time, in contrast, emphasised the supernatural harm that would come to those even tangentially connected to the excavation of the tomb.

Sommers's version of *The Mummy* (1999) was to follow suit, presenting a take on the curse predominantly driven by the need for an undead ancient Egyptian to restore himself and his lover to life (being himself cursed and bringing with him the biblical plagues of Egypt), explicitly using the language of an apocryphal curse reported to have been found in Tutankhamun's tomb. Sommers's film adapts Freund's inscribed chest; rather than the 'Scroll of Thoth' being found within, which might evoke, through the figure of Thoth, connotations of magic and wisdom, in Sommers's take, the chest contains the 'Book of the Dead', whose title might suggest something more sinister to the layperson if not to the seasoned Egyptologist. Indeed, in Sommers's film, the hieroglyphic text on the chest reads 'Death will come on swift wings to whomsoever opens this chest', specifically echoing the language of the invented curses used to bolster newspaper sales after Lord Carnarvon's death and to compete with *The Times* as the official channel reporting on the dig (Hoving 2022: 227). Sommers's original

addition to the end of the inscription—'He will kill all who open this chest.... And assimilate their organs and fluids' (Sommers n.d.)—which has no basis in the reportage on the excavation of Tutankhamun's tomb, provides a particularly gruesome addendum. The reconstitution of Imhotep's body through his consumption of the body parts of his victims allowed the team who worked on the CGI to show off their skills and to suggest something of the vampiric or cannibalistic monster about an otherwise quite sympathetic villain.

In Freund's film, therefore, Tutankhamun conjures up a powerful romantic love, vengeful supernatural forces, and also the opulent artistry of the artefacts found within his tomb, all of which typify extravagant Hollywood versions of ancient Egypt. While less explicit in its references, as I go on to outline, in these aspects Sommers's version follows in the footsteps of its predecessor. Nonetheless, there are key differences, foremost among them the heavy visual emphasis on gold that can only be achieved in a colour film, and with it the development of a storyline far more interested in 'treasure', and the pursuit of material wealth as a shared motivation for a host of the film's characters, both western and Egyptian. The seductive golden allure of Tutankhamun's tomb (if not in reality then certainly as it has subsequently come to exist in the popular imagination) is rendered here on a dazzling scale.

Wonderful Things: Tutankhamun Replicas and Amarna References in *The Mummy* (1999)

Despite being, from an Egyptological perspective, 'a morass of historical and geographical errors', as Donald Fritze puts it (2016: 363), the 1999 *Mummy* boasts 'beautifully detailed sets and artifacts' and 'terrific costumes' (Cowie and Johnson: 135), overseen by production designer Allan Cameron and costume designer John Bloomfield. These include various replicas and approximations of the artefacts found within Tutankhamun's tomb. While these items are not usually focal points, often appearing in the background of shots and more often than not functioning as set dressing rather than objects with which the film's characters actively engage, they nonetheless imbue the film's visuals with a sense of authenticity (particularly important given its more fantastical aspects) and, indeed, visual richness (in both senses of the word). The purpose appears to be not specifically to spotlight Tutankhamun as a historical figure in most cases, but rather to evoke the artistry, detail and lavishness of the artefacts buried with the boy king.

While the replicas and approximations do not include the most famous artefacts from the tomb—foremost among them Tutankhamun's iconic funerary mask—they are nonetheless recognisable to those familiar with images of the tomb and with the artefacts themselves, which were displayed outside of Egypt in various international 'blockbuster' exhibitions between 1961 and 2021.[8] It is likely that these made images of the artefacts among the most readily available source material for the art department when constructing their own props and costume pieces and suggests why, in some cases, there are notable discrepancies between

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[8] The first exhibition of a substantial number of artefacts from Tutankhamun's tomb, titled 'Tutankhamun Treasures', opened in 1961 and drew to a close in 1967, touring North America, Japan and France. The 'Treasures of Tutankhamun' exhibition opened in London and toured the USSR, North America and West Germany, closing in 1981. The 'Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs' exhibition opened in Switzerland in 2004 and toured the USA, closing in Melbourne, Australia, in 2011. The 'Tutankhamun: The Golden King and the Great Pharaohs' exhibition opened in Vienna and toured the USA, running from 2008 until 2013. Finally, the 'Treasures of the Golden Pharaoh' exhibition opened in 2018, touring North America, France and the UK, drawing to a close in 2021. The tomb contents will never again leave Egypt.

the size of original artefacts and the props they inspired: rather than using the originals as reference points, the art team evidently used photographic renderings, where scale is often less apparent.

One of the earliest identifiable replica artefacts in the film is a fairly faithful reproduction of the *wedjat* eye pectoral which adorned Tutankhamun's mummified remains (JE 61901, Egyptian Museum, Cairo), worn in *The Mummy* by the pharaoh Seti I (Aharon Ipalé) (Figure 3).[9] This item of jewellery, as Howard Carter noted upon examining it, 'show[s] traces of actual wear such as would be caused by use during lifetime', making its adornment of the living Seti (rather than being limited to use as a funerary object) particularly fitting (Carter 1927: 126).

Otherwise known as the Eye of Horus, the *wedjat* is one of the most familiar ancient Egyptian symbols in modern culture. It serves as a recognisable sign that connotes ancient Egypt even for audience members with little Egyptological knowledge. It is also particularly symbolic in this early part of the film, in which meaningful acts of looking proliferate—in particular, powerful moments of eye contact. Indeed, our first glimpse of Imhotep (Arnold Vosloo) shows him looking back in the direction of Anck-Su-Namun (Patricia Velásquez), 'Pharaoh's mistress', who paces towards the chamber where she knows she will find him with a fixed, confident gaze—with the exception of a quick glance at one of Imhotep's priests, who likewise turns to watch her. As Anck-Su-Namun and Imhotep embrace (not before making 'passes' in front of each other's eyes almost like a mutual act of mesmerism), Seti I emerges, the symbol of the eye resting on his chest signifying his perpetual watchfulness when it comes to his paramour. He scrutinises her intently, noticing her smudged body paint where Imhotep has touched her. This act of observation directly prefigures his murder by the couple.

Anck-Su-Namun wears little beyond body paint and items of jewellery, positioning her in the film's ancient preamble as sex object, albeit one who is herself empowered by the looking she

Figure 3. Seti I wears a replica of Tutankhamun's wedjat pectoral. Screenshot by the author.

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[9] The most notable difference between Tutankhamun's *wedjat* pectoral and that worn by Seti I in *The Mummy* is the proliferation of gold in the necklace's depiction of the goddesses which flank the eye, which corresponds with the film's overwhelmingly gold colour palette.

invites and which she returns.[10] Like Seti I's jewellery based on an ancient example, her necklace is an accurate replica of Sithathoryunet's pectoral, now part of the Egyptian collections at New York's Metropolitan Museum (Maksy 2020),[11] hailing from an earlier point in Egyptian history, though in this case predating Seti's reign by nearly 600 years. Imhotep's pendant, meanwhile, appears to have been based on the winged scarab pectoral of Psusennes I (JE 85787, 85797, 85, Egyptian Museum, Cairo), who came to the throne over 200 years after Seti.

Anck-Su-Namun and Seti also each wear two gold armbands (Figure 4), which appear to derive from another of Tutankhamun's items of jewellery—in this case, his pectoral featuring the vulture goddess Nekhbet (Carter 1927: pl. lxxxiv), clasping two shen rings in her talons. Rather than Nekhbet's wings curving downwards as in the original, her wings instead extend to encircle the upper arm. Unusually, it appears to have been the reverse of the pectoral rather than the front that formed the basis for these items of prop jewellery. The front of Tutankhamun's pectoral is inlaid with lapis lazuli, carnelian and coloured glass, while the reverse is gilt; the examples in *The Mummy* visually evoke the reverse of the pectoral, being done out entirely in gold. In addition, the reverse of Tutankhamun's pectoral shows the coil of the vulture's neck (a detail which does not appear on the front), which is also evident in the film's props. Nekhbet is an appropriate deity to depict on the pharaoh's jewellery, as the patron of Upper Egypt and symbolic of royalty, while the wearing of these items by both Seti and Anck-Su-Namun connect these characters, binding Anck-Su-Namun to the pharaoh. Such items of jewellery inspired by ancient examples contribute to the decoration of lavishly adorned bodies which signify an ancient Egypt which operates in the space between historically accurate and utterly fantastical. They serve as anchor points in historical reality to project a sense of authenticity onto the film's more outlandish and sensationalised aspects.

When the film moves on to its modern 1920s setting, there are two further locations in which Tutankhamun replicas manifest: in the Cairo Museum and in the fictional ancient Egyptian city of Hamunaptra. The Cairo Museum is the film's most historically accurate place for such

Figure 4. Anck-Su-Namun wears an armband derived from Tutankhamun's Nekhbet pectoral.
Screenshot by the author.

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[10] See A.I. Fernández Pichel, M. Orriols-Llonch, 'Sex, Gender and Sexualisation: Ancient Egypt in Contemporary Popular Culture' in this volume.
[11] For this object, see https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544232 (Accessed 16/06/2023).

Figure 5. The Cairo Museum setting includes approximations of Tutankhamun's funerary artefacts, including a ceremonial chair (far right) and a chair that bears an adapted version of one of his cartouches (centre). Screenshot by the author.

replicas to appear, the majority of artefacts unearthed from Tutankhamun's tomb having been installed here after they had been photographed and catalogued by Carter's team. In one scene, our heroes convene in a room in the museum which features an installation of multiple pieces of ancient Egyptian furniture accompanied by a mannequin, dressed as a pharaoh, riding a chariot in the background (Figure 5). Notably, the pharaoh wears the same crown as Seti I at the beginning of the film (the red crown of Lower Egypt rendered in gold), who we also first see riding his chariot back to his Theban palace, so this appears to be a nod back to *The Mummy*'s opening scene. Props and costume items visible here have evidently been recycled. The pharaoh's gold Nekhbet armbands and earrings, the horses' plumes—and even the colour of the horses themselves—are duplicated, as is the pharaoh's bow, which Jonathan (John Hannah), the clownish brother of the film's heroine, Evelyn (Rachel Weisz), nonchalantly holds. While the *wedjat* pectoral itself is not visible (none of the camera angles show it head on), the three strings of beads that suspend it can be seen in close-up shots of Jonathan, indicating the reappearance of this Tutankhamun replica to adorn the pharaoh's mannequin. The return of these props makes this scene one of the film's most visually self-referential and tongue-in-cheek. The beginning of the film is rendered here as a museum display, a static diorama which serves as a backdrop for modern events.

Other source material from Tutankhamun's tomb can be identified in this scene. Rick O'Connell (Brendan Fraser) sits on an approximation of one of Tutankhamun's ceremonial chairs. The chair's legs, decorated with duck-head designs, indicate a specific artefact (JE 62030, Egyptian Museum, Cairo) as source material for this prop. This is an approximation rather than an utterly faithful replica, however: the pattern on the chair's back is simplified, though clearly based on the original. The gilded spindles that run between the legs are fully restored, while in the original they are partially broken and more intricate (designed in the shape of a *sema tawy*, symbolic of the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt), and a shot from above reveals that, rather than the more intricate patterning on the original, the chair's seat is filled in with a less complex checkerboard design. This was no doubt much quicker for an art department to produce and particularly convenient as a time-saving measure, given

that O'Connell is seated for the majority of the scene. For O'Connell to rest on the pharaoh's chair emphasises his status as our primary male protagonist, attributing to him power and authority, only accentuated by his casual masculine posture.[12]

Other rooms in the Cairo Museum boast Tutankhamun replicas too, beyond the more formal exhibits. Statues of Anubis that can be seen in the background of particular shots of the Cairo Museum library (Figure 6) are clearly based on the Anubis shrine from Tutankhamun's tomb (JE 61444, Egyptian Museum, Cairo). The gold band around Anubis's neck in this original source is visible in the smaller versions of this artefact that function as set dressing here. Versions of the same artefact can be seen at the dig site in Hamunaptra, though they are missing the gold band. In the office of Dr Terrence Bey (Erick Avari), the museum's curator, moreover, a faithful replica of the gilded statuette of Tutankhamun standing on a papyrus boat and holding a harpoon (JE 60710, Egyptian Museum, Cairo) can be seen atop a cabinet (though the pharaoh's head is never in shot).

Artefacts from Tutankhamun's tomb certainly proliferate in the museum setting and, as with the duplication of the Anubis statues, they also have doubles that exist in Hamunaptra, as the film's depiction of an ancient Egyptian site ripe for archaeological investigation. To take one final example, the calcite model boat in the display case in the foreground of an early shot of one of the museum galleries (Figure 7) is one from Tutankhamun's tomb (JE 62120, Egyptian Museum, Cairo), distinctive because of the ibex heads that decorate its prow and stern.[13] The same boat is the basis for a similar artefact in Hamunaptra, though it is done out in gold rather than calcite (Figure 8); only the portion of the boat featuring

Figure 6. Anubis statues derived from Tutankhamun's Anubis shrine can be seen in the background of the museum library. Screenshot by the author.

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[12] O'Connell's casualness might suggest a disregard for the importance of the historical artefact on his part, along with Jonathan and Isaac Henderson (Stephen Dunham), also treasure-hunters. Terrence Bey takes a seat on an ancient artefact himself, implying perhaps a lax regard for conservation for a museum official, though he does intentionally burn the map to Hamunaptra early in the film. The characters we might recognise as having the greatest respect for ancient Egypt—Evelyn and Ardeth Bey—do not physically interact with artefacts in this scene, with the exception of a brief resting of the hand on one of the thrones by Ardeth Bey.
[13] A version of this model boat, also rendered in gold, can be seen in the temple while Alex (Freddie Boath) waits for his parents at the beginning of *The Mummy Returns* (2001).

Figure 7. Despite the dim lighting in this scene set in the Cairo Museum, the alabaster boat topped with a cabin is visible in the display case in the foreground. Screenshot by the author.

Figure 8. The same boat, this time in gold and without the cabin, can be seen to behind and to the left of the mummy's hand breaking through the sand. Screenshot by the author.

the ibex heads is included here—the structure with the four columns seen in the original and in the replica of the artefact as it appears in the museum display case are not present. Hamunaptra offers the most opulent sets in the portion of the film that takes place in the modern world, and the choice to make the boat gold rather than to reproduce the calcite colouring clearly denotes it as 'treasure' rather than 'artefact' in this setting (the colour of the version in the Cairo Museum being indeterminable in this gloomy atmospheric shot), in keeping with the version of Tutankhamun's tomb cache that exists in the popular consciousness rather than the archaeological reality.

It is at Hamunaptra that the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb becomes a more concrete reference point. Once our protagonists reconvene there, O'Connell, Jonathan and Ardeth Bey (Oded Fehr) stumble upon a vast room referred to in Sommers's script as the 'TREASURE CHAMBER' (Sommers n.d.). Sommers describes this set as '[f]illed to overflowing' with '[t] he wealth of Egypt' (n.d.). Confronted with this imposing gold-filled space (Figure 9), in

Figure 9. The treasure chamber at Hamunaptra evokes the gilded disarray of Tutankhamun's tomb, particularly in the chariot wheels propped up against other artefacts. Screenshot by the author.

which artefacts are piled high in a state of disarray, the audience and protagonists alike are presented with a crowded opulence familiar to us from photographic images of Tutankhamun's tomb, while particular artefacts—especially the sentinel statues and the six-spoked chariot wheels—specifically evoke Tutankhamun's funerary paraphernalia, the latter readily calling to mind the chariot wheels stacked with other artefacts in photographs of the tomb (Carter and Mace 1923: pl. xix, xx). Stuart Tyson Smith, who worked as an Egyptological consultant on *The Mummy* having previously provided his expertise for Roland Emmerich's *Stargate* (1994), records that 'Steven Sommers, the writer and director, kept my archaeological suggestions right next to his script during the shoot, using some of the information'; he notes that 'Sommers [...] avoided gemstones in the treasure and used bronze, not iron, for weapons' (2007: 29). The trove in which the protagonists find themselves in this moment is, in keeping with Smith's suggestion, one in which coloured gemstones are notably absent. Sommers and his team opt instead to create a scene where warm gilt tones dominate, taking Carter's observation that he could see 'everywhere the glint of gold' when first peering into Tutankhamun's tomb (Carter and Mace 1923: 96)—with Sommers approaching some of this language in his script where he notes that '[e]verything sparkles and shines'—and scaling this up into an enormous Hollywood successor to this space.

Indeed, even the dialogue at this moment seems to nod to the reported exchange between Carter and Carnarvon as Carter first looked into the pharaoh's tomb. In the first volume of *The Tomb of Tut·ankh·Amen* (1923), Carter recorded this historic moment, embellished from his original diary record:

> [D]etails of the room within emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues, and gold—everywhere the glint of gold. For the moment—an eternity it must have seemed to the others standing by—I was struck dumb with amazement, and when Lord Carnarvon, unable to stand the suspense any longer, inquired anxiously, 'Can you see anything?' it was all I could do to get out the words, 'Yes, wonderful things'. (Carter and Mace 1923: 95-96)

The Mummy's protagonists are less articulate when confronted with the sight of the treasure chamber, in dialogue that was evidently added subsequent to Sommers's writing of the script. While in the script the trio are simply left 'speechless', Jonathan and O'Connell are granted the following exchange in the film:

> JONATHAN
> Can you see…?
>
> O'CONNELL
> Yeah.
>
> JONATHAN
> Can you believe…?
>
> O'CONNELL
> Yeah.
>
> JONATHAN
> Can we just…?
>
> O'CONNELL
> No. (*The Mummy* 1999)

Carnarvon's question, 'Can you see anything?', is cut off as Jonathan's less articulate and unfinished 'Can you see…?', while Carter's formal response 'Yes' before the elaboration of 'Wonderful things', is rendered in the more informal 'Yeah'. There is a knowing comedy in this revised version of the famous exchange, which invites a direct comparison between the historic archaeological discovery and its action-adventure blockbuster descendant, the inarticulacy of the protagonists directly recalling the crafted eloquence of Carter's published account and revelling in this deliberate contrast.

The parallels between Hamunaptra and Tutankhamun's tomb were not lost on Max Allan Collins who, in his novelisation of the film, makes several references to Tutankhamun while the protagonists investigate this site. The treasure-driven Jonathan and the prison warden see Tutankhamun and gold as essentially synonymous, Jonathan wondering whether '[i]f [Imhotep] was such an important chap […] mightn't the inner coffin be solid gold, like Tut?' (Collins 1999: 114) and Hassan incredulous that '[i]n this underground city of boundless treasure […] the lady librarian was looking for a book! Yes […] a book fashioned of gold; but when King Tut's tomb had been found, what *hadn't* been fashioned of gold?' (1999: 107). Evelyn herself also uses the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb as a reference point, though she is motivated not by the monetary value of any discoveries but rather by their cultural significance. Evelyn wonders whether what they encounter at Hamunaptra 'might prove to be an archaeological find comparable to the tomb of King Tutankhamun' (1999: 100).

While Hamunaptra in particular, then, evokes Tutankhamun's tomb (and if not the historic reality of this site then its ensuing exaggeration in the popular imagination), artefacts from amongst Tutankhamun's tomb cache also function as indicators of Egyptianness in the modern museum and ancient Egyptian settings. They offer opulent but sometimes simplified takes on original pieces and are the connective tissue between antiquity and modernity as

they are depicted in the film, appearing in shots set in ancient Egypt and also in the film's most modern setting. Spanning millennia, they embody the overlap between 'treasure' and 'artefact', a dualism that is particularly noteworthy given the film's simultaneous interest in archaeological discovery and criticism of plunder which is never really worked through. While there are references to other periods in ancient Egypt's history elsewhere in the film, worthy of further note for the purposes of this essay are the connections to the Amarna period and its iconography, beginning during the reign of Akhenaten, Tutankhamun's father, and drawing to a close during the reign of Tutankhamun himself.

There are particular visual references in *The Mummy* to the Amarna style, developed during the reign of Akhenaten (originally known as Amenhotep IV). Amarna art is characterised by reverence for the Aten—the sun disc—at the centre of Akhenaten's new monotheistic religion, and a radically different depiction of the body often described as more 'naturalistic' than the conventions of both earlier and later periods (Montserrat 2000: 44). In popular culture, Amarna art and its bodies, which feature long, slender limbs, elongated crania, and rounded bellies, are often used as markers of an exaggerated otherness in comparison to the ancient Egyptian art before and after Akhenaten (Montserrat 2000: 57, 63, 164).

To take an example, one of the walls into which dormant flesh-eating scarab beetles have been inserted (Figure 10), found in one of the various chambers that make up the necropolis of Hamunaptra, is derived from a carved relief depicting Akhenaten, Nefertiti and three of their daughters, seated beneath the Aten (Figure 11; ÄM 14145, Neues Museum, Berlin). Aspects of the original have been altered—the sun, which is indented with recesses into which beetles can be inserted, is larger in Sommers's film, and while the real Egyptian relief shows rays of light emanating from the Aten disc and terminating in human hands, the hands have been replaced with more recesses for beetles in the reimagined artefact in *The Mummy*. There is a creative twisting of Egyptian mythology at play here, where the beetle god Khepri, who rolls the sun across the sky as the dung beetle rolls the ball of dung from which its young emerge, is referenced in the inserted flesh-eating scarabs. The use of the beetles along with solar iconography, therefore, seems based on some Egyptological research by the art department, even though Atenism held Aten to be the only deity. The 'strangeness' of Amarna art and the repurposing of this image as the holding place for beetles which evoke rebirth in Egyptian iconography (despite bringing death in the movie), work together to echo some of the film's key themes; like the carnivorous beetles, the dormant Imhotep consumes flesh in order to restore himself to life, ultimately in the hopes of also restoring and being reunited with his beloved. This is perhaps *The Mummy*'s most significant creative adaptation of original ancient Egyptian source material to denote a new meaning. As Matt Szafran notes, '[f]ilm production is a balance with often harsh time constraints, and the hieroglyphic "copy and paste" of background sets is an expedient way to make a set look Egyptian' (2023). The art department have, in this case, used an ancient Egyptian source as the basis for this set design, 'playing with iconography' by injecting new elements whilst also maintaining 'a degree of authenticity' (Szafran 2023). In Hamunaptra, therefore, the film thus creatively indulges in the golden aura of Tutankhamun and the strangeness of Amarna in a single site.

Figure 10. Jonathan unknowingly plucks a flesh-eating scarab from a wall, decorated with a scene derived from an Amarna Period carving. Screenshot by the author.

Figure 11. Relief of Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and three of their daughters. © José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro / CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

Ankhesenamun and Evelyn Carnarvon: The Significance of Names

Amarna is also connoted in the name of Ankhesenamun, the daughter of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, and Tutankhamun's queen and half-sister,[14] after whom Imhotep's love interest is named in both the 1932 and 1999 *Mummy* films. In both cases, we are thus presented with a revised take on ancient Egyptian history. At the time of Freund's movie, Ankhesenamun's name was well known, the images of her and Tutankhamun on his funerary artefacts were understood to be tender domestic scenes between a couple very much in love. Anck-es-en-Amon is therefore a suitable name for the ancient Egyptian identity of the reincarnation of Imhotep's young lover, Imhotep's feelings persisting across millennia in Freund's film (even if, in this film, the reincarnated Anck-es-en-Amon ultimately wants to live the life of her new modern incarnation). This is the case, too, for Ankh-Su-Namun in Sommers's film, despite a change in the pronunciation of the character's name. Like her namesake in Freund's film, which provides the precedent, Ankh-Su-Namun inherits her moniker from a royal Egyptian woman who died in her prime, and who appears to have been deeply cherished by her lover, whilst the name also evokes an Amarna princess, and the otherness and heretical zeal with which Akhenaten's reign is associated. She may not be the historical Ankhensenamun, transposed as she is into the later reign of Seti I, but these associations are nonetheless conveyed via her name.

The origin of certain characters' names is the primary aspect of Sommers's film which has drawn the attention of critics. Indeed, in addition to those who have made the connection between Ankhesenamun and the *Mummy* films (Lupton 2003: 34; Richardson 2021: 39, n. 15; Vinson 2017: 91), several scholars have pointed out that Evelyn Carnahan is inspired by Evelyn Carnarvon, the daughter of the original excavation's financier (Brio 2015; Hopkins 2002). In this final section, I turn to the additional details provided by the film's novelisation in scrutinising the significance of real modern people evoked in the characters' names, beyond the ancient figure of Ankhesesnamun, ascertaining one more tangible way in which *The Mummy*'s events are imagined as operating alongside the Tutankhamun discovery. Comparing Evelyn Carnahan and Gad Hassan with, and thinking specifically about the politics of naming these characters after, real individuals, throws into relief the moral polarisation of the film's characters as heroes or villains.

In Sommers's original film script, Evelyn Carnahan's name is given as Evelyn Carnarvon (Sommers n.d.). The revised surname, Carnahan, 'invok[es] a blend of Carter and Carnarvon' as Lisa Hopkins points out (2002), while Brio observes that her first name anchors her to Carnarvon's daughter, who was present at the opening of Tutankhamun's tomb (2015). Hopkins goes on to note that 'the first name of Evie's father is specifically given in the [novelisation of the film] as Howard' (2002). Indeed, the portrait of Evelyn and Jonathan's father elaborated upon in the textual rendering of Sommers's narrative by Collins is clearly derived from Howard Carter's biography:

> Howard Carnahan, son of an English painter of birds and himself a gifted watercolorist, had joined Sir Gaston Maspero—before the turn of the century—in the Egyptian government's Department of Antiquities and made his reputation with his celebrated detailed drawings of

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[14] On Ankhenaten's family, see Gabolde 1998.

important objects and murals found in the Valley of the Kings. And, of course, his crowning achievement had been his role in the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922. (Collins 1999: 41)

Howard Carter's father, Samuel John Carter, was an artist who specialised in paintings and drawings of animals, and Howard's skill with watercolours was invaluable when it came to developing a career in Egypt; not only was there work to be found for talented draughtspeople who could capture the forms and—crucially—the colours on archaeological sites, but for a while when Carter was without formal employment he was able to support himself financially by selling his watercolour paintings to tourists.[15] Carter was, like his namesake in Collins's *Mummy* novel, also recommended to Carnarvon by Gaston Maspero, then head of the Egyptian Antiquities Service.

The novelisation makes it clear that if not 'the man who found King Tut's tomb', Howard Carnahan was '*one* of the men' (Collins 1999: 126, my emphasis). While Evelyn and Jonathan's parents are dead in the novelisation (as they are in the film), Evelyn is presented as '[s]pitting in the eye of the King Tut curse' by 'continuing [her] father's work' (Collins 1999: 41). We learn that her parents died in a plane crash after the tomb's discovery, which 'the press had insisted upon connecting [...] to the Tutankhamun "curse"' (Collins 1999: 41). While Evelyn is exasperated by the peddling of this narrative, she herself comes around to 'believing [her] parents died as a result of King Tut's curse' over the course of the novel's events (1999: 163). Evelyn's increasing open-mindedness to supernatural possibilities sees her character develop from sceptical librarian to worldly archaeologist-adventurer, whose lack of experience in the field (which is cited as holding her back in her career at the narrative's opening) is thoroughly rectified by the film's conclusion.

Complicating the presentation of Evelyn and Jonathan's father as a Carter-Carnarvon hybrid is the relationship between their parents and museum officials in the film and its novelisation. In Sommers's film they are described by the museum's curator Dr Terrence Bey as 'our finest patrons' (*The Mummy* 1999), while in Collins's novelisation, Evelyn's parents willingly leave their estate to the Museum of Antiquities in Cairo. All of this suggests a less fraught relationship between the excavators and the Egyptian government in both the film and its novelisation than was the case historically (Colla 2008: 172-226). Tensions existed between Carter and Egyptian authorities, whipped up by Carter's privileging of *The Times* and his disparaging attitude towards the Egyptian press, and by his resistance to inspections by Egyptian authorities who were legally in charge of the dig. Indeed, other choices on Collins's part—certainly informed by Sommers's script and film—suggest a revised history that looks at western archaeologists through rose-tinted spectacles whilst recycling orientalist stereotypes when it comes to some of the narrative's Egyptian characters.

In particular, the retrospective naming of the duplicitous Egyptian prison warden who dies attempting to remove artefacts from Hamunaptra as Gad Hassan in the film's novelisation is especially noteworthy. This moniker derives from the name one of the real Egyptian foremen employed on the excavation of Tutankhamun's tomb, underscoring the orientalist reduction

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[15] See Hinson 2022. An album of Carter's watercolours of birds and other animals copied from ancient Egyptian source material is held in the archives of the Griffith Institute, University of Oxford, and available online in digitised form: http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/Carter_birds.html (Accessed 16/06/2023).

of one of the original unsung excavators to bumbling antagonist. Crucially, this perpetuates orientalist stereotypes that were already present in early twentieth-century accounts, including Carter's own.

Gad Hassan is not given a name in Sommers's script, nor in the credits—he is simply 'Warden'—though the character's name is given as Gad Hassan as part of the IMDB entry for the film,[16] suggesting that Collins sought an authentic Egyptian name for his novel-length rendering of Sommers's narrative and that this has subsequently 'stuck'. This is the name of one of the four foremen—the other three being Ahmed Gerigar, Hussein Abu Awad and Hussein Ahmed Said—whom Carter thanked in the second volume of *The Tomb of Tut·ankh·Amen* (published in 1927), despite sometimes praising and sometimes criticising them over the course of several years' working relationships, as recorded in his diaries (Abdel Rahman 2021: 17). Hend Mohamed Abdel Rahman asserts that 'Carter knew Gad Hassan before the excavation of Tut's tomb' (2021: 16), while T.G.H. James records that Carter and Hassan had been acquainted since at least 'the late spring of 1912' (2000: 193). In Carter's words, Hassan had 'taken up the profession of tomb-plundering' (quoted in James 2000: 193), and while this choice of phrase seemingly implies a moral judgement on his part (and a hypocritical one at that given that Carter himself would in time illegally remove artefacts from Tutankhamun's tomb), Carter clearly benefitted from Hassan's local knowledge, and negotiated with him to the satisfaction of both. Carter enlisted Hassan's aid later in his archaeological career on the dig that would unearth Tutankhamun's tomb, and even appointed him to a leadership role among the excavation team.[17] Abdel Rahman posits that as 'Carter benefited greatly from Gad Hassan as an antiquities trader', he gave Hassan this position as a result of this established relationship (2021: 16).

As Abdel Rahman records, '[t]he Egyptian contribution to Carter's excavation mission has always been neglected' (2021: 3); and Donald Malcolm Reid notes that this is true of histories of Egyptology more broadly: 'Egyptians flicker in the shadows as trusty foremen, loyal servants, laborers, tomb robbers, antiquities dealers, [and] obstructionist officials' (2019: 10). It is particularly unfortunate, then, given Hassan's knowledge and experience, along with the role that he played in the Tutankhamun excavations, that his name is attributed to one of the film's villains—as Omid Djalili who played the role termed it, an 'Arab scumbag', albeit a 'more cuddly, more comical' take on the character than Sommers had originally envisaged (Djalili 2001). Indeed, Carter's illegal activities have no reflection in the 1999 film (the 1932 film being released before these thefts publicly came to light), in which Howard Carnahan is simply idolised by his daughter. The Hollywood take on events renders characters as 'goodies' or 'baddies' in a way that perhaps is to be expected, but which does not cast a critical eye on the politics of discovery and excavation in the context of the 1920s. The gilded façade persists: while the shared lust for treasure of the American team, O'Connell, Jonathan and Hassan, is often used for comic effect, it is noteworthy that Hassan's death suggests that he gets his comeuppance. Jonathan, too, prises dormant jewelled scarabs from the walls in the hopes of making a quick buck, though his hero status as an eccentric white British man, and his adjacence to respectable professional Egyptology in the form of Evelyn, mean that his life is spared.

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[16] https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120616/ (Accessed 16/06/2023).
[17] Kees Van der Spek points out that this account was written later in Carter's life, and that T.G.H. James believed that Carter's dating of this event to the late spring of 1912 was incorrect, the event likely taking place in 'winter 1910-1911 or spring 1911' (2011: 242, n. 6).

Conclusion

Overall, Stephen Sommers's *The Mummy* is a film in which Tutankhamun lurks in the background, never centre-stage, but palpably suffusing the movie, from its opening in ancient Egypt through to the gold 'treasure' that shines in the heroes' saddlebags as they escape the sunken city of Hamunaptra and ride into the sunset as the film draws to a close. From the Theban palace to the modern museum and the archaeological site, and from items of jewellery to deconstructed chariot pieces, visual references to the artefacts interred with Tutankhamun abound. The film's fascination with gold, romance, and the supernatural also harks back to the original excavations and their seizing of the popular imagination from the 1920s onwards. In addition, names and other visual references call to mind both the perceived strangeness of the Amarna period and the historical figures involved in bringing to light the young pharaoh who had restored the Egyptian pantheon after a controversial stretch of monotheism, and the orientalist attitudes of western excavators of the 1920s that unfortunately have their own longstanding legacies.

The Mummy of 1999 provides its audiences with a Hollywood take on Tutankhamun, as did Freund's film of 1932 (the continuity between them across nearly 70 years underlining the persistence of the allure of Tutankhamun, peaking at various points across the twentieth century), offering itself up—if not by design—to this kind of cultural dissection that exposes its gilded façade and simplified take on the fractious relationships between western excavators and Egyptians at the time. Nonetheless, the 1999 *Mummy* manages to identify and repackage the aspects of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb which succeeded in making cultural waves in its own era in ways that other films have not; Alex Kurtzman's much maligned 2017 *Mummy* remake, for example, set for the most part in modern times in a decidedly greyscale London, references the monetary value of 'the contents of Tutankhamun's tomb'—'650 million pounds sterling' —but offers no jaw-dropping gold-adorned set to either evoke or compete with it.[18] While historians of both ancient and modern Egypt may find much to lament, the popular success of both the 1932 and 1999 iterations of *The Mummy* may boil down to their promise of a romanticised slice of archaeological fantasy that capitalises upon the cultural legacies of the Tutankhamun excavations, the like of which has been satisfying the appetites of consumers for over a century.

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[18] For the orientalism of Kurtzman's film, see Corriou 2020.

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Josephus as Source of the Egyptian Sequences in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956)[1]

Nuno Simões Rodrigues

In 1956, when Cecil B. DeMille introduced *The Ten Commandments* to the world, the film was already a revisitation of a theme that the director had filmed three decades earlier. In fact, DeMille made his first film with a biblical theme in 1923, which was also entitled *The Ten Commandments*.[2] Unlike the 1956 film, however, this first version was not set entirely in antiquity. In the 1923 production, the director dramatised a series of episodes taken from Exodus, but in the manner of a prologue, intended to give context to the American society of the 1920s which was the setting for the main part of the film. DeMille placed these episodes within a Christian framework, drawing on those of interest to his religious perspective, and excluding those related essentially to Jewish culture (Bourget 2013; Mendes 2015: 99). The recreation of Egypt in the 1923 version is still incipient and does not pay particular attention to archaeological detail, despite the initial scenes that provide an Egyptian backdrop, in line with the account in the first chapters of Exodus. These give the film a certain avant-garde character, considering the period in which it was produced (Koosed 2016: 67). It should also be recalled that 1923 was the year following the announcement of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. It was only after this event that the western world was invaded by that which may be referred to as the second wave of Egyptomania, the first wave having followed the Napoleonic campaigns. It also explains why the 1923 film did not yet echo that archaeological discovery in its scenography and wardrobe.[3] Therefore, in the absence of archaeological elements that would lend to a more accurate and historically realistic scenography, it was in Gustave Doré that DeMille found much of his iconographic inspiration for the 1923 film (Mendes 2015: 112).[4] Nevertheless, the political environment of 1923, in the aftermath of World War I and the reorganisation of the European colonial powers, already pointed towards a reappraisal of the Near East in the western imaginary (Mendes 2015: 100-103).

In 1956, three decades later, DeMille released a new version of the film, which would become his artistic testament.[5] This time, the framework of the biblical theme was positively that of

[2] *The Ten Commandments* of 1956 was not only DeMille's last film but also the finishing point of a journey dedicated to bringing history and in particular ancient history to the cinema, as shown by *The Ten Commandments* (1923), *The King of Kings* (1927), *The Sign of the Cross* (1932), *Cleopatra* (1934) and *Samson and Delilah* (1949). On this topic, see Mendes 2015.
[3] In contrast, the 1956 version was to echo this discovery, highlighting its archaeological and historical importance by showing Ramesses I seated on a throne that reproduces one of those found in the tomb of Tutankhamun. This topic was also noted by Alonso, Mastache and Alonso (2010: 143). For objects from Tutankhamun's tomb as a source of inspiration in classical and contemporary cinema, see E. Dobson, 'Stephen Sommers's *The Mummy* (1999): Modern Legacies of the Tutankhamun Excavations' in this volume.
[4] One should note the scenography clearly inspired by the Art Nouveau movement, for example. Among Doré's illustrations that influenced the 1923 film are the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea and Moses breaking the tablets of the law. Both appeared in *La Grande Bible de Tours* in 1843.
[5] Among the studies that analyse the 1956 film, see Alonso, Mastache and Alonso 2010; Comas 1999; Rodrigues 2016.

the ancient world, more specifically the Egyptian New Kingdom (1550-1075 BC), and the film lacked explicit parallels with the contemporary world (without prejudice to the comparative, albeit implicit, readings). DeMille's choice was certainly not unrelated to the fact that the modern sequence of the 1923 film had been poorly received by spectators, while the biblical sequence, integrated into the film in the form of a flashback prologue, was particularly well favoured (Mendes 2015: 114; Blanke 2018: 64). On the other hand, there were new technologies to exploit and more scientifically supported historical knowledge at his disposal.

Judging by the statements of DeMille and some of his collaborators in *The Ten Commandments* (1956), historical accuracy was of concern to the film's production from the outset. The publication of a book, in the same year as the film's premiere, by Henry S. Noerdlinger (who was also in charge of the historical research for the film), and with an introduction by DeMille himself, attests to this concern (Noerdlinger 1956; see also Llewellyn-Jones 2018: 117-118). Even though the book was entitled *Moses and Egypt: The Documentation to the Motion Picture The Ten Commandments*, it was mainly a compilation of discussions and documents related to the film's script and not a work of historiography *per se*. In fact, the book was criticised for that very reason, and was even deemed a 'pseudo historiography' used as publicity and propaganda for the film (Wright 1996; Louvish 2007; Alonso, Mastache and Alonso 2010: 142-143; Mendes 2015: 36-37, 289-290, n. 821; Moore 2018: 36). Furthermore, despite all the concerns of the filmmaker, neither 'historical rigour' nor 'philological rigour' are terms that can always be employed to characterise DeMille's film (Koosed 2016: 69), and it is in Noerdlinger's book that an explanation can be found for most of DeMille's choices in the making of *The Ten Commandments*. Ken Whitmore, a photographer on the film's production team, bears witness to this concern on the part of some of the members of the production team:

> And much to Henry Noerdlinger's consternation, hundreds and hundreds of camels trekked out, too. 'Camels were not introduced into Egypt for another millennium', Noerdlinger kept informing DeMille – and anyone else who would listen – but his caution fell on deaf ears. When people think of Egypt, people think of camels, and that was that. No one cared about the camels anyway, because all eyes were on the pigeons! (Orrison 1999: 89).

This preoccupation with alleged historical accuracy is evident not only in Noerdlinger's publication but also in the presentation delivered in person by DeMille in the first few minutes of the film. As noted by E. Mendes, this opening, in which DeMille seeks to substantiate his choices before the public and academic circles, is unparalleled in the history of cinema (2015: 289). DeMille was interested in making a film that was historically verisimilar in order to underline the historicity of Moses and the Exodus story (not necessarily the miracle of the Red Sea crossing, although the episode was included in the package).[6] Sometimes the need to follow a rigorous method in historical reconstruction goes so far as to include expressions of pure elitist erudition. This occurred in *The Ten Commandments* with the introduction of the character of Pentaur (played by Henry Wilcoxon) into the action. Pentaur is the alleged author of a poem dating back to the time of Ramesses II (c. 1279-1212 BC), in which the battle of Kadesh, between the Egyptians and the Hittites, is described (see e.g., Lalouette 1984: 108-119). DeMille and his screenwriters included him as a character in the film, making him one

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[6]   At this point what Alonso, Mastache and Alonso 2010: 163, say, quoting Marc Bloch, is relevant: 'The question is not whether the plagues devastated Egypt and then the waters of the Red Sea opened; the question is to understand why so many people believe that this was so'.

of Ramesses's generals. It is true that the character is not a scribe but a general in the film, but could it be a mere coincidence that this military figure's name is associated with that of another whose historical achievement is to have 'witnessed' an Egyptian feat of war? In any case, the association of Pentaur with the historical figure of the same name would only be made by a specialised audience and hardly at all by the general public. After all, knowledge of Egyptian culture was not likely to be as widespread as that of the biblical narrative.[7]

These concerns with historical accuracy were also related to the fact that DeMille was tampering with cultural heritage of great religious significance to the West, hence it was necessary to allay hypothetical sensitivities. Moreover, unlike the 1923 version, the 1956 film sought to reconstitute the lost or unknown years of Moses's life, in addition to defending the historicity of the character (Babington and Evans 1993: 46-47). It was therefore necessary to resort to considerable artistic recreation, which risked offending religious sensibilities, and which also explains DeMille's approach.

Yet another element which is illustrative of this concern with rigour (besides the publication of the book and DeMille's prologue) is the way in which DeMille, in the opening credits of the film, presents his audience with the 'bibliography' and sources on which his proposed reconstitution of Moses's possible life is based. It is to the accompaniment of a soundtrack with an epicWagnerian tone by Elmer Bernstein, that, after introducing the names of actors/characters, screenwriters, consultants (among whom Ralph Marcus, from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago features)[8] and technicians, DeMille's onscreen credit reads as follows (Figure 1):

> 'Those who see this motion picture – produced and directed by Cecil B. DeMille – will make a pilgrimage over the very ground that Moses trod more than 3000 years ago / in accordance with the Ancient texts of Philo, Josephus, Eusebius, the Midrash and The Holy Scriptures'.

It is also these ancient authors, Philo of Alexandria, Flavius Josephus, and Eusebius of Caesarea,[9] as well as the traditions of the Midrashim, that are often cited as authoritative arguments in Noerdlinger's book.

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[7] On Pentaur in the film see Alonso, Mastache and Alonso 2010: 156. Noerdlinger ignores Pentaur in his book on the film's production. Regarding the erudition present in the film, apart from Pentaur's character, a scene may be highlighted. When the pharaoh Sethi inspects the progress of the construction of the city of Goshen, he informs Moses of the accusations made against him for the concessions of rest and food granted by the latter to the slaves. Moses then states that it is always better to have strong workers than starving, exhausted or dead workers. To demonstrate this point a scale is used, on which Ramesses places weights on one plate to show Moses's concessions (involving more resources and less speed in construction) while Moses places a stone (symbolising the work of healthy and strong slaves) on the other plate. Moses's choice is therefore the right one given the greater weight of the stone. The iconography of the scene takes us back to the theme of weighing the heart, commonly represented among the Egyptians in a funerary context, and later depicted in the *Iliad*, in an episode known as the *Kerastasia*. It may thus be stated that DeMille's film also has two levels of interpretation by the audience: one more immediate and popular and the other more erudite. On Greek *kerastasia* and its relation to the Egyptian, see Rodrigues 2006. Note that Troy is also mentioned in the film, in the scene where Ramesses, already enthroned as the pharaoh, receives the foreign dignitaries. The Trojans, however, appear there as a people of the 5th century BC and not the 13th or 12th century BC, as they should.
[8] R. Marcus was one of the translators of Josephus for the Loeb collection, Marcus and Wikgren 1943.
[9] DeMille refers to Eusebius in the credits, but the fact is that Eusebius, in the *Preparatio Euangelica*, gathers information mainly from other texts, many of which have now disappeared, and which philology has analysed as being part of fragments of a corpus which brings together the work of Hellenistic authors such as Artapanus, Aristeas, Eupolemus,

Figure 1. Reference to ancient sources in the opening credits of The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956). Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA. Screenshot by the author.*

Although the historical accuracy and choices taken by DeMille and presented by Noerdlinger are debatable and controversial, the fact remains that the film's director and screenwriters, namely Aeneas MacKenzie, Jesse Lasky Jr, Jack Gariss, and Fredric M. Frank, drew on ancient sources, in addition to the Bible, to craft the screenplay for *The Ten Commandments*.[10] Among these sources is Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian who, during the period of the Flavians (in the second half of the 1st century AD), wrote a twenty-book history of the Jews (*Antiquitates Iudaicae*) in Greek, which is largely a paraphrase of Old Testament texts.

One of the features of Josephus's writings is the substantial and unprecedented amplification of the construction of characters of biblical origin.[11] Josephus is, in fact, a typically Hellenistic historian, who not only wishes to transmit a Hellenised version of the great figures of Israel's history and tradition, but in doing so considerably expands the composition of these same characters.[12]

Moses is one of the figures to whom Josephus devoted part of his work, with the life of the character occupying a hefty part of books II to IV of the *Antiquitates Iudaicae* (hereafter *AJ*). The topic was known and appreciated by Hellenistic audiences, largely due to Moses's connection

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Ezekiel and Demetrius. Information on Moses can be found in these fragments.

[10] In addition to the ancient sources, the screenwriters also made use of the following authors: Dorothy Clarke Wilson, *Prince of Egypt*, Philadelphia, 1949; J. H. Ingraham, *Pillar of Fire*, Boston, 1881; and A. E. Southon, *On Eagle's Wing*, New York, Toronto, London, 1939. The references feature in the film's opening credits.

[11] Josephus's amplifications consist in considerably expanding the physical and psychological features of the characters and the original biblical scenes and accounts, and even in creating and introducing novel episodes and unsubstantiated characters, almost always based on Hellenistic themes, recognised in mythology and in the various expressions of Greco-Roman poetics (epic, tragedy, novel, and even historiography). Rodrigues 2000 studies this stylistic process in Josephus's historiography, focusing on the figure of Saul, king of Israel.

[12] Most of the studies that systematically analyse Josephus's versions are owed to L. H. Feldman. Many of these studies have been collected in Feldman 1998a and Feldman 1998b.

with Egypt (Feldman 1998a: 46-50, 374).[13] It is also in this context that Josephus adds significant Hellenistic-type augmentations to the account of Moses's biblical origin, which in turn are echoed in DeMille's film.

The Ten Commandments of 1956 is a 220-minute film and can be divided into four major parts: 1) Moses in Egypt, 2) Moses the shepherd, 3) Moses the liberating leader, and 4) Moses the lawgiver. Each of these parts forms a nucleus within DeMille's film, connected by a common thread which is the life of the prophet. Its climax comes at the moment when the God of Israel gives Moses the Law for His people. From the outset, it may be said that the contribution of Josephus's material to the second, third and fourth parts of the film is almost negligible, while the biblical texts (Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers) are the main sources for those. It is mainly in the first and longest part of the film, lasting almost two hours, that we encounter Josephus's material.

In turn, Josephus's influence in the film can be recognised and organised into three major sequences and themes: 1) the exposure of Moses and the adoption of the child by Pharaoh's daughter, 2) Moses as prince of Egypt, and 3) Moses as general of Egypt.[14] There is also room in the present paper to highlight the pertinent omissions and divergences from Josephus's text in DeMille's film, for just as the director and his screenwriters made a choice regarding the material they wished to collect and use for the composition of the screenplay, so they also made a selection, which was not accidental, of what material to leave out.

The Exposure of Moses and the Adoption of the Child by Pharaoh's Daughter

While it is not exactly an original theme in ancient mythology, the exposure of Moses as a child in the context of Pharaoh's persecution of the newborn among the Hebrews (Exodus 1:15-22) is one of the most popularly recognised narratives in the story of Israel's lawgiver. In fact, the exposure and attempted murder of children is a recognised topos in many narratives, such as those related to Sargon (in Mesopotamia), Oedipus and Perseus (in Greece), Cyrus (in Persia) and Romulus and Remus (in Rome) (see e.g., Redford 1967; Feldman 1998a: 380). This is also a theme with great dramatic potential, therefore its use in a cinematic recreation of Moses's life would be practically unavoidable. For Christian audiences, the theme clearly echoes the episode in the Gospel of Matthew in which Herod the Great orders the Massacre of the Innocents (2:16-18). Interestingly, in the 1923 version, the episode is omitted, no doubt due to the circumstances and aims that inform that version. Thus, in the 1956 version, centred as it is around the figure of Moses, DeMille does not dispense with the topic, following the account found in Exodus 1:1-2:8.

The biblical text is relatively restrained regarding Moses's life in the Egyptian court. In Josephus, however, as in other sources, the respective authors give considerable development to this experience. In the work of Josephus, the narrative concerning Moses is significantly expanded, occupying, as mentioned, parts of books II to IV of the *Antiquitates Iudaicae* (more specifically, *AJ* 2.217-4.331, without prejudice to other references to Moses elsewhere in his

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[13]   The taste of Greeks and Romans for Egyptian themes can be traced back at least as far as Herodotus (5th century BC), namely in *Histories*, book II, and has high points in other works, such as Greek tragedy and novel, as evidenced by Euripides's *Helen* and Heliodorus's *Aethiopica*. See e.g., Rodrigues 2004.
[14]   On these topics see e.g., Schearing 2021: 31-45.

writings). The episode of the exposure and adoption of the child by the pharaoh's daughter is treated to some of these amplifications.

According to Josephus, after the child Moses has been put in the basket and thrown into the Nile, it is his sister, Mariame (the Greek form of the Hebrew name 'Miriam') who accompanies him, to ensure that no harm comes to the child (*AJ* 2.221-222). In this passage, the historian closely follows Exodus 2:4, and the account is accompanied by Josephus's typical reflections on Divine Providence and the way in which it acts to the benefit of God's protégés (*AJ* 2.222-223). This is followed by the scene of Pharaoh's bathing daughter, typical in ancient literary contexts, also present in Exodus 2:5-10, but to which Josephus adds some significant elements, one of which is the name of the Egyptian princess, who in the biblical text remains anonymous. According to Josephus, the princess was called Thermuthis (*AJ* 2.224), a name which, incidentally, suggests an Egyptian-sounding Hellenisation.[15] It is apparent that Josephus adopted the name of the princess from one of his sources (cf. *Book of Jubilees* 47.5), but in fact Thermuthis is the *interpretatio graeca* of the goddess Renenwetet or Renenutet, often depicted as a snake sitting on a throne (Flusser and Amorai-Stark 1993/1994; Wilkinson 2003: 224-226). This Egyptian deity was a goddess of nourishment, fertility, and harvest, and as such, the deity who cared for the pharaoh from his birth to his death, hence also her syncretism with Isis, especially in New Empire texts (Beinlich-Seeber 1984: col. 232-236). This understanding is highlighted by Flusser and Amorai Stark:

> Thus, when the biblical daughter of Pharaoh was given the name Thermuthis in Egypt, the goddess did not lose her particular personality. The Jews thought that the Egyptians saw this pagan goddess as the Mother of the young Pharaoh and thus, as the step-mother of the child PharaohMoses. We can conclude that the *interpretatio iudaica* of Pharaoh's daughter was articulated in Egypt by Egyptian Jews in the third century B.C.E. or, at the latest, in the first half of the second century (Flusser and AmoraiStark 1993/1994: 220).

Herein lies the explanation for the name given by Josephus to the daughter of the pharaoh who retrieved Moses from the waters of the Nile: she must have been named Thermuthis, by an association of ideas, perhaps already in a Hellenistic context, since this goddess was regarded as the divine nurse among the Egyptians.

DeMille, however, bestows another name on the Egyptian princess. The director and his screenwriters refer to her as 'Bithiah' (a character portrayed by Nina Foch). Why was this change made when Josephus explicitly mentions the name 'Thermuthis'? Moreover, although this is unlikely to be noticed by the vast majority of viewers, the name 'Bithiah' has an obvious Hebrew root, meaning 'Daughter of Yahweh'. Noerdlinger explains the choice (1956: 65): although the work of Josephus underlies some of the scenes in which Bithiah appears in the film, the option used by DeMille and the screenwriters stems from the Midrash Rabbah (III, 34) and the commentary this Jewish text weaves into 1 Chronicles (4:18). Indeed, in 1 Chronicles the following may be read: 'Bithiah the daughter of Pharaoh, which Mered took'. The Hebrew version of this name for an Egyptian princess is anchored in an ancient Jewish tradition stating that the God of Israel addressed the daughter of Pharaoh as follows: 'Moses was not your son, yet you called him your son; you, too, though you are not My daughter, yet I will call you My

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[15] The princess's name is mentioned again in *AJ* 2.232, 236, 243.

daughter' (Midrash Rabbah IV, 6, *apud* Noerdlinger 1956: 65). So, as 'Bithiah' means 'Daughter of Yahweh' in Hebrew, the relationship is explained. In part, this construction is rooted in the Exodus text which reads: 'She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water"' (Exodus 2:10). On the other hand, the connection with the passage in 1 Chronicles ultimately underpins the choice of the princess's name in DeMille's film (and also explains the inclusion of Mered as another character, played by Donald Curtis).

Figures 2 and 3. Maids and slaves of Bithiah (Nina Foch), the pharaoh's daughter, by the Nile. Among the slaves, Memnet (Judith Anderson) may be noted. The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956). Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA. Screenshot by the author.*

The biblical narrative of the finding of the child in the Nile is markedly concise. The film, however, presents us with a scene full of glamour, in which the pharaoh's daughter, surrounded by slaves and handmaids, is relaxing on the banks of the river. Bithiah's maids look more like 1950s pin-ups than young Egyptian women from the New Kingdom. Besides this feature, the scene is also enriched with playful elements that are more reminiscent of Josephus's Hellenistic narrative than the restrained biblical passage, in simply reads: 'Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it' (Exodus 2:5). Josephus, on the other hand, is a little more rhetorical: 'The king had a daughter, Thermuthis. Playing by the riverbank and spying the basket being borne down the stream, she sent off some swimmers with orders to bring that cot to her' (*AJ* 2.224). Josephus agrees with the biblical text when he mentions that the princess sent someone to fetch the basket, but significantly alters it by saying that it was some swimmers, and not just one servant girl, who were sent. DeMille's film makes a compromise by adopting the presence of both the swimmers and the slave (named Memnet, played by Judith Anderson), but then gives the role of protagonist in the retrieval of the basket to Bithiah herself (Figures 2, 3 and 4). There is a feel to this DeMille sequence that also recalls Nausicaa's episode in the *Odyssey*, in which the princess of the Phaeacians plays with her handmaidens on the banks of the river in Scheria, and comes upon the shipwrecked Odysseus (Homer, *Odyssey* 6.71-117). This similarity in DeMille's film appears to derive directly from the Hollywood director's use both of the atmosphere created by Josephus, together with additional inspiration from Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema's painting, *The Finding of Moses* (1904), to colour the scene.[16]

Figure 4. Bithiah (Nina Foch) finds the child in the Nile and calls him 'Moses'. The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956). Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA. Screenshot by the author.*

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[16] On DeMille's use of Alma-Tadema in general and in *The Ten Commandments* of 1956 in particular, see Mendes 2015: 68, 159, 281, 295, 302, and the contribution of G. Juberías Gracia in the present volume: 'From Alma-Tadema to Cecil B. DeMille: The Influence of Nineteenth-Century Painting on Classical Hollywood Films Set in Ancient Egypt'. In his account Josephus goes further, performing an exercise in etymology around the name 'Moses,' which is, in fact, motivated by the Exodus narrative, *AJ* 2.228. Nausicaa's episode was used on several occasions by Josephus,

Moses, the Prince of Egypt

This is perhaps the category in which Flavius Josephus is most innovative in his rewriting of Moses's biography, finding room for manoeuvre in defining his hero in the Hellenistic manner. This approach is, in fact, common in Josephus's historiography, and practically all the great biblical characters are presented to the Hellenistic public as if they were Greco-Roman heroes.[17] Indeed, Josephus's Moses is portrayed with attributes that portray him an ideal statesman. Josephus, like Philo, hints that Moses is heir to the throne of Egypt (*AJ* 2.232-235; Philo, *De Vita Mosis* 1.7.32), a presentation which is reflected in DeMille's film. As Feldman remarks: 'In general, the Hellenistic hero had to be a philosopherking in the Platonic style, a high priest, a prophet, and a veritable Pericles as described by Thucydides' (Feldman 1998a: 377). Josephus's Moses fulfils all these requirements,[18] and most of them are transposed to the big screen by Cecil B. DeMille.

While in biblical texts Moses is the arm of God, the fact is that the whole narrative of Exodus, and even of the ensuing books, focuses on Yahweh's deeds and not on those of the man Moses. It is notable how, in the Bible, Moses does not even have sufficient skills to speak alone before the pharaoh, doing everything in the company of his brother, Aaron (Exodus 4:27, 6:13). Even when Moses tries to gain some prominence, Yahweh punishes him for it (Numbers 20:9-13).

While endowing Moses with all the characteristics of a Hellenistic hero, Josephus also depicts the biblical hero using the cardinal virtues as defined by Plato: wisdom and prudence (*sophia* and *phronesis*), justice (*dikaiosyne*), temperance (*sophrosyne*) and courage (*andreia*) (Plato, *Republic* 4.427e). In addition he also adds other features, such as a pious character, noble birth, physical beauty, and leadership qualities. In fact, even before Josephus, Philo of Alexandria had attributed the Platonic virtues to Moses when he said: 'In these words Moses intends to sketch out the particular virtues. And they also are four in number, prudence, temperance, courage, and justice' (*Legum Allegoriae* 1.19) (Feldman 1992b; Feldman 1998a: 397-433).

These are the main features that also stand out in Moses's personality as Prince of Egypt in DeMille's version. Shifting from the moment when the pharaoh's daughter finds the baby Moses in the Nile to a later period, when the child has become a grown man, DeMille's film exalts all these elements in the hero's profile. The pharaoh (who in the film is identified with Sethi I,[19] and is played by Sir Cedric Hardwicke) has great affection for Moses as a prince (portrayed by Charlton Heston), considering him to be the son of his sister Bithiah (Figure 5). This attitude of the Egyptian sovereign is in line with the account in Josephus (*AJ* 2.233), even though there the pharaoh is the father of the princess and not her brother.[20] This is also why Sethi entrusts

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as underlined by Feldman 1998a: 186, 241, 266, 330-331, 440. The topic reappears in the film in the scene in which Moses, already in Madian, is found beside the well by Jethro's daughters and helps them repel the men who try to steal their cattle and water. The scene of Jethro's daughters, however, is most likely inspired not only by Josephus's description (*AJ* 2.258-263), but also by Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 1.10.51-59). Both amplify the passage in Exodus 2:16-22 with circumstantial reflections.

[17] In Feldman 1998a and 1998b, this is proven by the author with his detailed studies on Josephus's rewriting of the biographies of biblical heroes. For the case of Moses, see also Feldman 1992a, 1992b and 1993.

[18] Feldman 1998a: 377 says the historian's treatment of the Hebrew lawgiver is a veritable aretalogy.

[19] On the reasons for the choice of this king and the identification of Ramesses II as the pharaoh of the exodus, see Noerdlinger 1956: 55-60.

[20] While the Bible and Josephus both allude to only two pharaohs in Moses's life, firstly the one who had not met Joseph and who issued the edict ordering the children's slaughter, and secondly the pharaoh of the exodus, the film

Moses with several tasks of crucial importance for Egypt, including the building of a city in Goshen, which is also where the enslaved Hebrews live. In this regard, Moses emerges as a wise man, whose wisdom (*sophia*) reaches the level of mastering techniques such as those of architecture (Figure 6). Associated with this wisdom is his prudence (*phronesis*), evident in his great diligence when making decisions about the construction of the city of Sethi. In Josephus, this characterisation is found in several passages that consider the development of Moses's character, such as that in which the Ethiopian princess recognises his skill in war (*AJ* 2.252).[21]

Naturally, this is a more technical and less philosophical type of wisdom, and a less political prudence, than that possibly referred to by Plato in *The Republic*, but the character's actions are nevertheless expressions of *sophia* and *phronesis*.

Figure 5. Sethi (Sir Cedric Hardwicke) and the Pharaoh household: Ramesses (Yul Brynner), Nefretiri (Anne Baxter), Bithia (Nina Foch) and Pentaur (Henry Wilcoxon). The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956). Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA. Screenshot by the author.*

includes three, identifying them with Ramesses I (Ian Keith), associated with the edict; Sethi I, the pharaoh who welcomes Moses into his house; and Ramesses II, the pharaoh of the exodus. In these three pharaohs one perceives the scheme 'bad king – good king – bad king'. On these identifications, see Noerdlinger (1956: 55-60). In fact, Ramesses II is the chief villain of the narrative. Hellenistic elements can also be recognised in this formulation. Alonso, Mastache and Alonso (2010: 172) draw our attention to the detail of Ramesses appearing in a war chariot pulled by black horses the moment he begins the pursuit of Moses and the Hebrews through the desert, relating this image of the pharaoh to that of Messala (Stephen Boyd) in William Wyler's *Ben-Hur* (1959). Also, the villain of that film appears driving a chariot pulled by black horses, as opposed to those of the hero *Ben-Hur* (the same Charlton Heston who three years earlier had played Moses), which are white. The topic seems to be older, however, for another great villain of the western imagination, the god Hades, drives a chariot of black steeds as he emerges from the underworld to abduct his niece, Persephone (Ovid, *Fasti* 4.445-446; *Metamorphoses* 5.402-404; Claudianus, *De Raptu Proserpinae* 1.279-288). See also *Apocalypse* 6.5-7, where the horse carrying Famine is black. One must also remember that dark-skinned victims were offered to heroes and the gods of the underworld.

21 On the wisdom of Josephus's Moses, see Feldman (1998a: 397-401). The wisdom of Moses is echoed in the New Testament, in *Acts* 7:22, where Stephen refers to the knowledge the prophet had of Egyptian wisdom. See also Lang (2007: 126).

Figure 6. Moses (Charlton Heston) looks carefully at the construction process, along with master builder Baka (Vincent Price). The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956).*
Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA. Screenshot by the author.

Besides wisdom, a sense of justice (*dikaiosyne*) also dominates Moses's ethos (after all, he is the Prophet of the Law) (Feldman 1998a: 414-421). Josephus is explicit in this regard when he says: 'For he used to decide the disputes of those who sought his aid, and all came to him, thinking that only so would they obtain justice, if they had him for their arbitrator' (*AJ* 3.66; Thackeray 1961: 351). In DeMille's film, Moses's righteous character makes itself equally apparent, and the moments in the film's Egyptian sequences, when the director makes it relevant, are also pertinent. An example of this is the moment when, following the intervention of the Israelite water girl Lilia (Debra Paget), Moses saves his natural mother, the slave Yochabel (Martha Scott), from being crushed to death under the stone blocks used to build the city of Goshen (Figures 7 and 8). Another example is when Moses kills the master builder Baka (played by Vincent Price) to save Joshua (John Derek) from torture and an eventual unfair death (Figure 9).[22] In addition to these examples, DeMille's Moses hates the cruelty with which slaves are treated, going so far as to 'raid' the temple granaries to give wheat to the Hebrews and to grant them a weekly day of rest (foreshadowing the institution of the Sabbath by Mosaic Law).

The third virtue, temperance (*sophrosyne*), which is evident in the characterisation of Moses by both Josephus and DeMille, is glimpsed in the way the hero strives to live in harmony alongside his 'brother' Ramesses (Yul Brynner). Unlike the Egyptian, who does everything to undermine the relationship with Bithiah's son, Moses is guided by an ethic of restraint, he is a Stoic *avant la lettre*, showing self-control and harmony that fit the definition of *sophrosyne*.[23] This virtue is also apparent in Moses's choice to marry Sephora (Yvonne De Carlo), the daughter of a desert sheik, who lives in tents, herds cattle and, above all, dispenses with the

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[22] The death of a man who defies orthopraxis or the righteous behaviour (i.e., not behaving as a man and therefore crossing the boundaries of his gender) of another 'morally righteous' man also has symbolic weight in the film.
[23] Curiously, the biblical Moses is often choleric (Alonso, Mastache and Alonso 2010: 153).

Figure 7. Moses (Charlton Heston) listens to Lilia (Debra Paget), who intercedes with the prince for his natural mother. The master builder Baka (Vincent Price) watches the scene. The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956). Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA. Screenshot by the author.*

Figure 8. Moses (Charlton Heston) saves Yochabel (Martha Scott) from being crushed to death under the stone blocks. The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956). Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA. Screenshot by the author.*

Figure 9. Moses (Charlton Heston) kills Baka (Vincent Price) and saves Joshua (John Derek). The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956). Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA. Screenshot by the author.*

luxuries and riches of palaces like those in Egypt. Furthermore, this virtue is also related to piety (*eusebeia*) which, along with temperance, Josephus considers to be Moses's main virtue (*AJ* 1.6; on Moses's temperance, *AJ* 4.328-329) (Feldman 1998: 412-414, 421-425) and with which DeMille imbues his main character throughout the film, but especially after Moses discovers he is a Hebrew and not an Egyptian.

The fourth and last virtue, courage (*andreia*), is another of the characteristics of Josephus's Moses, as already highlighted by Feldman in his identification of fifteen occurrences in which the hero is called *strategos* (general, *AJ* 2.241, 268; 3.2, 11-12, 28, 47, 65, 67, 78, 102, 105; 4.82, 194, 329) (Feldman 1998a: 401-11). From a Hellenistic perspective, above all, the association of Moses with a military career necessarily implies the idea of courage, which is the basis of the third category to be analysed.

Moses, Egypt's General

As mentioned by Mendes, at the time of *The Ten Commandments'* production, actors such as Charlton Heston became well known for depicting the powerful and patriarchal male body, referring to a new standard of masculinity, and at the same time projecting a typification of the grammar of the male body for consumption by audiences of both sexes (Mendes 2015: 267-268, 363; also Moore 2018: 43). The events surrounding the choice of Heston for the role of Moses are well known and well documented (e.g., Orrison 1999: 43-49; Mendes 2015: 331-332). Heston certainly translates a stereotype of the North American hero, often seen in what can be considered the great American mythology, the Western, and which corresponds to the cowboy and 'guy next door' who even speaks like many Americans of the time, allowing them

to identify with this type of popular hero.[24] Thus, in *The Ten Commandments,* Heston embodies the typical American hero and has all that it takes to play the role of a heroic and romantic general. In this regard it is also appropriate to quote Arnold Friberg, an artist who was part of the technical team of the film: 'I believe that a tremendous religious leader like Moses or Jesus should be presented as commanding and strong, not a weakling or a victim'. (Orrison 1999: 66; Koosed 2016: 72-73).

As such, the representation of Moses in the film as a strategist and general, and a man of courage, is particularly appealing, and is also in line with the characterisation given by Josephus. In 1956, in the context of the Cold War and the reorganisation of the State of Israel in Palestine, this depiction of Moses took on an even greater dimension by enabling DeMille's audiences to identify with the biblical hero as a liberator and defender of freedom.[25] This image of Moses as a warrior, once again, is mainly constructed in the Egyptian part of the film.

It is as a warrior/general that Moses emerges as the conqueror of Ethiopia (Figures 10 and 11). The topic of Egypt's incursions into the south is historical and has been attested since the most ancient times, during the Egyptian Old Kingdom (2670-2200 BC). However, there is an obvious anachronism here. DeMille and his screenwriters choose to characterise Moses as the conqueror of Ethiopia yet it is as Ethiopians that the members of an embassy in the region present themselves at Sethi's palace. It should be noted that DeMille's Moses treats them as allies and friends rather than defeated enemies, which confirms him as a man of *sophrosyne*, without nullifying his strategic genius as a general and, above all, as a diplomat. The fact is, however, that at the time of Sethi I and Ramesses II, the territory evoked in that scene was not known as 'Ethiopia,' but as 'Nubia'. It is on Josephus that the authors of this argument rely to identify the territory with Ethiopia, as it is on the Hellenistic author that the whole episode is based (*AJ* 2.238-253). As a matter of fact, not only is the toponym Greek, but the use of 'Ethiopia' would have made far more sense to the audiences of 1956 than 'Nubia' or even 'Sudan' (Alonso, Mastache and Alonso 2010: 145). Moreover, the evocation of Ethiopia would have been received by these same audiences as an echo of black Africa, then dominated by Europeans and North Americans.

The Ethiopian passage in Josephus's life of Moses is an original and unusual recreation by the Hellenistic historian. The entire passage is based on a brief biblical reference, however, not from Exodus, but from Numbers (Numbers 12:1).[26] In fact, it is in this book that we read that Moses married a Cushite woman, i.e., from Cush (South Nubia), a territory identified with Ethiopia by the Greeks.[27]

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[24] On this issue, see the excellent reflections of Wyke (1997: 139-140), regarding the choice of Robert Taylor as the main character of Mervyn LeRoy's *Quo Vadis* in 1951 and its underlying stereotypes. See also Llewellyn-Jones 2018: 332-3. Interestingly, in the same year as the premiere of *The Ten Commandments*, Charlton Heston (Moses) and Anne Baxter (Nefretiri) starred in *Three Violent People,* a Western under Rudolph Maté's direction.

[25] Wright 2002: 89-127, analysing the film as an allegory of the Cold War; Rodrigues 2016; Schearing 2021: 36.

[26] As Thackeray (1961: 269 n. b.) notes, the legend of Moses's victory over Ethiopia is likely to originate from the Alexandrian Jews, rooted in the Bible (Numbers 12:1). But Moses's relationship with Ethiopia is not exclusive to Josephus (although the reference to Tharbis is), for it also appears in Artapanus, a second-century BC author. (*apud* Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27). The references by Josephus and Artapanus, however, are distinct from each other, meaning that this was a broader tradition.

[27] Noerdlinger (1956: 70) explains it: 'From the biblical point of view Cush and Ethiopia are identical.'

Figures 10 and 11. Moses (Charlton Heston) enters as a warrior and is hailed as victorious in the court of Pharaoh Sethi (Sir Cedric Hardwicke). The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956). Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA. Screenshot by the author.*

Beyond offering his Hellenistic readers a context for this marriage, Josephus goes further by amplifying the theme, making it the basis of Moses's exaltation as Egypt's general and warrior. Moses is recognised as a general of valour, in whom the expectations of the Egyptians, but also of the Hebrews, are placed (*AJ* 2.243). In a campaign against Ethiopia, after its invasion of Egyptian territory (*AJ* 2.239), Moses also reveals strategic sagacity and the ability to devise marvellous stratagems (*AJ* 2.244-245). It is this ability and shrewdness that allows Moses, in his

role as a general, to conquer the monstrous winged serpents that inhabit Ethiopian territory and create serious obstacles to the advance of the Egyptians - something he achieves by bringing ibises, a natural and deadly enemy of serpents, to eat them (*AJ* 2.246). In this context, Josephus even enters the realm of mythological wonder by mentioning the existence of flying serpents (*AJ* 2.245), obviously omitted from DeMille's film, given their natural unlikelihood. Yet Josephus's passage brings his profile of Moses closer to that of a mythological hero, like Heracles, for example. Having overcome the obstacles, Moses and the Egyptian army conquer most of the Ethiopian cities, until only Meroe, the capital, remains, where the surviving Ethiopians take refuge and which they fortify (*AJ* 2.248-249).

Like Agamemnon leading the Achaeans, Moses lays siege to Meroe, which appears like Troy (*AJ* 2.249-250). It is in this context that Josephus inserts the story of Tharbis, the Ethiopian princess. According to the historian, as the siege was not developing and no solution was in sight for the end of that war, Tharbis, who had fallen love with the general Moses when she saw him fighting from the city walls (the reference is clearly reminiscent of the Homeric *teikhoskopia*, *Iliad.* 3.121-244), decided to offer herself to him in marriage (*AJ.* 2.252-3). Josephus tells us that Moses accepted the proposal, under conditions that guaranteed victory for the Egyptians. The episode, with obvious Greco-Roman and even biblical parallels,[28] is not included in DeMille's film script, despite its dramatic potential. But Tharbis (Esther Brown) is used and integrated into the script's gallery of characters. It is she, moreover, who to a large extent sustains the image of Moses as a great general, by recognising his skills as warrior and diplomat before the pharaoh, during the embassy scene. In fact, DeMille makes Tharbis one of the members of the Ethiopian embassy that comes to Egypt to acknowledge the greatness of the pharaoh and thereby also to extol the magnanimity of the general Moses (Figures 12 and 13).

It is surprising that the screenwriters of *The Ten Commandments* did not take advantage of Josephus's story, which has Tharbis as the centre of the action, to develop the plot of political and romantic intrigue that is nevertheless generated with Ramesses and Nefretiri. After all, Tharbis is a genuine biblical character while Nefretiri is not. But perhaps in 1956 the time was not yet ripe to create a love story for the big screen involving a military hero played by a white actor, with whom the white, Christian or Jewish North Americans identified, and a heroine played by an actress of African descent, such as the one who gives life to Tharbis.[29]

For the Hellenistic mentality, to be a great warrior is also to be a great lover. Like Campbell's hero, the Hellenistic hero is simultaneously a warrior, beautiful in appearance, and a lover. Furthermore, for this author, as lover the hero deals with women as if they were symbols of forces to be tamed (Campbell 2008: 293-294). His relationship with women is thus another

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[28] The biblical example is Raab's, whose house is located on the walls of Jericho and who helps the Hebrew spies to obtain vital information to conquer the city (*Joshua* 2:1-24). But the theme is dealt with extensively in the Greco-Roman mythological-legendary tradition: myths of Antiope, Comaithus, Demonice, Leucophira, Nanis, Polycritus, Pisidice, Salia, Scylla; the legend of Tarpeia; the romance of Ninus. On this issue and hypotheses on the possible origins of the topic, see Feldman (1998a: 403-406).

[29] In this regard, it is interesting to note what Noerdlinger (1956: 71) says: 'In the poem by Ezekiel quoted by Eusebius, Sephora is described as a dark-skinned Ethiopian. Concerning her appearance on the screen, we show Sephora according to rabbinic tradition'. Cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.28. On the poem by Ezekiel the Jew, see Rodrigues 2007.

Figures 12 and 13. The Ethiopian embassy, where Princess Tharbis (Esther Brown), is presented by Moses (Charlton Heston) at the Egyptian court as an ally to Pharaoh Sethi (Sir Cedric Hardwicke), Prince Ramesses (Yul Brynner) and Princess Nefretiri (Anne Baxter). The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956). Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA. Screenshot by the author.*

way of defining the hero as warrior. Josephus employs this several times with his biblical heroes and Moses is no exception (Braun 1938: 26-30; Niehoff 2017). DeMille picks up the topic from Josephus, making his Moses a general as well as a romantic hero. The young, adult Moses, the Egyptian Moses, is a beautiful and powerful man, a man of arms. As such, he arouses the desire of women.

Kallos or beauty is an intrinsic quality of Hellenistic heroes. As noted by Feldman, Josephus emphasises Moses's beauty almost from the very beginning of the *Antiquitates Iudaicae* (Feldman 1998a: 384). *Kallos* is, in fact, one of the reasons why the pharaoh's daughter is enchanted by the child found in the Nile (*AJ* 2.224). Moses's beauty is maintained throughout the narrative, being highlighted in some passages, such as the following: 'When he was three years old, God gave wondrous increase to his stature; and none was so indifferent to beauty as not, on seeing Moses, to be amazed at his comeliness' (*AJ* 2.231-232, Thackeray 1961: 265). DeMille, naturally, harnesses this approach and transforms his Moses into a manly, virile and, above all, beautiful looking hero. In doing so, he gives him the characteristics which are, in the Hellenistic mentality, also those of a great general. These features, however, are particularly visible in the Egyptian Moses

Figures 14 and 15. Moses (Charlton Heston), Prince of Egypt, and Moses, Prophet of the Law. The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956). Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA. Screenshot by the author.*

of the first part of the film (Figures 14 and 15) and they become relegated to a secondary position in the Hebrew Moses of the following parts. This choice is certainly related to the association of the Moses of the Hebrews with ideas of modesty and restraint, in which sex appeal is neutralised, while the Moses of the Egyptians, or of the Gentiles, is more easily endowed with that aura of beauty and related heroic characteristics.

It is after the scene in which Bithiah welcomes the child Moses that the film immediately shifts to another, in which the central figure is Nefretiri (Anne Baxter) who, at the palace window, acclaims Moses on his return to Egypt after being proclaimed victorious against Ethiopia. Nefretiri (= Nefertari, historically one of the wives of Ramesses II) with all her feminine beauty and sensuality, is a metaphor for Egypt, the country which dominates the entire first part of the film. In the film, before marrying Ramesses, Nefretiri has two suitors among the princes of Egypt: Moses and Ramesses. She prefers Moses and tries to seduce him, offering him power (Figure 16). That is why she says to Moses, when suggesting that he build the city of Goshen to gain Sethi's favour, 'I am Egypt!'.[30]

One should bear in mind, however, that the character of an Egyptian suitor/lover of Moses does not appear either in Josephus or the Bible. She is a creation of DeMille's screenwriters, who find space, in the absence of historical information regarding Moses's Egyptian years, for a desirable romantic plot, particularly appealing to the film audiences of 1956. This plot becomes useful, moreover, for establishing the contrast between Sephora, Moses's wife from the Land of Madian, and Nefretiri, princess of Egypt. It should be recalled that DeMille's plot

Figure 16. Romantic scene in which Nefretiri (Anne Baxter) tells Moses (Charlton Heston) that she is Egypt. The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956). Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA. Screenshot by the author.*

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[30] This identification of the woman with the land is a common metaphor in classical cinema epics. In *Nefertiti, regina del Nilo* by Fernando Cerchio (1961), the same sentence is applied to Nefertiti.

begins with young Moses and young Ramesses, still unmarried, under Sethi's rule, both as suitors to princess Nefretiri in the Egyptian court. Later, after Moses's disgrace, Ramesses marries Nefretiri (which is in line with historical evidence) and Moses leaves Egypt for the wilderness, becoming the husband of Sephora (which is in keeping with biblical and literary data).

Figures 17 and 18. Moses (Charlton Heston) and Sephora (Yvonne De Carlo) in the land of Madian and by the Sinai.
The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956). Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA.*
Screenshot by the author.

While for contemporary audiences, Nefretiri represents the typically eastern vanity, luxury, and lust of an exotic Egypt (Saïd 2003),[31] Sephora represents the modesty of the woman accepted by the God first of the Hebrews and then of the Christians. The voluptuousness with which Nefretiri is depicted contrasts with the restraint and sobriety of Sephora, who appears, in one of the scenes of the part we have called 'Moses the Shepherd', as a typification of the women among the settlers from Europe who travelled in the pioneer caravans to the American West during the 19th century, crossing the vast North American desert. DeMille's Sephora is thus an excellent role model with whom the American housewife of 1956 can identify (Figures 17 and 18).[32] The two women provide the means of making the contrast between the gentile, romantic, erotic and warrior Moses of Egypt, and the pious Moses of the desert and of the Hebrews (Figure 19). Through them the first division in the structure of *The Ten Commandments* is also established.

Undoubtedly, the relationship with Nefretiri makes Moses a romantic, but also an erotic hero to DeMille's audiences. In Josephus, however, this feature, equally present, is made with recourse to Tharbis, the Ethiopian princess. DeMille did not miss the opportunity to include this character in the script of his film to accentuate a degree of erotic aura, although, as other authors have also noted, this film appears to be mostly 'an-erotic' (Alonso, Mastache and

Figure 19. Metaphors for Israel and Egypt, Sephora (Yvonne De Carlo) and Nefretiri (Anne Baxter) embody simplicity and luxury. Note the sobriety of the blue of Sephora's costume and the ostentation of the purple and silver of Nefretiri's. The Ten Commandments *by Cecil B. DeMille (1956). Distribution: Paramount Pictures, USA. Screenshot by the author.*

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[31] This issue is also addressed in Rodrigues 2023. See also the essay 'Sex, Gender and Sexualisation: Ancient Egypt in Contemporary Popular Culture' by A.I. Fernández Pichel and M. Orriols-Llonch in this volume and McGeough 2022: 127-130.

[32] Josephus refers to Sephora by name only twice: *AJ* 2.277; 3.63. On the stereotype embodied by Sephora (Yvonne De Carlo), see Mendes (2015: 326-327). McGeough (2022: 127-140) calls it the stereotype of the feisty housewife of epic cinema.

Alonso 2010: 179). The Ethiopian princess's scene is perhaps the squence most influenced by Josephus in the entire film.

In short, as a man, Moses is recognised as a member of Pharaoh's family and even a potential heir to the throne. He is excellent at what he does and boasts the Hellenistic cardinal virtues, as we have seen. But he is also an unparalleled warrior, and a diplomat, as suggested in DeMille's film. The warrior hero is the ideal complement to the philosopher-prince, and vice versa.

Omissions and Divergences from Josephus by DeMille

It is noticeable that, when making *The Ten Commandments*, DeMille and his screenwriters chose to make some identifiable omissions from the narrative given by Josephus which might, if used, have contributed appreciable information to the film. Some of the omitted material might also have had interesting dramatic potential. However, the American director chose not to include it in the script, which may in some cases be significant.

Among these omissions is the fact that, according to Josephus, it was Moses's father, Amram, and not his mother, Yochabel, who planned the rescue of the child by throwing him into the Nile in a basket (*AJ* 2.210-223). At this point, Josephus's narrative is significantly expanded when compared to the biblical version (Exodus 2:1-3). In a dream, God promises Amram that his son will be the deliverer of the Hebrews (*AJ* 2.212-216). There is a similar formulation in the *Antiquitates Biblicae* by Pseudo-Philo, but there it is Miriam, the sister, who has the prophetic dream (9.10). Feldman considers the hypothesis that Josephus amplified the figure of the father rather than those of the mother and sister for misogynistic reasons (Feldman 1998a: 379). It does not seem impossible that this might have been the case, but what is also of interest here is that Josephus's story, with its links to the story of Joseph, Mary's husband (*Matthew* 2.13), would also have had an impact on an audience with a Christian background. DeMille, however, decided to ignore it and stick to the strictly biblical plot, in which it is the mother who has the leading role.[33]

Similarly, Miriam's agency with Pharaoh's daughter to secure a nurse of Hebrew origin for the child Moses (*AJ* 2.221, 226-227) is also omitted in the 1956 film. And so are all the reflections on Moses's childhood, including the episode in which the historian recounts that when Moses was presented to the pharaoh as the son of his daughter, the king of Egypt put a crown on the child's head and Moses immediately threw it to the ground and trampled on it. It was seen as an adverse omen for Egypt and led to a bad reaction from the Egyptian scribe who was present who immediately tried to kill the boy (*AJ* 2.233234). Despite the dramatic interest of Josephus's text, the scene was possibly not in line with what the screenwriters intended for the characterisation of Moses as prince of Egypt. DeMille was only interested in the adoption episode, not only to meet audience expectations, but also to make sense of the plan envisioned for the character.

References to Ethiopia are also kept to a minimum in DeMille's film, perhaps surprisingly considering that these essentially derive from Josephus, who says more about the topic in his work, but this information is underutilised by the screenwriters for reasons related to the

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[33] On the importance of Jewish and Christian audiences for DeMille, see Alonso, Mastache and Alonso (2010: 142); Mendes 2015.

film's plot. In fact, DeMille is satisfied with the demonstration of Moses's heroic and romantic character, preferring to ignore the skirmishes on the battlefield, the confrontation with the winged serpents of the desert and the development of the love affair with the Ethiopian princess. To show these features on screen would be to give too much space to a bellicose, mythological (in the sense of a surreal wonder rather than like the miracles presented in the Bible) and polyamorous Moses (*AJ* 2.238-253). None of this was of relevance to the achievement of DeMille's goals.

The murder of the Egyptian by Moses, which is mentioned in the Bible (Exodus 2:11-12), is omitted by Josephus, perhaps because the historian did not want to give further arguments to the detractors of the Jews of his time. DeMille could have taken this hint from Josephus and simply made Moses a fugitive from Egypt who intended nothing more than to save his own life (*AJ* 2.254-257). But perhaps ignoring the incident would have conflicted too much with the expectations of the audiences who were familiar with the biblical texts, hence the theme of murder is included in the film and the Egyptian victim, Baka, even earns the right to be a prominent character. Similarly, Josephus's reference to the Egyptians' conspiracy against Moses, derived from their fear, insecurity and envy of him (*AJ* 2.255-256), is also omitted from the film, missing another topic that could have contributed a relatively interesting dramatic development within the palace conspiracies. In the film, the antagonists are Bithiah's slave, Memnet, and Ramesses, who represent the hero's main opponents, although without a conspiracy.

The prominence given by DeMille to Dathan (Edward G. Robinson) as the villain on the Hebrew side is also worthy of note. In both the Bible and Josephus, Dathan appears only sporadically, chiefly in the context of the rebellion against Moses in the desert after the exodus (Numbers 16; *AJ* 4.19, 37, 51, 54). Dathan is referred to only as one of the rebels, perhaps not even the ringleader. But this is the figure DeMille captures, presenting him at an earlier stage, in the Egyptian scenes, as a wicked and ambitious collaborator with the Egyptians, which in 1956 might have echoed those among the Jews who, willingly or unwillingly, had turned against their own people by helping Israel's enemies.

Conclusions

As already noted, Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956) can be divided into four major parts, with the figure of Moses as the constant focus of the action. The first of these parts corresponds to the character of the Moses in Egypt. DeMille and his screenwriters relied on various sources for the cinematographic rewriting of the life of Moses, including among them the ancient texts, namely, in addition to the biblical texts, the works of Philo of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea and Flavius Josephus. When taken into consideration as an object of analysis, it is possible to perceive Josephus's influence above all in the first part of DeMille's film, the one set in the Egypt of Sethi I and Ramesses II. This part, in turn, can then be divided into three major sequences or topics: the exposure and adoption of the child Moses, Moses the prince of Egypt, and Moses the general. In all these sequences we can find Josephus, now on the big screen.

In the first of these sequences, the Hellenistic atmosphere, particularly inspired by Josephus and by the context of his writings, is evident. Although the princess's name is not the one

Josephus gives her, that whole sequence can be traced as deriving from the events as Josephus recounts them. In the second sequence, the cardinal virtues – wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage – are those which Josephus attributes to his Hebrew hero and which also stand out in the manner in which DeMille presents him.[34] In the third sequence, it is the heroic and romantic character, integral to a great general of a great army, that gains prominence and is understood by the audiences of DeMille's film. Equally pertinent are the choices of DeMille and his screenwriters, resulting in the omission of and divergence from interesting developments made by Josephus in his Hellenistic biography of Moses.

The first part of the film is an exercise in historical reconstitution, which can be integrated into the gaps in the historical record and the narrative that has been made of it. As already noted, that part of the film might as well have been called 'Everything you wanted to know about Moses in Egypt but can't find in the Bible' (Alonso, Mastache and Alonso 2010: 148).

It thus seems that it was not only through the biblical texts, but also through Hellenistic sources that the theme of Moses and the setting in which he moved, namely ancient Egypt, have pervaded and live on in the western collective memory, in its popular culture. *The Ten Commandments* (1956) remains one of the most viewed films in the history of cinema and one of the most honoured by awards. Unprecedented great scenes, such as the opening of the Red Sea, are still remembered to this day, as well as other aspects such as the scenography, the wardrobe by Edith Head and her team, and the magnificent music by Elmer Bernstein. Hence, it is fully justifiable to include this film among the productions that have contributed most to the construction of the image of ancient Egypt, both as a land of refuge and marvels and as a land of oppression (a dichotomy already present in the Bible), in popular culture.

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[34] 'DeMille's Moses embodies America's twentieth-century masculine ideals. He is young, handsome, strong, powerful, sexy, wise, and courageous' (Koosed 2016: 73).

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From Alma-Tadema to Cecil B. DeMille:
The Influence of Nineteenth-Century Painting on Classical Hollywood Films Set in Ancient Egypt

Guillermo Juberías Gracia

The representation of ancient Egypt in contemporary popular culture is a complex phenomenon, imbued with social, political, aesthetic, and historical implications. Stephanie Moser notes that the role played by the reception and representation processes in generating society's current knowledge of the past has not been extensively explored (Moser 2014: 1263).[1] With regard to this she also remarks that the approach to past times, and thus to ancient Egypt, is not only generated by archaeologists, but also by many other communities of professionals such as writers, filmmakers, artists and illustrators, museographers and theatre directors. Consequently, scrutiny of the diversity of viewpoints provided by different disciplines is a necessary tool for the analysis of this reception of the past from the modern perspective. Today, studies on ancient Egyptian reception have been complemented by new perspectives that seek to analyse not only the dialogue between the two temporal contexts of past and present, but also the time and space between the object and the act of reception. In the words of Florian Ebeling, this dynamic in-between 'can only be understood as a constant interaction of reference to the past, self-image and projection to the future' (2019: 56).[2]

In this article, we will reflect on the impact of nineteenth-century Egyptian-inspired painting on the recreation of this ancient civilisation through the staging of classical Hollywood cinema. Additionally, we will verify how these cultural products contributed to projecting in western societies a very specific aesthetic and imaginary of ancient Egypt.[3]

With this objective in mind, first we offer a brief introduction on how western contacts with Egypt since the Napoleonic campaigns awakened interest in the country of the Nile, an effect reflected, among others, in the Universal Exhibitions of London and Paris. We then proceed to examine the reflection of this taste for Egypt in the nineteenth-century painting of artists such as Jean-Léon Gérôme or Lawrence Alma-Tadema. The overall goal of this study is to analyse the influence of these and other painters on Hollywood cinema of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, focusing primarily on films about Cleopatra and those with biblical themes.[4]

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[1] This article was translated into English by Lilian Ndemo, English teacher at the Université Bretagne Sud (France).
[2] Reception studies in the field of ancient Egypt have been enriched in recent years by the application of theories such as those of Aby Warburg and his *Nachleben* or Jan Assmann's *Mnemohistory* (Assmann and Ebeling 2020). These approaches have made it possible to critically analyse phenomena such as Egyptomania, which is currently under review (Versluys 2020).
[3] On this topic, see e.g., Wojtala 2019: 87-100.
[4] We have decided to focus our research on the major blockbusters of classical Hollywood directly inspired by ancient Egypt. For this reason, we do not include films about mummies, a very prolific subgenre in cinema since its origin with Georges Méliès's film *Robbing Cleopatra's Tomb* (1899). Films about mummies generally have a contemporary setting in which archaeological excavations are recreated.

'C'est plus égyptien que l'Égypte': Egypt in Nineteenth-century Visual Culture

The fascination with ancient Egypt has been constant throughout the history of art. Its deities, historical figures, and religious and funerary architecture were frequently reinterpreted, starting in the Renaissance and Baroque periods and becoming especially popular in the 19th century, thanks to the archaeological discoveries that resulted from Napoleon's Egyptian campaign from 1798 to 1801 (Humbert, Pantazzi and Ziegler 1994; Bednarski 2010; Moser 2015).

This campaign coincided with a change in the world's political order. Imperialism marked the 19th century and this new social and political order was fundamental to the evolution of the cultural manifestations in the late modern period. Edward S. Said (1994: 99-100) argued that, in the French and British cases, the representation of everything beyond the metropolitan frontier consisted of a reshaping of the 'raw' or primitive data concerning these territories by adapting it to the local conventions of European narrative or visual representation. In the field of art, this is evidenced by the fact that painting and other representational arts sought to create images to support the aim of contemplating, dominating, and maintaining distant territories. All the images addressed in this article, both nineteenth-century history painting and the feature films of classical Hollywood, demonstrate in different ways the purpose of legitimising first European and then North American power through images of a territory whose domination and control constituted an important military objective for France, Britain and North America successively.

In this regard, the imperialist writings of art critics such as John Ruskin, a great defender of Britain's role as a colonial power, should be taken into account (Said 1994: 102-105). His artistic theories were closely followed by the painters of the Victorian era who depicted distant territories such as Egypt or the Near East, and others closer to Britain, such as the Iberian Peninsula or North Africa, from that imperialist viewpoint.

In the French case, we also find this vision in works by Jean-Léon Gérôme, whose paintings portray the Napoleonic campaign with a clear imperialist approach by representing the Egyptian territory as both a fascinating country and a battlefield.

This colonial vision permeated Egyptology from its birth in the 19th century, and was met with criticism such as that of the Egyptian delegation attending the 1889 International Congress of Orientalists held in Stockholm.[5] The members of this delegation travelled to Sweden through Paris, visiting the Universal Exhibition of 1889, and criticised the superficiality of that world fair, which exploited clichés and stereotypes about Egypt without any solid scientific basis (Mitchell 1991: 1-7).[6]

Egypt was perceived by nineteenth-century Europeans through the lens of exotism, which was fully integrated into this imperialist perspective. According to Pérez Largacha and Vivas Sainz (2020: 83-105), in the 19th century knowledge about this civilisation of several millenia was hardly based on scientific works but instead on wonder, fascination, and myth. After the

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[5] The International Congress of Orientalists was a conference held to address studies related to the Near East. It first convened in Paris in 1873.

[6] In recent decades, historiography of Egyptology has exposed these colonialist views on Egypt (Carruthers 2014; Mitchell 1991; Colla 2007).

publication of *Description de l'Égypte* (1809-1829) by the scientists who accompanied Napoleon to the land of the Nile, the analysis of the Rosetta Stone, and the beginning of the arrival of numerous Egyptian pieces into western museums, a taste for Egypt began to take hold among Europeans, who later had the opportunity to visit the Egyptian pavilions at the Universal Exhibitions of London (1851) and Paris (1867).[7]

The London Great Exhibition of 1851 included an Egyptian Court, designed mainly by the architect Owen Jones with the collaboration of the sculptor Joseph Bonomi, located inside its famous Crystal Palace (Ossian 2007). In this court we find various diverse architectural and decorative elements inspired by Egyptian monuments (Figure 1), such as the colossi of Ramesses II on the façade of the temple of Abu Simbel, the Osirian pillars of the funerary temple of Ramesses II in Western Thebes, the hypostyle hall of the temple of Karnak, or the paintings from the tombs of Beni Hassan.[8] Jones had earlier visited Egypt and depicted

Figure 1. Egyptian Court, Crystal Palace, Ludwig Wilhelm Heinrich Gruner (19th century).
Photography, 230 x 280mm. Courtesy of the ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
Images free of charge for academic publications.

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[7] On Egyptomania in the European national and international exhibitions of the 19th century, see, e.g., Effland 2010.
[8] The Victoria and Albert Museum in London has in its collection drawings, designs and abundant images and plans of the Universal Exhibition of 1851: e.g., *Design for Egyptian Court, Crystal Palace* (accession number: 29084A/1).

Figure 2. Architectural drawing of an entrance pylon to an Egyptian temple, Owen Jones, ca. 1853. Watercolour on paper, 174 x 251mm. Courtesy of the ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Images free of charge for academic publications.

its temples through drawings and watercolour paintings.[9] He imbued the London Egyptian Court with a colossal and exuberant character, using vivid colours that reproduced the lost polychromes of the original Egyptian monuments (Moser 2012), as shown in other drawings by Jones (Figure 2). These impermanent structures presented in the international exhibitions of the 19th century may have served as a starting point for film sets, which also tended to imitate the massive dimensions and to use exceptionally bright colours when recreating ancient Egyptian buildings.

Another milestone in the dissemination of this particular image of ancient Egypt which began to take shape after the important events at the beginning of the century was its representation at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867, when Khedive Ismail Pasha wanted to move away from the Ottoman cultural influence by presenting a project for which the advisor was the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette. For this purpose, a pavilion called 'Temple of Hathor' was built, which functioned as a museum of antiquities and was directly inspired by the Greco-Roman temples of Dendera, Edfou, Kom Ombo, Philae, etc., constituting the centrepiece of the so-called *Parc égyptien* of the exhibition (Demeulenaere-Douyère 2014).

These universal exhibitions were highly popular: around six million people visited the one in London in 1851 and those in Paris attracted between 11 million and 15 million visitors

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9 See in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London *Columns of the Temple of Ramses the Great and Temple of Sedingar* (a.n.: SD.544:1); *Columns of the Temple of Luqsor and Lateral Column Temple of Karnak* (a.n.: SD.544:3) or *Architectural drawing of an entrance pylon to an Egyptian temple* (a.n.: SD.544:2).

in 1867, 32 million in 1889, and almost 51 million in 1900 (Demeulenaere-Douyère 2012: 81). This facilitated the spread of Egyptian-themed art among the general public, popularising an aesthetic reimagined from the European point of view.

Another element that was needed to lay the foundations of the future cinematic taste for Egypt was the dissemination of Egyptian history and all the stories that emerged from it, which also revitalised knowledge of the protagonists of ancient Egypt, particularly the most renowned pharaohs and queens. In this process the performing and visual arts played a critical role as these brought all their stories to life. In this respect, nineteenth-century painters were recreating idealised Egyptian-inspired scenes on their canvases, while Verdi premiered his opera *Aida* at the Khedivial Opera House in Cairo in 1871. The opera was under the scientific guidance of Auguste Mariette and the set was designed by French artists Philippe Chaperon, Édouard Desplechin, and Jean Baptiste Lavastre (Figure 3). It contributed, according to Edward W. Said (1994: 112), to upholding the image of Egypt as an exotic, distant, and ancient place where Europeans could display their dominance.

In terms of historically inspired painting, the names of Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904) and Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912) must be mentioned. The former was one of the most

Figure 3. Set design for Act 2 tableau 2 of Verdi's Aida, Édouard Desplechin (1871). Watercolour, gouache and touches of white on beige paper, 494 x 646mm. Courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Bibliothèque-musée de l'opéra. Work in the public domain: gallica.bnf.fr /BnF.

outstanding masters of *pompier* painting, a style of art frequently inspired by antiquity. Gérôme's paintings had a direct influence on the so-called peplum film genre (also known as sword-and-sandal), from Enrico Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis* (1913) and its subsequent version by Mervyn Le Roy (1951), to Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000). According to Laurent Guido and Valentin Robert (2011: 8-23), Gérôme's painting uses narrative techniques such as the selection of the moment after the climax of the action, a practice which is later seen on the big screen, and he conceived of his canvases as grand narrative spectacles. This type of approach is also present in Gérôme's paintings set in Egypt, a country to which he had travelled for the first time in 1855.[10] However, most of his paintings do not portray the civilisation of the pharaohs but offer more recent images of Egyptian ruins or scenes of the streets of Cairo. He did recreate an ancient setting in his work entitled *Cleopatra and Caesar* (1866, private collection),[11] however, the background depicted does not come from the artist's direct observation of remaining evidence but from copying the designs collected in *Description de l'Égypte* (Kennedy 2023: 77).

The case of Alma-Tadema is different. Vern G. Swanson (1977: 43) stated that the Dutch painter (who trained in Belgium) did not have many direct disciples; however, his greatest contribution to the wider art of the 20th century was cinematographic: the London *Sunday Times* of February 18th, 1968 even described him as 'the painter who inspired Hollywood'.[12] Thanks to his artistic training in the city of Antwerp with Egide Charles Gustave Wappers and Jan August Hendrik Leys, he learned a type of detailed, meticulous painting, taking its inspiration from the past (Barrow 2001: 16) which explains why he was able to paint his Egyptian-inspired images, even though he had not yet visited the country of the Nile. His erudite art was based on the consultation of works such as the aforementioned *Description de l'Égypte*, and, according to Victoria Álvarez Rodríguez (2019: 535), the engravings of *The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (1837) by Sir John Gardner Wilkinson. Álvarez Rodríguez also points to his study of the famous *Grammar of Ornament* by Owen Jones, and visits which he made to the previously mentioned Egyptian Court at the Crystal Palace exhibition and to the rich collections of Egyptian art at the British Museum in London, as possible influences.

To trace the origin of the artist's interest in ancient Egypt, we have found a pertinent testimony by the writer Helen Zimmern, one of Alma-Tadema's first biographers (1902). Zimmern highlights the artist's friendship with the Berlin Egyptologist Georg Ebers, stating (1902: 22):

> The German Egyptologist and novelist, George Ebers, a friend of Alma Tadema's, to whom he dedicated one of his historical tales, once asked him what it was that had turned him from his Franks towards the land of Isis. Alma Tadema replied, 'Where else should I have begun as soon as I became acquainted with the life of the ancients? The first thing a child learns of ancient history is about the Court of Pharaoh and if we go back to the source of art and science must we not return to Egypt?'

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[10] As examples, we can mention: *Cafe House, Cairo (Casting Bullets)* (*ca.* 1884), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York or *Napoleon in Egypt* (1867–68), Princeton University Art Museum.
[11] A study and a reproduction of the painting can be seen in Kennedy 2023: 81.
[12] As pointed out by Coleman (2004: 50, n. 5).

The author points out that those compositions inspired by the ancient past belong to genre painting rather than history painting, as they focus on everyday scenes portraying life in ancient Egypt (Zimmern 1902: 22-26). Of the 26 canvases depicting Egyptian subjects painted by Alma-Tadema a number are of particular interest because of their later influence on the construction of film sets: *The Egyptian Widow* (1872, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), *Death of the Pharaoh's Firstborn Son* (1872, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), *Joseph, Overseer of Pharaoh's Granaries* (1874, Dahesh Museum, New York), *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1885, private collection), and *The Finding of Moses* (1904, private collection).[13]

With regard to their subject matter, these scenes appear to be inspired by the Old Testament and the Greco-Roman period of Egyptian history. These paintings, especially those executed during the 1870s, confirmed Alma-Tadema as notably representative of this historicist trend as they illustrated his great archaeological rigour thanks to the study of Egyptian furniture and ornamental repertoires of which he made abundant pencil copies.[14] Álvarez Rodríguez (2019: 549) indicated how in *Joseph, Overseer of Pharaoh's Granaries* (1874, Dahesh Museum, New York), Alma-Tadema included in the background of the scene elements drawn from the tomb of Nebamun in Dra Abou el-Naga (Luxor, ancient Thebes) (*ca.* 1350 BC), which contains one of the most celebrated sets of tomb paintings in ancient Egyptian history (Parkinson 2008). Nebamun was an official from the 18th Dynasty, a scribe, and a grain counter, like Joseph. Fragments of the decoration of his tomb were sent to the British Museum in 1821 and their stable state of preservation allowed Alma-Tadema to get a close look at the rich polychromies of Egyptian burials, details which he transferred to his own compositions. The banquet and music scenes on the tomb of Nebamun were also to inspire details of his *Pastime in Ancient Egypt Three Thousand Years Ago* (1863, Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston, United Kingdom) and *Egyptian Chess Players* (1865, private collection), to which he was to add depictions of objects from the Musée du Louvre and inscriptions from the Rijksmuseum in Leiden (Álvarez Rodríguez 2019: 542).

Another important issue concerning Alma-Tadema's paintings which has so far received little attention in art historiography has to do with the dissemination of his works through European newspapers, especially illustrated magazines. During the second half of the 19th century, many of his paintings were part of private collections and the public could only access them through these magazines. In the British case, we can highlight the example of *Pastime in Ancient Egypt*, engraved by Charles William Sharpe and published in 1874 in the London magazine *The Art Journal* and, two years later, in an edition published by Gebbie & Barrie commemorating the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, where the original painting was exhibited.[15] Another example, this time from France, concerns the painting *Joseph, Overseer of Pharaoh's Granaries*, published in *L'Univers Illustré* in 1874. The author of the review of the engraving states that Alma-Tadema had already presented a painting dealing with the plagues of Egypt at the Salon art exhibition in Paris the previous year (Jan-Karl 1874: 747). The weekly magazine also reviewed the 1874 Salon and explained the qualities of the two paintings presented by the Dutch artist. About the one entitled *The Tenth Plague of Egypt*, the author noted '*c'est plus égyptien que l'Égypte*' (Pontmartin 1874).

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[13]   Except for the last named, all of them were painted before his late trip to Egypt in 1902.

[14]   These copies are preserved in the Cadbury Research Library of the University of Birmingham (Moser 2017: 52-53).

[15]   A copy of this print is preserved in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Accession Number 2015.653.5 (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/700931) (Accessed 14.06.2023).

In Spain too, illustrated magazines paid attention to Alma-Tadema and his recreation of the ancient world. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the special issue dedicated to the painter in 1887 by the Catalan magazine *La Ilustración Artística*, with an article by Helen Zimmern translated into Spanish by Enrique Leopoldo de Verneuil. This article was accompanied by 34 engravings reproducing paintings, drawings, and images from the artist's workshop in London (Zimmern 1887: 1-16). It includes two Egyptian-inspired paintings: on the cover is an engraving of his painting *Pandora* in which Pandora holds the famous box of evils, familiar from Greek mythology, which is shown here in an Egyptian form with a sphinx-shaped lid, while elsewhere in the issue is an engraving of his painting entitled *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra.*

The presence of the ancient world, and the Egyptian civilisation in particular, in the press at that time generated a familiarity with such reinterpretations of Egyptian art, contributing to this taste for Egypt in Europe at the end of the 19th century. This fascination with the land of the Nile gave rise to what is known as the Neo-Egyptian style in architecture and decorative arts. In its early days, this type of design was mainly reserved for buildings with a leisure function, such as theatres or, later, cinemas. Examples of this in England, France, and the United States are well known and include the following: the Egyptian Hall in Picadilly, London (1812) which was used as an exhibition hall, the Louxor cinema hall in Paris (1921) and the Grauman's Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood (1922). In Spain this neo-Egyptian fashion was very widespread and was applied in buildings for a wide variety of uses (Saguar Quer 1997: 386-406), such as the Fabra Observatory on Mount Tibidabo in Barcelona (1904), designed by José Doménech Estapá. The use of Egyptian motifs in European and American funerary architecture and sculpture was equally common during the 19th century. We can highlight examples such as the main entrance to the Terre-Cabade cemetery in Toulouse, France (1840) or the neo-Egyptian mausoleum tombs in Woodlawn Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York (19th and 20th centuries). The city of Zaragoza in Spain provides another good example of the use of these decorative repertoires, with numerous tombs in its municipal cemetery incorporating obelisks, pyramids or sphinxes, as investigated by Ascensión Hernández Martínez and Pedro Luis Hernando Sebastián (1994-95: 451-470). This style of design was even used for the retail stores, as in the case of the 'Fantoba pastry shop' in Zaragoza, founded in 1856 and renovated in 1888, incorporating carpentry and stained glass executed in the neo-Egyptian style and with a set of paintings of Egyptian inspiration in which the aesthetic present in the paintings of Alma-Tadema is adapted to the format of decorative painting. Among the personal documents of the architect and decorator Ricardo Magdalena, preserved in the Municipal Archives of Zaragoza, there are watercolour paintings of Egyptian inspiration that were later adapted and used in the decoration of the store (Hernández Martínez and Hernando Sebastián 1994-95: 459-460).[16]

All these examples reveal the strong presence of the late nineteenth-century reimagining of ancient Egypt in visual culture. This phenomenon contributed to generating aesthetic themes that would be exploited by Hollywood directors in the next century for their films based on antiquity.

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[16] Municipal Archives of Zaragoza. Private Archives: Ricardo Magdalena. Box 021176, call number 01/02. *Alegoría de la prudencia.*

Egyptian-inspired Painting and its Influence on Hollywood Cinema

Before delving into the uses that Hollywood cinema made of nineteenth-century painting, it is important to point out the complex relationship that has existed between cinema and painting since the beginning of the film industry. Mónica Barrientos Bueno (2002: 70-71) explains how historical cinema has exploited nineteenth-century painting for the reason that the apparent historical authenticity of the artworks had led to an acceptance in the public consciousness of their reliability as a trustworthy source. Furthermore, according to Barrientos Bueno, cinema and painting share certain compositional elements, such as the reading direction of the eye, the compositional lines or the use of symbolic spaces, the difference being that cinema incorporates real movement.[17]

An obvious example is the work of Alma-Tadema, whose paintings had a direct impact on Hollywood cinema from its beginning. Film historian Ivo Blom (2017: 187-199) highlighted the Dutch painter's strong influence on certain scenes of Enrico Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis* (1913). He also observes that one of the most obvious direct inspirations for the silent film *L'orgie romaine* (1911) is Alma-Tadema's celebrated canvas *The Roses of Heliogabalus* (1888, Pérez Simón Collection). Later, in 1916, David W. Griffith premiered *Intolerance*, whose sets recreating ancient Babylon were inspired by Alma-Tadema's paintings such as *Spring* (1894, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles). In this work, he portrayed the celebration of spring in an ancient city, showing imposing classical buildings and a crowd of lavishly garlanded characters, a scene that would be recreated in the film by Griffith's set designers (Natali 2007: 115).

Concerning ancient Egypt in relation to the influence of nineteenth-century painting on Hollywood cinema, the two most recurrent topics were the life of Cleopatra and biblical stories set in Egypt. As for the first, it is worth mentioning two early silent films, the 1912 *Cleopatra*, directed by Charles L. Gaskill, with Arthur Courbault as art director and starring Helen Gardner, based on the play of the same name by Victorien Sardou and Émile Moreau (1890) in which the role of Cleopatra was portrayed by the iconic Sarah Bernhardt. There are abundant photographs of the French actress interpreting this role, showing Egyptian-inspired costumes, highly influenced by an orientalist and imagined aesthetic, notably eclectic and not faithful to the archaeological reality of ancient Egypt (Figure 4).

Equally lavish was *Cleopatra* (1917) by J. Gordon Edwards, featuring the actress Theda Bara.[18] George James Hopkins, the art director of this film, was then at the beginning of what would be a long career in Hollywood.[19] The film was a blockbuster, which, like the 1912 film, was also based on the play by Sardou and Moreau and contributed to the consolidation of the idea of Cleopatra as a *femme fatale*, played by the most famous vamp actress of Hollywood in

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[17] She also points out how painting has been present in audiovisuals through the use of pictorial effects, *tableaux vivants* (static scenes containing one or more actors representing an existing painting) and matte painting (painted representations of a landscape or set not present at the filming location) (Barrientos Bueno 2002: 72-76).

[18] Unfortunately, the film was destroyed after the censorship imposed by the Hays code (Ruiz Garrido 2006: 189). However, numerous images of Theda Bara playing *Cleopatra* have been preserved, many of which are located in the Wikimedia Commons collections:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Theda_Bara_as_Cleopatra (Accessed 14 June 2023). In addition, on July 30th, 2016 a set of 12 lobby cards (photographs from the film) was auctioned at Heritage Auctions:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Cleopatra_(1917_lobby_cards) (Accessed 14 June 2023).

[19] A complete list of his filmography can be found at: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0394166/ (Accessed 14 June 2023).

Figure 4. Cabinet card image of actress Sarah Bernhardt, as Cleopatra, New York (1891).
Napoleon Sarony. Source: Wikimedia Commons: Theatrical Cabinet Photographs of Women (TCS 2).
Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Work in the public domain.

the 1910s (McGeough 2022: 127-140) (Figure 5). We presume that the inspiration for Theda Bara's costumes came not so much from nineteenth-century painting but from the whole gamut of the performing arts, as evidenced by the parallels with photographs of actresses of this era who played Cleopatra in shows or dance performances.[20] According to the Fox Film Corporation, the actress wore more than 50 dresses for the film, at a cost of half a million dollars (Ramírez 1986: 161). The few surviving images of the sets still reveal an Egyptian inspiration notably removed from archaeological veracity.

The real turning point in the representation of ancient Egypt in film sets and costumes came with the directors who lived through the transition from silent to talkies, especially Cecil B. DeMille (1881-1959). His first version of *The Ten Commandments* (1923) already involved the use of large-scale Egyptian-inspired designs that were revisited in the 1956 remake of the film. Furthermore, his *Cleopatra* (1934), with the heroine played by the French-American actress Claudette Colbert, was the first sound version of the story of the legendary queen of Egypt. The film had three prestigious art directors, Hans Dreier, Roland Anderson and Boris Leven, which gives us an idea of DeMille's interest in creating a careful and lavishly sumptuous production. The film exploits a notably sexualised image of the figure of Cleopatra, which is

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[20] We can establish direct links with the photographs of shows such as the one-act choreographic drama *Cleopatra*, directed by Michel Fokine, performed at the Théatre du Châtelet in Paris in 1909 and at the Royal Theatre in Stockholm in 1913. The Bibliothèque Nationale de France holds photographs of Ida Rubinstein performing *Cleopatra,* taken by photographer Auguste Bert (ark:/12148/btv1b70028646), as well as photos by the Atelier Jaeger photographers, showing the Stockholm staging (ark:/12148/btv1b7002871b).

Figure 5. Poster for the film Cleopatra, *by J. Gordons Edward, starring Theda Bara.*
Motion picture news, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

morally justified by the fact that it is a story set in a distant time and in an oriental context.[21] Prieto Arciniega explains how it was precisely this grand scale and sensual atmosphere that ensured great public success for DeMille's blockbusters (2000: 158-160).

In Cecil B. DeMille's *Cleopatra* we can see, firstly, an interest on the part of the director to bring to life all those scenes of daily life in Egyptian and Graeco-Roman antiquity imagined by Alma-Tadema. An example of this is the reconstruction of Caesar's villa in the film, especially in the scene just before the arrival of Caesar and Cleopatra together in Rome (Figure 6). It shows a multitude of characters in a festive setting around the *impluvium* of the house, a representation in which echoes of Alma-Tadema's work are evident. The painter set numerous scenes in Roman domestic interiors, emphasising the elegance of the *domus*, giving prominence to the fountains and the *impluvium* in the atrium, around which a hedonistic and refined lifestyle was centred. This can be seen, for example, in *A Roman Art Lover* (1868, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven) (Figure 7) or in scenes in which he recreated indoor festivities such as *The Vintage Festival* (1871, private collection).

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[21] In this book, the authors A.I. Fernández-Pichel and M. Orriols-Llonch reflect on this aspect in the chapter titled: 'Sex, Gender and Sexualisation of Ancient Egypt in Contemporary Popular Culture'.

Figure 6. Villa of Caesar in the movie Cleopatra *by Cecil B. DeMille (1934). Screenshot by the author.*

Figure 7. A Roman art lover, *Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1868). Oil on panel, 55.8 x 84.4cm. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven. Work in the public domain, CC0 1.0 Universal (CC0 1.0).*
Public Domain Dedication.

Figure 8. Cleopatra's entrance to Rome in the movie Cleopatra *by Cecil B. DeMille (1934).*
Screenshot by the author.

Alma-Tadema's paintings also served, secondly, as a reference for the designs of the public spaces in *Cleopatra.* In this regard, he had depicted the Baths of Caracalla in the work of the same name from 1899 (private collection), and recreated some scenes of votive and ceremonial processions. For example, Cleopatra's entrance into Rome shows the grandiose architecture of the city, the presence of crowds watching the procession, and the throwing of floral petals (Figure 8). These elements are also present in *Spring* (1894, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles), as mentioned above (Figure 9). The artist's willingness to capture background scenes of everyday life in the ancient world was of fundamental value to the filmmakers who decades later took his painting as a reference.

In the scenes of this film set in Egypt rather than Rome the influence of nineteenth-century painting is less evident. This is illustrated by the representation of settings such as Cleopatra's ship or the throne room of her palace in Alexandria which instead evidence an influence of the stylised and monumental Art Deco, so successful in the United States since the 1920s.

The art of bygone eras not only inspired the film's sets, but also had its mark on certain poses and attitudes adopted by the characters. In the scene in which Cleopatra receives Mark Antony, we can see a representation of the queen reclining on a luxurious *triclinium*, with an ostentatious background of feathers. This type of image is not inspired by Egyptian art but by the western artistic tradition, which starts with the recumbent Venus of the Renaissance painters (for instance, the famous examples of Titian),[22] continues in the Baroque with

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[22] As an example we can cite the Titian's *Venus and Musician* from the Prado Museum, Madrid (*ca.* 1555) or the version in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (*ca.* 1555-1565).

Figure 9. Spring, Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1894). Oil on canvas, 178.4 x 80.3cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Work in the public domain (http://rightsstatements.org/ vocab/NoC-US/1.0/).

Velázquez[23] and reaches nineteenth-century painting in which we find Cleopatra depicted reclining in an indolent pose in the paintings of Alexandre Cabanel (*Cleopatra Testing Poisons on Condemned Prisoners*, 1887, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen) or Alexis van Hamme (*Antony & Cleopatra, Egyptian Theater*, 1900, private collection). This seductive and self-absorbed image of the Egyptian queen also appeared in the performing arts. An example of this is shown in photographs of the actress Lillie Langtry, dressed as Cleopatra, holding a mirror and reclining on a *triclinium,* during her performance in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1891).[24]

After Cecil B. DeMille, many other directors of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s brought the love affairs of Cleopatra, Julius Caesar, and Mark Antony to life. These films included the British production by the Hungarian-born director Gabriel Pascal (1945), the film by the Mexican Ricardo Gavaldón (1946), and the Italian production by Piero Pierotti and Viktor Tourjansky (1962). However, it was the epic *Cleopatra* (1963), directed by Joseph Leo Mankiewicz (1909-1993), starring Elizabeth Taylor and brought to the screen in Technicolor, that achieved the greatest commercial and critical success. It is important to highlight the art direction team on this film, which won an Oscar for best art direction and included John DeCuir, Jack Martin Smith, Hilyard M. Brown, Herman A. Blumenthal, Elven Webb, Maurice Pelling and Boris Juraga. The design of a significant section of the sets was John DeCuir's responsibility, and he was able masterfully to balance Egyptian and Greek influences in his recreation of Alexandria (García 2015: 123) (Figure 10). His watercolour designs and their final materialisation in the full-colour film are inspired by neoclassical images, and there are obvious visual links to certain nineteenth-century paintings that recreated ancient civilisations, such as Thomas Cole's celebrated series entitled *The Course of Empire* (1833-1836, New York Historical Society), a set of five paintings showing the evolution of an empire from the primitive beginnings to its final disintegration (Figure 11).[25]

The costumes in *Cleopatra* are a nod to Egyptian culture, such as the clothes in scenes of solemn ceremonies in which the elements of the queen's costume are the usual ones of the pharaonic royalty as shown in the ancient temple reliefs. In the recreation of the interior scenes, however, the queen's sexual dimension is notably heightened through the use of nudity, in a manner typical of other films of the 1960s (Ruiz Garrido 2006: 193-194). In this respect, some of the most iconic scenes of the film show Cleopatra's legendary baths (Figure 12). The technique of using the transparency of the water, which partially reveals the queen's naked body submerged in her marble bathtub, is reminiscent of some of Alma-Tadema's paintings such as *A Favourite Custom* (1909, Tate Britain, London) (Figure 13).

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[23] This is the case of his famous painting *The Toilet of Venus*, also known as *Rokeby Venus* (1647-1651), National Gallery of Art, London.

[24] Library of the Congress, control number 98504776, https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3b10597/ (Accessed 14 June 2023).

[25] Cole was the founder of what is known as the Hudson River School, a school of American landscape painters deeply indebted to Romanticism and the Baroque tradition of ruined landscapes in the style of Claude Lorrain (1600?-1682). His paintings enjoyed a widespread popularity in the United States and were undoubtedly used for the recreation of towering sets of the peplum cinematic genre.

Figure 10. Port of Alexandria in Joseph Mankiewicz's film Cleopatra *(1963). Screenshot by the author.*

Figure 11. The Course of Empire, The Consummation, *Thomas Cole (1836). Oil on canvas, 129.5 x 193cm. New York Historical Society. Thomas Cole, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.*

Another of the film's pivotal moments is its denouement, when the death of the queen is depicted, accompanied in her suicide by her two slaves (Figure 14). In this respect, the story follows Plutarch's version (*Antony 85-86*):

But swift suffering had occurred. For, coming at a run and finding that the guards had perceived nothing, opening the doors, they found her lying dead on a golden couch arrayed

Figure 12. Cleopatra in her bath, played by Elizabeth Taylor in Joseph Leo Mankiewicz's film Cleopatra *(1963). Screenshot by the author.*

Figure 13. A favourite custom, *Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1909). Oil on panel, 66 x 45.1cm. Tate Britain, London. Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.*

as a queen. Of her women, the one called Iras was dying at her feet and another, Charmion, already tottering and heavy-headed, was trying to adjust the diadem around her head. When someone said [lit. someone saying] to her in anger, '[This is] a fine thing, Charmion' she said, 'It is indeed a very fine thing and befitting the descendant of so many kings'. She said nothing more but fell there by the side of the couch. It is said that the asp was brought in with those figs and was hidden by the leaves above [them], for thus Cleopatra had given orders that the creature should fasten upon her body with herself not being aware [of it]. But when, having removed some of the figs, she saw [it], she said, 'So here it is', and she held out her arm bared for the bite.

In nineteenth-century painting there are not many representations of Cleopatra's death that follow Plutarch's account. We do see, in a canvas by the Filipino artist Juan de Luna y Novicio (1881, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid), an image of the queen on her deathbed, on a golden bed, accompanied by her two maidservants, one already dead and the other in agony. There is also a definite parallel in the luxurious attire worn by Elizabeth Taylor in this scene and the majestic headdress with which the Victorian painter John Collier immortalised the already dead Cleopatra (1890, Gallery Oldham), accompanied by the two slaves. However, in Mankiewicz's blockbuster, the scale of the sets has no parallel with those depicted in paintings.

In addition to the figure of Cleopatra, the second major subject of Egyptian-inspired films of the peplum genre was biblical stories. After DeMille's triumph with his *Cleopatra*, his second great success in this genre was his remake of *The Ten Commandments* (1956). The silent version of this film (1923) —even if a large part of the film has a contemporary setting— had already been an important step in the historicist purpose of these Egyptian-set films, with Paul Uribe in charge of the art direction (Ramírez Domínguez 1986: 165). The 1956 version was a resounding success, produced in Technicolor, with some of its locations even being in Egypt. The art directors were Hal Pereira, Walter H. Tyler, and Albert Nozaki. In this case, the use of Technicolor made the pictorial borrowings more evident in this film. At the beginning, the

Figure 14. Cleopatra's death, played by Elizabeth Taylor in Joseph Leo Mankiewicz's film Cleopatra *(1963). Screenshot by the author.*

film recreates the discovery of Moses in the basket on the banks of the Nile, next to the royal palace.[26] This scene is full of elegance and sensuality, imagining the moments of intimacy in which the pharaoh's daughter, Bithiah, bathed in the waters of the Nile with her handmaidens. This scene can be compared to some nineteenth-century paintings such as *The Finding of Moses* by Frederick Goodall (1885, private collection).

Additionally, Alma-Tadema's paintings were also an important reference for the film and Ivo Blom located some 'visual quotations' from them (2017: 193-196). Notable among them is the scene depicting the death of the pharaoh's firstborn. This scene is based on the biblical passage in Exodus 12:29-42:

> At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.
>
> During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, 'Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me'.

The use of Alma-Tadema's *Death of the Pharaoh's Firstborn Son* (1872, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) for the representation of this scene on the screen had already occurred earlier in silent films like Louis Feuillade's *L'Exode* (1910) (Shepherd 2013: 121-122). In the case of *The Ten Commandments* we do not see a visual quotation of Alma-Tadema's painting, but rather a direct inspiration. The setting of the scene at night, as determined by the biblical story itself, creates a very similar luminosity in the both the painting and the film (Figures 15 and 16). But it is above all the representation of the inanimate body of the pharaoh's firstborn, whose head hangs back inertly, that appears to be directly inspired by Alma-Tadema's painting. This is also a pictorialist point of view, imitating a type of composition that Alma-Tadema frequently used when setting his interior scenes, consisting of focusing on the lower part of the walls and columns, suggesting such a colossal size of the architectural elements that only the lower parts can be included in the scene.

It is likely that Cecil B. DeMille was also inspired by Alma-Tadema's painting when it came to endowing his film with a certain chromatic palette. In the daytime scenes, the use of pastel colours —mostly pale blue, yellow and mauve— stands out, particularly in the representations of the palace of Ramesses II and Nefretiri. This delicate chromatic range can be seen in the dresses and scenes in which the queen is the main protagonist, recreating a luxurious atmosphere of pomp. It is worth noting the parallel between the image of Nefretiri being carried in a palanquin (Figure 17), accompanied by slaves carrying large feather fans, and Alma-Tadema's painting *The Finding of Moses* (1904, private collection) (Figure 18). The precise, detailed, and meticulous character of the latter must have inspired DeMille in his recreation of the lavish costumes and decorative objects of the movie scene. With regard to these, the pre-production work of painter Arnold Friberg and costume designers Dorothy Jeakins and

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[26] See 'Josephus as source of the Egyptian sequence in Cecil B. DeMille's The Ten Commandments (1956)' by Nuno Simões Rodrigues in this volume.

Figure 15. The death of the firstborn, in the film by Cecil B. DeMille's The Ten Commandments *(1956). Screenshot by the author.*

Figure 16. Death of the Pharaoh's Firstborn Son, *Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1872). Oil on canvas, 77 x 124.5cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.*

John L. Jensen, who made numerous drawings to create detailed costume designs for the film, are worth mentioning.[27]

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[27]   As a sample of the art direction work of the film, we have found some of these charcoal or watercolour drawings auctioned at Christie's, along with pieces of jewellery worn by the film's actors. https://www.christies.com/en/auction/pop-culture-22020/ (Accessed 14.06.2023).

Figure 17. Queen Nefretiri played by Anne Baxter in the film by Cecil B. DeMille's The Ten Commandments *(1956). Screenshot by the author.*

Figure 18. The finding of Moses*, Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1904). Oil on canvas, 136.7 x 213.4 cm. Private collection. Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.*

Leaving aside the story of Cleopatra and those derived from the Bible, it is possible to find other classic Hollywood peplum genre films with different themes that are set in Egypt. The 1950s were particularly prolific in this respect: *Valley of the Kings*, by Robert Pirosh (1954); *Land of the Pharaohs*, by Howard Hawks (1955), and additionally, *La donna dei faraoni*, by Victor

Tourjansky (1960). However, for the subject we are dealing with here, we are interested in highlighting the case of *The Egyptian* (1954) by Michael Curtiz (1886-1962), with George Davis and Lyle R. Wheeler as art directors. Álvarez Sosa affirms the intention of archaeological fidelity present in the film, appreciable in the reproduction of ancient Egyptian attire and of authentic archaeological pieces, such as the headdresses of the queens Nefertiti or Tiye (2012). However, when recreating the interior of temples and palaces, the author warns, as in most Egyptian peplum films, the hieroglyphs represented have no meaning (2012: 188).

In the case of *The Egyptian*, the inspiration in the sets is not so extensively inspired by nineteenth-century painting, although the grandiose nature of the representation of ancient Egyptian architecture and the profusion of colours used in the mural decoration are reminiscent of Alma-Tadema and other painters of his time.

However, we can distinguish the common models shared by the art directors of this film and the painters who, in the 19th century, recreated Egyptian scenes. In the same way that Alma-Tadema was inspired by the cycle of paintings of Nebamun located in the British Museum, as we have pointed out above, so in *The Egyptian* the inspiration is also through pieces preserved in American and European museums. In this regard, we have seen how one of the palace scenes recreated in the film (Figure 19) includes a painting from the tomb of Menna (TT69) in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, in the Theban Necropolis. This painting was well known in the United States because the Metropolitan Museum of New York holds a very faithful copy of it, painted by an artist specialised in copying Egyptian paintings, Nina M. Davies (Figure 20). This copy was executed in 1924 and is part of the large collection of facsimiles of Egyptian paintings kept at the Metropolitan Museum (Wilkinson 1983), on which Nina Davies worked in Luxor after her marriage to Norman de Garis Davies. The popularity of these facsimiles, much appreciated by museum visitors, probably led the art directors of *The Egyptian* to use them for the film sets. In addition, in the same film, greater historical realism is sought through the recreation of different reliefs of the Amarna period illustrating the royal family worshipping the solar disk of Aten, as we see in the representation of the pharaoh's palace at the end of the film, after the poisoning of Akhnaton.

Figure 19. The Egyptian, *film by Michael Curtiz (1954). Screenshot by the author.*

Figure 20. Menna and Family Hunting in the Marshes*, Tomb of Menna, Nina de Garis Davies (1924). Tempera on paper, 101 x 189cm. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of New York. Work in the public domain.*

Conclusion: the Need for Further Research into the Sources of Inspiration for Egyptian-based Cinema

Throughout this contribution, we have shown the influence that nineteenth-century painting, particularly the works of Lawrence Alma-Tadema but also of other painters of the period, had on the Egyptian-inspired cinema of classical Hollywood.

Moreover, the analysis of the aforementioned works also reveals how this inspiration from nineteenth-century painting is rarely achieved through direct copying. Directors such as Cecil B. DeMille or Joseph L. Mankiewicz resort to the aesthetics of authors such as Alma-Tadema or Gérôme, not to copy them, but to recreate certain values of that genre of painting which they are interested in transferring to the cinema of classical Hollywood. Hence, these directors and their art directors are interested fundamentally in the decorative character of these paintings, the elegance and luxury of their environments, the sensuality of the poses of their characters, and their supposed archaeological verisimilitude. Together with all these aesthetic values, certain ideological precepts inherited from the 19th century can also be perceived in these films, which continue to be a sample of the imperialist and orientalist vision with which the West, even in more contemporary times, has continued to look at ancient Egypt.

Finally, in addition to paintings, it would in the future be useful to analyse the impact of a more extensive range of visual culture, such as that influence of the impermanent constructions of the universal exhibitions, mentioned in this chapter, the scenographies of the performing arts, and Victorian costume parties, elements that may have had an important influence on Hollywood cinema but which have not been the subject of study to date.[28]

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[28] As Pilar Poblador (2017: 217-220) states, these issues were closely related to the universe of nineteenth-century painting and would merit a more detailed analysis in general and in relation to classical Hollywood cinema.

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Sex, Gender and Sexualisation:
Ancient Egypt in Contemporary Popular Culture

Abraham I. Fernández Pichel and Marc Orriols-Llonch[1]

Introduction

Over the last few decades gender studies has made a remarkable impact on the historiography of the ancient world, and Egyptology has by no means been exempt from this development. The application of new work in gender studies to this historical discipline has often clarified some of the traditionally accepted conceptions of gender and sexuality in ancient Egypt, leading to a proliferation of new analytical approaches to issues such as identity and ethnicity (Matić 2020; Schneider 2018), sexual orientation (Parkinson 1995), sexual relations (Orriols-Llonch 2016), masculinities (Diamond 2021; Parkinson 2008) and the role of women in society (Ayad 2022; Kleinke 2007), to name but a few examples.

For its part, contemporary popular culture (mainly cinema, TV series, comics, and genre literature) often employs narratives and motifs that illustrate, explicitly or implicitly, specific aspects of the particular issues outlined above, in the context of the cultural reception of ancient Egypt. In this (re)creation of the past from the present moment, considered in a broad sense of successive presents, ancient sources play a fundamental role in their capacity as generators of a general historical framework. However, other types of questions and motivations that revolve around current issues of various kinds (political, social, economic and ideological) in which authors and audiences find themselves immersed are more reflective of a modern source's contemporary context. Therefore, it is surprising, to say the least, that gender studies has scarcely explored the enormous potential of this type of critical approach in the specific case of Egypt re-imagined through popular culture.[2] In this sense, we must point out that this relative lack of interest on the part of specialists has not affected the study of other ancient civilisations in the same way. Indeed, for more than half a century, there has been a relatively extensive literature and numerous scientific conferences on gender and sexuality in literature and film inspired by the classical world (Pierce 2011; Shoat 1997; Wyke 1997).

Alongside this first eventuality, a second should be noted, which concerns the sources used to analyse the expressions in Egyptian-inspired popular culture which are relevant to gender studies. Most of the (few) studies published in this field use film and literary works created up to the middle of the last century, with a particular emphasis on the cinema of classical Hollywood and English literature from the late 19th and first part of the 20th century. At the same time, the cultural works scrutinised almost exclusively derive from the Western world. There is hardly any reference to the enormous amount of work from the last 50 years,

[2] One of the first exceptions to this was Meskell 1998.

while other cultural manifestations, such as those provided by comics, music, or video games, whose examples are not without interest, have been all but completely ignored.

This article aims to bring some of these more recent sources, together with other earlier examples, into a general reflection on various aspects of sexuality, in its broadest sense, in contemporary popular culture. This will be attempted through the analysis of selected works that present either complex narratives or simple incidental motifs inspired by ancient Egypt. The catalogue of sources consulted in this respect is by no means exhaustive, and our considerations are open to new contributions and possible modifications.

The structure of our approach to this analysis leads us firstly to identify a series of generalities relating to the thematisation of sexuality concerning ancient Egypt in popular culture (i.e. the cultural fascination with Cleopatra, who embodies the sexually voracious *femme fatale*; orientalism with its connotations of harems ruled over by a despotic patriarch; and the idea of ancient Egypt as the origin point of many aspects of human culture, including sexual practices), and, subsequently, to examine in greater detail the specific models of masculinities and femininities which are often transmitted by these works.

Preliminary Remarks

According to the Heliopolitan cosmogony, in the moments before the creation of the universe, designated in the Egyptian language by the terms *pȝwt* 'primeval times' or *sp tpy* 'First Occasion', the solar demiurge stood alone on a hill or solid platform emerging from the primordial and infinite waters of the chaos of pre-existence. Various ancient traditions explain how this androgynous divinity next resorted, among other modes of creation, to masturbation in order to bring his offspring, the gods Shu and Tefnut, into the world. In this way, the first sexual differentiation is established, Shu embodying the masculine principle and his sister and companion, Tefnut, representing the feminine (Allen 1988: 8-12; Bickel 1994: 71-75; Orriols-Llonch, 2012b). This sexual duality will govern the origin of future divine generations (Geb-Nut, Osiris-Isis, Seth-Nephtys), thus establishing a binarism that will be reflected in the composition of the Egyptian nuclear family: a man, a woman, and their offspring[3] in a clearly heteronormative scheme (Orriols-Llonch 2022).

Other mythological passages insist on the fundamental role played by sexuality in understanding the world according to the ancient Egyptians. For example, in the context of the resurrection of Osiris, fundamental as a guarantor of the continuity of the divine kingship, Isis, represented in her bird form, lowers herself onto the phallus of the deceased god to conceive the god Horus (Derchain 2012; Graham 2020; Orriols-Llonch 2020; Quack 2004). As a continuation of this act, the struggles between Horus and Seth for the succession to the throne vacated by Osiris also provide a series of testimonies. As early as the *Pyramid Texts* (PT 501C, *Pyr.* 1-6 [P]), the two gods have a series of sexual encounters in which anal penetration between the two is explicitly mentioned, and later, in the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom, only practised by Seth on Horus.[4] Similarly, certain passages mention the

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[3] The description of certain divinities in Egyptian historical sources attests, however, to an evident gender fluidity in some cases (Pries 2011; Stadler 2004). Likewise, in Egyptian society, there is also evidence of individuals with non-binary gender identities (Depauw 2003; Matić 2016; Quack 2012).
[4] For the Middle Kingdom: Kahun papyrus VI.12 (Griffith 1898: pl. 3; Parkinson 2004: 120-121) and for the New

mutilation of various parts of their bodies: Seth plucks out Horus's eye, and Horus removes Seth's testicles (PT 215, *Pyr.* 142a-b; PT 501C, *Pyr.* 1-6 P; PT 570B, *Pyr.* 1462c-1463e). These actions, in which two hegemonic male divinities confront each other in their claim to power, pursue a 'feminisation of the adversary': both the removal of the male genitals and being anally penetrated by another man would be seen to feminise the individual on whom the action is perpetrated, which would directly delegitimise him to occupy the Egyptian throne, conceived as something archetypically masculine.[5]

In an earthlier context, parietal or sculptural representations explicitly depicting the sexual practices of the ancient Egyptian population are rare, at least prior to the Greco-Roman period. Among them, we can count only about thirty examples, all belonging to 'unofficial' art, i.e., art that does not conform to the conventions of the official *decorum*. In all cases, these representations show heterosexual couples copulating in different positions and demonstrating a search for pleasure that goes beyond merely reproductive sex. The document par excellence in this respect is the so-called 'erotic' Turin papyrus (Omlin 1973), but we can also cite other types of testimonies on ostraca and parietal graffiti (Manniche 1977; Orriols-Llonch 2009). From the Greco-Roman period, on the other hand, we have many more images of sexual acts, even on more 'official' artefacts, such as amulets and small statuettes (Martin 1987; Omlin 1973: pl. XXX-XXXI; Richard 2005).

If we then consider how these iconographic and textual testimonies of the past may have influenced the image of sex and sexuality in ancient Egypt conveyed to us by contemporary popular culture, we perceive that other kinds of cultural references may well be more important. As Lynn Meskell points out in relation to certain sexual practices in Egyptomania: 'It seems that invoking historical Egypt is unnecessary, since it is our (re)construction of Egypt which has become the powerful and evocative vehicle of contemporary desires' (Meskell 1998: 63). The following are some of the most commonly observed cultural references.

Firstly, in fiction inspired by ancient Egypt, there is a disproportionate prominence of a negative and hypersexualised vision of Cleopatra VII that finds its origins in the classical world. Thus, in the words of the Latin poet Propertius (1st century BC), Cleopatra is 'the harlot queen (*meretrix regina*) of licentious Canopus, the one disgrace branded on Philip's line' (*Elegies* 3.11.39-40). The same description was later attributed to her, in the 1st century AD, by Pliny the Elder (*Naturalis Historia* 9.119). Cassius Dio (2nd-3rd century AD), for his part, states, 'she was of insatiable passion and insatiable avarice. She was swayed often by laudable ambition, but often by overweening effrontery' (*Historia Romana* 51.15.4).[6] At the iconographic level, various testimonies offer a caricatured image of the queen that again emphasises aspects of her sexuality. This is the case with fragments of Roman reliefs and *lucernae* in which Cleopatra VII is shown having sex with Mark Antony (BM 1865,1118.252; BM WITT.251)[7] or even copulating with a crocodile (BM 1865,1118.249; BM 1865,1118.252.+).[8]

Kingdom: *The Contendings of Horus and Seth* (Chester Beatty papyrus I, rº 11'1-8: Broze 1996: 90-92).

[5] For this and other types of sexual violence in ancient Egypt, see Matić 2021: 66-86.

[6] A compilation of sources on the subject can be found at T. Sewell-Lasater, 'Eternally Maligned as the Power-hungry *Femme Fatale*: Kleopatra VII in *Assassin's Creed Origins* and Other Video Games', in the present volume.

[7] For these testimonies, see, in order of citation: www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1865-1118-252 and http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_WITT-251 (Accessed 27.02.2023)

[8] For these testimonies, see, in order of citation: www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1865-1118-249 and www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1865-1118-252- (Accessed 27.02.2023)

These testimonies, and many others, support the image of Cleopatra VII as an ambitious woman desirous of an alliance with Rome that would strengthen and increase her power, first thanks to Julius Caesar and later, Mark Antony. The fact that these alliances with Rome were forged mainly in the Egyptian queen's bedchamber contributed to the fact that enemy propaganda often described her in the terms described above. We go on, in this article, to stress the continuity of this image of Cleopatra to the present day.

Secondly, the gender constructions and sexualisation of ancient Egypt in popular culture also clearly link to so-called 'orientalism'. In this way, some of the cultural clichés frequently associated with the Arab and oriental world, such as exoticism, polygamy and harems, among others, are applied to ancient Egypt (Said 1979: 190). Thus, in Marie Corelli's *Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul* (1897), the title character is the favourite of the harem of the Egyptian warrior Araxes, and in Roland Emmerich's *Stargate* (1994), the evil Ra, played by Jaye Davidson, dwells inside a pyramid in the company of a harem of half-naked children. However, these cultural elements are not specific to ancient Egypt. For example, we know that polygamy was a common practice of the pharaonic kingship, but there is no evidence of its existence in the rest of Egyptian society (Meskell 2005: 104-105; Toivari-Viitala 2001: 87-89). The same can be said in the case of harems. The 'harem' in ancient Egypt was simply the place of residence and education of royal wives, princes, and their entourage (Roth 2012: 2; Yoyotte 2015: 26-27). Therefore, its frequent depiction in fiction linked to sex and lust corresponds more readily to an understanding in the modern popular imagination of the harems of the Ottoman sultans as possessing a sexual character which lacks historical veracity.

The otherness of the Egyptian can also be seen in the western perception since the 19th century of mummies as authentic fetishes, often clearly imbued with sexual connotations (Meskell 1998: 64-66).[9] In this respect, a paradigmatic example in contemporary fiction would be Anne Rice's novel *The Mummy, or Ramses the Damned* (1989), in which the mummies of Ramses and Cleopatra, after their resurrection in early twentieth-century England, manifest an uncontrollable propensity for carnal pleasure.

Thirdly, the civilisations of pre-classical antiquity, i.e., Egypt and Mesopotamia, are often viewed through the lens of the 'historiographical notion of origins'. According to this notion, the Nile valley and the territories around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were the places where the first manifestations of a wide range of cultural practices, situations and/or processes took place. This question is perfectly exemplified in the organisation of Samuel N. Kramer's book *History begins at Sumer: Thirty-Nine 'Firsts' in Recorded History* (1956), which brings together different chapters whose titles, in all cases, follow the form of 'The First…' or 'The First Case of…'. In the subject that interests us in this article, chapter 33 is entitled 'The Sacred Marriage: The First Sex Symbolism' (Kramer 1956: 303-324). In the case of popular culture, this idea of origins is clearly reflected in Olatunde Osunsanmi's film *The Fourth Kind* (2009), which references Sumerian as the oldest language of humanity (Mosleth King 2021: 4), or the description of Mesopotamia as the cradle of the oldest civilisations in Chloe Zao's *The Eternals* (2020) (Fernández Pichel 2023). As far as Egypt is concerned, numerous works of fiction describe this civilisation as the origin of the widest variety of such phenomena. Thus, the

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[9] This is the case in certain aristocratic practices in the Old Continent, such as mummy unrolling ceremonies, in which the deceased Egyptian gradually reveals his or her nakedness during a macabre striptease show. Similarly, mummy powder was often mass-marketed in nineteenth-century Europe for its supposed aphrodisiac properties.

instalment of the video game in the *Assassin's Creed* series which is inspired by ancient Egypt is entitled *Origins* (2017). Furthermore, in Anne Rice's novel *The Queen of the Damned* (1988), it is in Egypt that the first cases of vampirism manifests, and in Bryan Singer's *X-Men: Apocalypse* (2016), it is there that the first of the mutants, En Sabah Nur, appears. Two references are particularly explicit in the precise area of sex. First, in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969), the protagonist Billy Pilgrim wanders through New York and finds, in Times Square, a seedy bookshop full of erotic books. One of the volumes in the shop deals with oral sex from ancient Egypt to the present. In this testimony, therefore, Egypt represents the beginning of such sexual practices for humankind. Second, in the third season (S03E02) of *What We Do in the Shadows* (2021), Nandor, Nadja, and Laszlo, three of the four main vampires in the series, visit the library of the Vampire Council. Laszlo then tells them that this library contains the most significant and oldest collection of pornographic works in the world. Among the (fictional) books found there are the 'Knobnomicon' from 706 BC, Gutenberg's 'Vaginary' (1487), Tocqueville's 'Lusty Discharge Pamphlet' (1842) and, the oldest, a book on the longest penises of ancient Egypt.

In short, the issues listed above, among others, contribute to the configuration of a clearly sexualised image of ancient Egypt in popular culture, in which some of the usual tropes of cultural reception and Egyptomania from its earliest manifestations converge. We now turn to some specific examples of this re-imagining of ancient Egypt, in which current issues and motivations, often in relation to the tastes and preferences of audiences in the context of so-called 'mass culture', are also evident. For all that, little of the above would find direct inspiration in the ancient sources of the pharaonic past.

Masculinities and Femininities in Contemporary Egyptomania

Popular culture is a fundamental source for understanding contemporary gender constructions. The analysis of certain visual representations of characters or descriptions of these characters included in the texts of various works of Egyptian-inspired fiction thus reveals various schemas of masculinity and femininity, in which a clear thematisation of the male and female bodies and sexualities comes into focus.

Masculinities

In the case of men, in recent narratives inspired by ancient Egypt we often notice a celebration of the physical and athletic values of certain main characters. The creation of these characters is part of a long tradition that dates back to the production of a whole series of Italian epic films from the late 1950s that featured a hyper-muscled Hercules (McGeough 2022: 214-239), as well as the representation of comic book heroes from the so-called 'Golden Age' (1938-1956). In the realm of Egyptomania, these influences are not felt until much later, with Russ Manning and Joe Kubert's *The Ape Man Battles the Stone Sphinx* (*Tarzan Vol 1 #237*) (1975) and Roger Barnes's *Heru Son of Ausar* (1993), or, more recently, with the Scorpion King in Stephen Sommers's *The Mummy Returns* (2001) and the subsequent spinoff sagas (especially Chuck Russell's *The Scorpion King* (2002) and *The Scorpion King 2: Rise of a Warrior* (2008) by Russell Mulcahy). Two recent works continue the theme in the creation of their characters: *Gods of Egypt* (2016) by Alex Proyas and the comic *God Is Dead* (2013) by Jonathan Hickman and Mike Costa.

In *Gods of Egypt*, the first of these two works, the fundamental episodes of the so-called myth of Osiris are recreated in a framework clearly inspired by steampunk and retro-futurist aesthetics. After the *coup d'état* perpetrated by the god Seth and his supporters and the fratricide of Osiris, the evil god undertakes a systematic annihilation of his divine adversaries and reduces the inhabitants of Egypt to slavery. Horus, the rightful successor to the throne of Osiris, then goes into exile and progressively stages his return to avenge his father's death and regain the power that the tyrant has since seized. The film thus uses the setting of a mythical and timeless Egypt to frame the essential principles of a type of narrative common to the fantasy and adventure genre. According to these, the advent of evil, represented by Seth, is the starting point of a path to restoring the previous balance that can only be reached after the victory of the hero (Horus) in a final confrontation with the anti-hero (Seth).[10] As the defining moment of the film, this combat is characterised as a fight between equals, in which the gods are portrayed in their physical magnificence: their bodies are athletic, vigorous and of enormous size (Fernández Pichel 2023).

This heroic characterisation of Horus is emphasised from the first moments of the film, in which his divine body is clearly introduced as a theme. After a nocturnal celebration, Horus awakens in his bed, and an entourage of attractive maidservants urges him to begin preparations for his presentation as the new king to the people. The half-naked god enters the bath and is cared for by the young women, who praise the physical strength he showed in his fight against a fearsome lion whose corpse hangs from a rope in the room. His wife, Hathor, of exotic and glowing beauty (played by Élodie Yung, a French actress of Cambodian origin),[11] then enters the scene and sensually massages Horus's body (Figure 1). In the next scene, even before the ceremony, Hathor chides Horus for bedding any girl who flutters her eyelashes, ironically emphasising the god's polygamy. This brief sequence makes explicit, therefore, a masculinity defined in terms of both the physical and sexual vigour of the character, thus making Horus the perfect king for the Egyptians. These same qualities can be attributed to the

Figure 1. The bath scene in Gods of Egypt *(2016) by Alex Proyas (Screenshot by the authors).*

[10] Horus is thus defined as the archetypal 'Epic or Romantic Hero', according to the classification established by Bruce Meyer (2006: 246-249).
[11] On the controversy over the ethnic origins of the film's cast members, see McGeough 2022: 245.

Figure 2. The god Horus endowed with a robotic body in Alex Proyas's Gods of Egypt *(2016)*
(Screenshot by the authors).

villainous Seth, whose prowess as a warrior and military accomplishments and whose sexual promiscuity with the goddesses Nephtys and Hathor are extolled.[12]

The extensive physical energy of the contenders in *Gods of Egypt* is likewise defined by their capacity for hybridisation. The fight sequences show the transformation of Horus and Seth into theriomorphic beings (with the head of a falcon and an indeterminate canid, respectively)[13] equipped with a robotic exoskeleton that increases their strength and endurance (Figure 2). This attribute helps to accentuate not the Egyptian gods' magical or supernatural/divine skills in the film's narrative, but the superiority of their physical abilities, which are thus focused on the body and its artificial optimisation.

Numerous visual analogies with this work can be found in the second of the two works mentioned above, namely in the basic premises of *God Is Dead* (#1-6). In general terms, this comic presents the return of pagan gods from the past to the present-day world, who then embark on a process of territorial conquest and subjugation of the population. The Norse, Egyptian, Aztec, and Greek gods thus established theocracies all over the planet, in the maintenance of which they face a resistance represented by human scientists, in a clear opposition between religion and science. The wars between the pantheons, provoked by the expansionist desires of each of them, and over the course of which they will eliminate each other, contribute decisively to the definitive fall of the ancient gods. Most of the plot focuses on these divine battles.

In the case of the Egyptian gods, they form a group of three made up of Horus, Anubis, and Bastet (Figure 3). Like the rest of the gods, these characters exist outside of their characteristic chronological and spatial context, as the action is set in the present and in a struggle on a global scale. The iconography adopted is faithful to the ancient representations: Horus, Anubis, and Bastet are identifiable by their conventional features (the head of a falcon, jackal, and cat,

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[12] In Egyptian mythology, the goddess Nephtys, wife and sister of Seth, is said to have been unfaithful to Seth and committed adultery with Osiris (Gaber 2015; Lieven 2006). The love triangle formed by Horus, Seth, and Hathor in the film, on the other hand, has no parallel in ancient Egyptian sources.
[13] For Seth's animal, see, among others, Velde 1967: 13-14; McDonald 2000: 75-81.

respectively), although there are apparent dissimilarities in terms of their bodies. In the case of the male gods, Horus and Anubis have naked torsos and exaggeratedly muscular physiques, as if they were bodybuilders. As mentioned above, this image is indebted to numerous epic films inspired by antiquity, but above all, in this case, to the influence exerted by superhero comics in the Marvel and DC tradition and their transposition into cinema at least since 2008. Even the goddess Bastet is represented in the comic with a body whose masculinisation, shown by its imposing physicality, is countered by the disproportionate size of her breasts. In *God Is Dead*, the gods are muscular athletes, but they also fly, emit bolts of power, and control the elements. Horus, Anubis, and Bastet are thus supervillains. In the battle sequences their bodies are the focus of the viewer's attention, seeking to arouse in the spectator a will to emulate them, and/or sexual desire (Neale 1993: 4-8). In their modes of action there is also a clear sexual distinction: Horus and Anubis intervene directly in the mêlée, displaying their brutality through hand-to-hand combat; Bastet, on the other hand, acts at a distance, directing a cohort of cats that attack the opponents. The male protagonists evidence action, while the female protagonist represents passivity (Gates 2006: 41).

The human counterparts to the gods in the classic good *versus* evil trope in comics and films are not, however, such physically endowed contenders, as is the case in *Gods of Egypt*. The resistance in *God Is Dead* is led by two individuals whose characteristics contrast the hyperphysicality of the gods: an old man and a man in a wheelchair, clearly alluding to Albert

Figure 3. Horus, Bastet and Anubis as representatives of the Egyptian pantheon in God Is Dead *#1 (2013) by Jonathan Hickman and Mike Costa (Screenshot by the authors).*

Figure 4. Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking as leaders of the human Resistance against divine power on Earth in God Is Dead*#1 (2013) by Jonathan Hickman and Mike Costa (Screenshot by the authors).*

Einstein and Stephen Hawking (Figure 4). In short, evil is embodied in a hyper-masculinity in which strength and physical violence are emphasised, whereas good is firmly on the side of science.

Somewhat different is the thematisation of the body and sexuality in the comic *La foire aux immortels* (1980) by Enki Bilal, which is the first volume of the *Trilogie Nikopol* (1980-1992); its film version *Immortel ad vitam* (2004); and the video game *Nikopol: Secrets of the Immortals* (2008) by White Birds Productions. In these works, and even with significant diegetic differences between them, the Egyptian gods are involved in the main events of the story. Broadly speaking, they are set in a typical science fiction universe in which Paris in the comic book and the video game and New York in the film serve as the setting of an 'urban dystopia' (Kawa 2009: 164). In both cases, the starting point is the appearance of a pyramid spaceship in the sky above these technologised and decadent metropolises, inside which are the Egyptian gods (Figure 5). One of them, the god Horus, decides to rebel and abandon the pyramid. He flees to the city, where he meets the fugitive Nikopol, whose body he will use to further his plans against his fellow gods.

On a visual level, the comic represents the Egyptian divinities in their theriomorphic aspects, with animal heads, the latter allowing the identification of each of them, always in accordance with their usual iconography in ancient sources. This is the case for Anubis, Bastet, Horus, Thoth, Sobek, Amon, Khnum, Taweret, and, to a lesser extent, Bes, whose appearance is not so similar to Egyptian depictions of him. The bodies of the gods, however, receive special treatment. Numerous vignettes reproduce the semi- or completely naked torsos of the figures and occasionally show the breasts, penis, or buttocks of some of the divinities depicted.[14] The plentiful amount of clothing on the humans in the city thus contrasts with the nudity of the divine bodies, which thus serves as an explicit expression of the otherness of the Egyptians. There is no trace of heroism or eroticism in these representations as is the case in *Gods of Egypt* and *God Is Dead.* The bodies are unsightly and participate in the filth and corruption of

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[14] Nudity features in plentiful ancient Egyptian sources, as abundant depictions of the ithyphallic gods Min and Amun or the naked Bes illustrate.

Figure 5. Congregation of Egyptian gods inside the pyramid in Enki Bilal's La foire aux immortels *(1980)*
(Screenshot by the authors).

the futuristic city environments. The aim is thus to awaken a certain discomfort in the reader, analogous to that which the human characters in the comic manifest in their encounter with these gods. In an example of this, after a long enforced hibernation due to his conviction for desertion, Nikopol exclaims in the presence of Horus:

> Et aujourd'hui je me réveille, trente ans plus tard, station Alésia, une jambe en moins, pissant tout mon sang, en compagnie d'un homme à poil à tête de rapace qui connaît tout de ma vie et se prétend dieu...[15]

On the political level, too, there is an evident conflict between the Parisian regime and the newcomers. Paris is ruled by a fascist party headed by Jean-Ferdinand Choublanc. The elite of society is made up of an overwhelming majority of men. At the same time, the fertile women are confined to an underground clinic, undergoing artificial reproduction techniques that ensure the conception of a higher percentage of males. Of course, none of the representatives of local power are women. The emergence of the Egyptians and their model of power led by Anubis and Bastet is therefore in clear conflict with the Choublanc regime: the phallocracy of Paris, as defined by Bilal himself, is opposed to the sexual bicephaly of the pyramid.

In the film *Immortel ad vitam*, on the other hand, the sexual content is much more explicit. The initial premise remains the same as in the first volume of the comic: Horus occupies the body of the returned Nikopol. However, the purpose of this possession has lost an important part of its political dimension (to overthrow Anubis and Bastet and the Choublanc regime). In this version, Horus, condemned for his betrayal of the gods, is sent to New York to spend his last days before his punishment is carried out and he loses his immortality. The god then wants

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[15] 'And today I wake up, thirty years later, in Alésia station, one leg missing, pissing blood, in the company of a naked man with the head of a bird of prey who knows everything about my life and claims to be god...' (Author's translation).

to find a suitable woman with whom he can beget a divine offspring to provide continuity for his existence. His choice is Jill, a young non-human woman with blue hair and skin, who has the unique ability to procreate with the gods. Thus, while in *La foire aux immortels* the human protagonists were exclusively male, the film and the second and third parts of the comic, *La femme piège* (1986) and *Froid équateur* (1992), introduce women as protagonists (Goffette 2014: 251-254).

However, in pursuing his plan, Horus, in the film version, needs to adopt human form in order to copulate with Jill, and he uses the body of Nikopol for this purpose. Thus, even indirectly, the god can have sex with a woman (Figure 6) in a mode of sexual intercourse whose parallels in ancient Egypt have recently been pointed out (Matić 2018a; 2018b). In a manner typical in a world of sordidness and decadence such as New York at the end of the 21st century, the first contact between the two is made by means of coercion: Horus, in the body of Nikopol, hypnotises Jill, subjecting her to his will and raping her in a hotel room. The filming of this sex sequence employs changing and progressively distancing perspectives, thus making explicit the spectator's position as a direct participant in what is happening through a voyeuristic gaze. Horus, Nikopol, and Jill configure, in short, a triangle in which reproductive sexuality acquires connotations of continuity and perpetuation, and in which the body is configured as both vessel and support (Nikopol as the vessel of Horus and Jill as the vessel charged with carrying the descendant of Horus).

In short, the characters in the works consulted contribute to characterising hegemonic masculinity in which a conscious visual focus on the divine body is evident. In *Gods of Egypt* and *God Is Dead*, we thus witness the physical and sexual exaltation of the characters in the context of superheroic narratives which are pseudo-mythologically inspired. However, while in *God Is Dead* each of the gods seems to act entirely independently, in *Gods of Egypt*, Horus

Figure 6. Sex scene between Nikopol, as the vessel of Horus (whose head is visible above the human's), and Jill in Enki Bilal's Immortal (ad vitam) *(2004) (Screenshot by the authors).*

moves from the usual isolation of the hegemonic male to embrace a collaborative masculinity through his bond with the young human, Bek.[16] In the *Trilogie Nikopol*, meanwhile, the body and the notion of corporeality manifest a greater dynamism that affects the reproductive type of contact between gods and humans in a distinctly heteronormative framework. These examples contrast with that of the evil Ra in the film *Stargate* (1994), whose body becomes the sensitive manifestation of a queered Egypt and thus of a masculinity defined by its ambiguity and fluidity (Dobson 2019: 51-52; Meskell 1998: 70-75). This gender shifting is also present in earlier literary works like Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897) and Sax Rohmer's *Brood of the Witch Queen* (1918). In these narratives, queer-coded ancient Egyptians typically function as evil, thus explicitly linking androgyny to deviance, whereas the hypermasculine examples noted previously have the capacity to embody either good or evil.[17]

Femininities

Generally speaking, the Egyptian-inspired narratives and motifs used in contemporary popular culture allow us to identify two fundamental models of femininity. In analysing the first of these, we focus on Fernando Cerchio's film *Nefertiti, regina del Nilo* (1961). The appearance of this queen in historical genre literature and films is common in the context of the events of the reign of the pharaoh Amenhotep IV/Akhenaton. A third prominent figure in these narratives is the sculptor Thutmose, creator of the famous bust of the queen in the Neues Museum in Berlin. In popular culture, the fine and delicate beauty recreated by Thutmose in this work of art betrays the artist's affectionate closeness to Nefertiti, which often leads to plots imagining a romance between the two characters. In Cerchio's film, the young sculptor Thumos (=Thutmose, played by Edmund Purdom) and the beautiful Tanit (Jeanne Crain) conceal their love which would contravene the precepts of the priesthood of Amun, into which the young woman aspires to enter. On his accession to the throne, Amenhotep IV, nevertheless, grants Thumos permission to marry Tanit so that she can be free from the custody of the god's high priest, the wicked Benakon. The jubilant young woman then exclaims that she can now become the wife of the sculptor Tumos and the mother of their many future children. The relationship between Tumos and Tanit thus reproduces a typically heteronormative scheme that follows the patterns of hegemonic masculinity and traditional femininity: the husband exercises his function as breadwinner through professional work while the woman embodies the perfect housewife with a chiefly reproductive role.

Events later in the film bring a halt to their plans, as Tanit instead becomes the betrothed of King Amenhotep IV. As queen, now called Nefertiti, her mission is still to bear children, but in this case, to give the pharaoh a legitimate successor who would eventually become king of Egypt. Unable to forget Thumos, however, the queen repeatedly rejects Amenhotep, who thus suffers and views Nefertiti as the cruel cause of his torment. Thumos is then commissioned to make a bust of the queen, and the intimacy that develops between the two during its execution rekindles their love for each other. The queen then confesses that she has not betrayed Thumos since she is not a wife for Amenhotep, no doubt an allusion to her avoidance of consummating her marriage with the pharaoh. This sequence of the film, set in the royal palace, defines Nefertiti as a virtuous adulteress[18] while at the same time emphasising her

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[16]   This transition is characteristic of certain characters in contemporary superhero cinema (McGrath 2016: 137-140).

[17]   On ancient Egypt and its characters as evil in popular culture, see Fernández Pichel 2023 (with bibliography).

[18]   For adultery as acceptable to conservative audiences in classic Hollywood in the 1950s, see McGeough 2022: 137.

Figure 7. Nefertiti as queen of Egypt, assuming power after the death of Akhenaton in Fernando Cerchio's Nefertiti, regina del Nilo *(1961) (Screenshot by the authors).*

empowerment, the manner in which the queen imposes her own decisions on patriarchal mandates and conventions, represented here by Amenhotep IV and by the priest Benakon, who will be revealed to be the young woman's father. In the final part of the film, this is explicitly evidenced in his seizure of power in the face of Amenhotep's inability to rule his people and deal with the conflict against the priesthood of Amun (Figure 7). However, this interregnum during which Nefertiti has some empowerment is conceived in the film as an anomaly, simply as a period of transition and disorder after the death of the pharaoh and until the arrival of the man again, personified in Thumos, with whom the happy ending is achieved when the couple is reunited. In this way, Nefertiti, without ceasing to be the queen, becomes Tanit again and resumes her previous role as a housewife and future wife of Thumos. In this respect, Thumos's final words are illustrative: 'Nefertiti now you are Egypt, but we will remember the Tanit of yesterday'.

In the second, more recurrent model of femininity, the Egyptian woman is presented as the archetype of sensuality and superficiality. The case of the character of Nefernefernefer in the novel *Sinuhe egyptiläinen* (*Sinuhe the Egyptian*) (1945) by Mika Waltari and of Nefer in its film version, *The Egyptian* (1954) directed by Michael Curtiz, are paradigmatic. In the novel, Nefernefernefer is a beautiful Theban courtesan with whom Sinuhe falls in love at a very young age.[19] The first meeting between the two occurs when Sinuhe is about to be ordained as a priest in the temple of Amun. The woman notices Sinuhe's presence and seduces him, taking advantage of his innocence and sexual immaturity. The Egyptian, at that stage, has to resist Nefernefernefer's explicit sexual offers since, as part of his ordination, he must reside within the temple without the possibility of leaving the sacred precinct and thus of visiting the woman's chambers. The subsequent meeting between the two, when Sinuhe has become an adult, takes place in Nefernefernefer's house, where all kinds of excesses involving alcohol and sex take place daily (Figure 8). In the context of these orgies, the phrase uttered by Nefernefernefer 'I am a decent woman and no harlot' seems to suggest just the opposite. The

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[19] The name Nefernefernefer, in Egyptian, insists three times on the word 'Beauty' (*nfr*), which indicates, by intensifying repetition, the fullness of her beauty, 'perfection' (*nfrnfrnfr* or *nfrw*).

Figure 8. Evening entertainment at Nefer's house in Michael Curtiz's The Egyptian *(1954) (Screenshot by the authors).*

fact that Nefer, this time using an abbreviated version of her name, is of Babylonian origin is a further pointer to this in Curtiz's film version.[20] In return for consenting to Sinuhe's carnal desires, however, Nefernefernefer/Nefer incessantly demands that the Egyptian bring her various material goods as proof of his love for her. The beautiful woman is never satisfied with what she receives and demands new riches, which Sinuhe himself appropriates from his parents when his own resources are exhausted. This brings ruin and loneliness for Sinuhe as his parents, disgraced by their son's behaviour, resort to suicide.

It is thus evident that the superficiality of Nefernefernefer/Nefer, who manipulates Sinuhe through seduction and is only interested in wealth, reveals a misogynistic view of women as the embodiment of the vices and flaws that lead men to perdition.[21] In this sense Nefernefernefer/Nefer embodies the 'wrong woman' of the Hollywood cinematic epic of the 1950s and 1960s (McGeough 2022: 127-128), with which the Nefertari character in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956), played by Anne Baxter, is also identified (McGeough 2022: 127-128),[22] and in which we even recognise particular reminiscences in Anck-su-namun (Patricia Velasquez) in Stephen Sommers's *The Mummy* (1999).

Other testimonies also insist on the propensity of Egyptian female rulers for frivolity and luxury. In Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958), Holly Golightly, the female protagonist, played by Audrey Hepburn in Blake Edwards's 1961 film, prepares to go out on the town and the narrator describes her radiant appearance in the following terms: 'it was a subject to ponder,

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[20] As Rosa (2021: 181, 186) points out, Nefer's relation to the 'Whore of Babylon' of biblical resonance finds an obvious expression here.

[21] For this trope in Egyptian literature, see *Tale of the Two Brothers*, *Truth and Falsehood* or the *Myth of Isis and Re* (Orriols-Llonch 2012b).

[22] See also N. Rodrigues, 'Josephus as the Source of the Egyptian Sequences from Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956)', in this volume.

how, from such wreckage, she evolved the eventual effect: pampered, calmly immaculate, as though she'd been attended by Cleopatra's maids'. In *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005) by Paul Auster, the wellbeing achieved by little Lucy, taken in by her great-uncle in the big city to avoid the toxic influence of her parents in the village, is described in a clear analogy to the comforts of a monarch: 'Breakfast in bed. Just like Queen Nefertiti'.

Therefore, in general, wickedness, frivolity, ambition, sensuality, and luxury are some of the leitmotifs used in the characterisation of this fictional model of femininity in Egyptomania. All these attributes are frequently brought together in the description of Queen Cleopatra VII as early as antiquity, thus reconfiguring the portrayal of the historical character to transform her into an 'Egyptian Pop Queen' (Kulpa 2022: 37). We now focus on some recent examples that illustrate this, focusing on the explicit hypersexualisation of Cleopatra.

The portrayal of Cleopatra as a seductive queen of unparalleled beauty has directly influenced the choice of the actresses and models chosen to play her in cinema.[23] Two leading examples are, firstly, Elizabeth Taylor, giving an iconic performance in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra* (1963), and secondly, Monica Belluci in Alain Chabat's *Asterix et Obélix: Mission Cléopâtre* (2002).[24] Both Elizabeth Taylor and the Italian actress were, in their respective times, among the most sought-after screen actresses, the former in both Hollywood and European cinema, and the latter predominantly in Europe but with forays into American cinema. Both were considered worldwide sex-symbols, making them perfect incarnations of Cleopatra on the big screen. The same can be said of the actresses who starred in earlier films which took the queen's life as their main theme, such as Claudette Colbert in Cecil B. DeMille's *Cleopatra* (1934) or Sophia Loren in Mario Mattoli's *Due notti con Cleopatra* (1954). More recently, Bill Condon's film *Dreamgirls* (2006) briefly features Beyoncé Knowles as Cleopatra, a representation with obvious ethnic connotations in relation to Black Power.[25] This recreation of Cleopatra's beauty spreads beyond the medium of film. Her portrayal in comics, literature, music, and video games also emphasise the magnificence of her beauty and her captivating sensuality. Examples include the comic *Cléopâtre, la reine fatale* (2017) by Thierry and Marie Gloris, the video game *Assassin's Creed Origins* (2017),[26] and the pseudo-Cleopatra embodied by Kate Perry in the music video for her song *Dark Horse* (2013).[27]

Likewise, Cleopatra's beauty is often inseparable from her sexual voracity. This longstanding topos in representations of the queen was decisively influenced by Propertius's famous description of Cleopatra as a *meretrix regina* noted above. Two works of fiction from the last decade testify to the reformulation of this well-known attitude to Cleopatra in popular culture.

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[23] For an analysis of the different Cleopatras in cinema from the early 20th century to the first decade of the 2000s see Wenzel (2005: 92-125).

[24] On a visual level, Elizabeth Taylor's Cleopatra has been the most influential of subsequent representations of the queen in popular culture. For a consideration of this see Wyke and Montserrat 2011: 188-191.

[25] In the present paper, ethnicity does not constitute a primary object of reflection. However, we would like to draw attention to the frequent reproduction of Queen Cleopatra and, above all, Nefertiti, as icons of blackness. In this respect, alongside the example of Beyoncé mentioned above, it is worth noting the music video for *Remember the Time* by Michael Jackson (1992), which shows the model Iman as the image of Nefertiti (Matić 2017: 111-112), or the recent theatrical production *Antony and Cleopatra* (2018) by Simon Godwin, in which the queen is played by Sophie Okonedo.

[26] See the article 'Eternally Maligned as the Power-hungry *Femme Fatale*: Kleopatra VII in *Assassin's Creed Origins* and Other Video Games' by Tara Sewell-Lasater in this volume.

[27] Although the identification of the Egyptian magician protagonist in the film clip with Cleopatra is not explicit, Katy Perry's aesthetic in the clip is clearly based on Elizabeth Taylor's Cleopatra. Likewise, the recurring appearance of the snake motif connects to one of the queen's attributes in popular culture (Kulpa 2022: 42).

The first of these, the comic *Chrononauts* (2015) by Mark Millar and Sean Murphy, features Corbin Quinn and Danny Reilly as the main protagonists. These two technological geniuses achieve time travel by means of special suits designed by themselves. This conveys them to 1920s New York, 1960s Paris, the Middle Ages, prehistory, and ancient Egypt. In Corbin's sumptuous New York residence he has a collection of the clothes and objects which he wears for each of his time travels, as well as a blackboard on which he records the names of the women he has sex with in each of these contrasting lives in different eras. On the list are, for example, Marilyn Monroe and Cleopatra. These women are icons of sensuality and sexuality who have transcended their historical moment. At the same time, their mention in this list is intended to reinforce Corbin's expression of hypermasculinity, which has clear sexist connotations.

The second of these examples is found in Edgar Wright's film *Last Night in Soho* (2021). In this case, the linking of sexuality with the Egyptian queen is merely an incidental element of the plot. The character Sandie, played by Anya Taylor-Joy, goes to London to realise her dreams of becoming a singer. However, after a series of disappointments, she turns to sex work to continue her quest for success. In one of the sequences in the club where Sandie offers her sexual services, we briefly witness the performance of an exotic dancer whose stage name is Cleopatra.

This hypersexualisation in Egyptian-inspired popular culture is also reflected in pornographic cinema.[28] In this genre, which is part of what Linda Williams defines as 'body genres' (1991),[29] the use of ancient Egyptian characters is a regular feature. It is interesting to note that, in general, no specific Egyptian male character is used as a protagonist in these films.[30] Instead, generic designations such as 'Pharaoh' appear, as in *The Pharaoh's Curse* (2000), written and directed by Thor Stephens, or, quite often, in films starring mummies, as in Giancarlo Candiano's *The MummyX* (2005) or in *Raiders of The Lost Arse: The Mummy's Hand* (2002) directed by Chris Ward and J.D. Slater.

As far as women are concerned, Cleopatra VII is the ultimate choice as protagonist. Here a difference must be noted between 'hardcore porn', in which scenes of all kinds of explicit sexual acts are shown and the hypersexualisation of the protagonists is extreme, and 'softcore porn', in which nudity and non-explicit sexual acts appear and the objectification of the protagonists is much less pronounced, although it exists.

In the former, the queen is the protagonist of films such as *Antonio e Cleopatra* (1996) written and directed by Joe D'Amato (Figures 9-10), *Cleópatra. O Tesão do Faraó* (2003) directed by Roger Lemos, and *Cleopatra II: The Legend of Eros* (2004) directed by Antonio Adamo and written by Barbara Brown. Cleopatra is also a regular in BDSM films,[31] such as *Cleopatra's Bondage Revenge*

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[28] See in this respect Wenzel (2005: 280-282).

[29] In the sense of a bodily excess shared by the pornographic genre, horror films and drama, related to the intensification of the emotions and sensations required by the characters in the plots and the mimicry of these by the viewer (i.e. fear in the case of horror films, sexual ecstasy in relation to porn films or, finally, pain and grief in dramatic films) (Williams 1991: 3-5).

[30] Certain personalities of historic Egypt could easily have been sexualised and therefore explicitly linked to pornographic cinema, due to certain well-known episodes in their biographies. For example, Ramses II, who is mentioned in ancient sources as having had almost a hundred children. Perhaps in reference to this issue, and not without some irony, a Canadian brand of condoms is named after the pharaoh (Mougenot 2022: 27, fig. 2).

[31] The acronym for sexual practices such as Bondage, Discipline/Dominance, Submission and Sadomasochism.

Figures 9-10. Scenes from Antony and Cleopatra *(1996) by Joe D'Amato (Screenshot by the authors).*

(1985) directed by Carter Stevens or Syren Productions's *Cleopatra Sadistica* (2010), and in transgender porn such as *Yasmin Lee as Cleopatra* (2011).

In softcore porn, meanwhile, the queen appears in the animated films *Cleopatra* (1970) directed by Osamu Tezuka and Eiichi Yamamoto (Figures 11-12), and *The Notorious Cleopatra* (1970) directed by Peter Perry Jr (as A.P. Stootsberry) and in the live-action film *Sogni erotici di Cleopatra* (1985) directed by Rino Di Silvestro. Within this subgenre, we have found just one film whose protagonist is Nefertiti: *Nefertiti, figlia del sole* (1995), directed by Guy Gilles.

To sum up, beyond the obvious objectification and hypersexualisation of the individual, whether female or male, in this type of film, the predominance of Cleopatra VII is particularly noteworthy. This further confirms our previous observations regarding the characterisation of the Ptolemaic queen in Egyptomania. This tradition is also echoed in various comic books with erotic content, such as *Cléobis, jumelle de Cléopâtre* (1982) by Yan, included in the collection *Les amours de l'histoire*, and *Cleopatra* (1975) in the publication *Erogys 4: Laura* by Guillermo Bestard.

In short, the analysis of the female characters in the selected works reveals a clear distinction between the two types of femininity. On the one hand, Nefertiti, in Fernando Cerchio's film, stands as a representative of an ideology especially in vogue in the mid-20th century in which women should be, above all, a 'feisty housewife' (McGeough 2022: 127) and in which the values of marriage and family with their obvious Christian connotations are emphasised.[32] On the other hand, we find a model of a woman of seductive beauty, but of inordinate ambition and superficiality, whose actions will ultimately lead to the male character's undoing. This is the personification of the *femme fatale*, whose most celebrated example is Queen Cleopatra. In the recreation of this, as in the portrayal of other female characters inspired by ancient Egypt,

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[32] In the film, the monotheism of the Chaldean populations of Egypt, which insists on ideals of peace, freedom, and social justice with evident Christian roots, becomes the origin of the official Atenism later promulgated by Amenhotep IV/Akhenaton. This implicitly introduces Christianity into a historical context in which it would not have been chronologically justifiable.

Figures 11-12. Scenes from Cleopatra (Kureopatara, *Mushi Productions, 1970) from Osamu Tezuka's* Animerama trilogy *(Screenshot by the authors).*

there is a predilection among contemporary authors to emphasise the sexual dimension. To illustrate this, in an interview given in 2011 by Didier Crisse, author of the famous comic series *Les dieux du Nil* (Figures. 11-12), he stated in relation to the creative and artistic process of his work:[33]

> Pour les déesses, je n'a pas trop cherché les déesses animales. Pour les dieux ce fut le contraire. Le panthéon étant vraiment très vaste. Donc, pour les filles, j'ai surtout recherché le côté glamour et pour les garçons le côté hybride.[34]

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[33] https://www.bd-best.com/dans-l-atelier-de-didier-crisse-news-4277.html (Accessed 22/03/23).
[34] 'For the goddesses, I didn't really look for animal goddesses. For the gods it was the opposite. The pantheon is really very vast. So, for girls, I especially looked for the glamorous side and for boys the hybrid side' (Author's translation).

Figures 13-14. Egyptian goddesses in the comic book Les dieux du Nil *by Crisse and Besson © (2012).*

Conclusions

Harems, wicked or virtuous women, muscular bodies, oriental luxury, sensuality, and sex all recur in contemporary Egyptomania. The appearance of these themes in the selected works contributes to the configuration of different models of masculinities and femininities, the former insisting on a thematisation of the male body and the expression of a dominant heteronormativity, while the latter allows for the establishment of a duality that testifies to a clear polarisation of female roles. In both cases, there is an explicit link to current dynamics related to sexuality and gender. In this sense, *Nefertiti, regina del Nilo* informs us much more about mid-twentieth-century American society than it does about the Amarna period of ancient Egypt, while Horus in *Gods of Egypt* has much more to do with the tastes and preferences of current audiences in the context of the superheroic genre of the Marvel Cinematic Universe or DC Comics films than with the gods of ancient Egyptian mythology.

Between the two historical periods of ancient Egyptian civilisation and of the present-day there has, therefore, been a conscious and constant reimagining of the past with regard to sex, gender and sexuality, in which, as we have shown, the historiography of the classical world centred on the figure of Cleopatra VII, orientalism and the conception of ancient Egypt as the cradle of civilisation have all been decisive. These influences of the present and the past can be seen in the construction of Egyptian-inspired characters in numerous contemporary works, in which the imagined Egyptian

appears clearly hyper-sexualised (in a broad sense that refers not only to physical acts of sex but to sexuality in general).

However, although this sexualisation of Egyptian civilisation in popular culture finds a large part of its justification in these three main areas, there is another issue which deserves to be highlighted: the frequent representation of half-naked gods and humans on the walls of Egyptian temples or tombs. Indeed, the modern imagination has often constructed visions of ancient Egypt in which the naked body in these past images has nourished a myriad of fantasies of a sexual and sometimes even undeniably erotic nature, to which future scholarship might fruitfully turn. To end on one example, this perception of the Egyptian is evident in the following excerpt from *Lolita* (1955) by Vladimir Nabokov, in which the sexual predilection of the novel's main character, Humbert Humbert, for young girls is expressed via an interesting reference in pharaonic Egypt, where he finds the perfect historical allusion to refer to his own transgressive and taboo fantasies:

> Here are two of King Akhnaten's and Queen Nefertiti's pre-nubile Nile daughters (that royal couple had a litter of six), wearing nothing but many necklaces of bright beads, relaxed on cushions, intact after three thousand years, with their soft brown puppybodies, cropped hair and long ebony eyes.

Ancient Egypt has rich potential not only for normative adult sexual and romantic desires that correspond to notions of masculinity and femininity, particularly as these are idealised in the modern imagination, but also for possibilities of dark fantasies, transgression and the most forbidden of impulses.

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Eternally Maligned as the Power-hungry *Femme Fatale*: Kleopatra VII in *Assassin's Creed Origins* and Other Video Games

Tara Sewell-Lasater

For Egyptophiles everywhere the announcement of *Assassin's Creed Origins* was exhilarating. Many Hellenistic historians, myself included, anticipated the recreation of the great city of Alexandria and the palaces of the Ptolemies with delight. Visually, the game did not disappoint; it is a work of art, gracefully and realistically reproducing the Hellenistic Egyptian landscape in a way that has wowed both the gaming community and historians alike. This was no surprise, as the *Assassin's Creed* franchise has built a reputation for fun, historically accurate games, an endeavor that is reflected in Ubisoft's motto, 'making history everyone's playground' (Poiron 2021: 79). Accordingly, *Assassin's Creed Origins* has some definite strengths. It was well researched, since the producers consulted historians, egyptologists, archaeologists, and linguists, and used archaeological artifacts as source material.[1] The historicity of the game has even inspired some historians to engage in 'archaeogaming', where they stream walkthroughs of gameplay and discuss the accuracy of the landscapes and monuments for interested viewers.

Archaeogaming is a burgeoning field that many historians and professors find useful, especially for inspiring interest in history among students who too often regard the subject as boring and far removed from their current concerns.[2] As Casey points out, in reference to Egyptian history, 'through the telescopic lens of scholarship, individual moments come into focus, are magnified, and become real, but the whole remains an incomplete sum of its disconnected parts' (2021: 71). As a result, playing games like *Assassin's Creed Origins* can provide an immersive experience of ancient history that is more dynamic than simply reading about it. While some might disregard video games as being of value to scholarship or teaching, let us not forget that many pieces of historic literature that are now considered indelible parts of ancient history were originally produced for entertainment purposes, such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Just as the entertainment value of the *Iliad* helped it survive into the modern world, so can the entertainment aspects of video games help spur interest in ancient topics now. Ubisoft has even encouraged the use of its games in classrooms by releasing Discovery Tour mode for its three most recent *Assassin's Creed* installments, *Origins* (Hellenistic Egypt), *Odyssey* (Peloponnesian War Greece), and *Valhalla* (ninth-century AD Viking expansion). In *Origin's* Discovery Tour mode, the player can navigate the map, without the combat or narrative mechanics of the game, to take guided tours of or freely explore Egyptian landmarks and daily life.[3] The tours are accompanied by informative audio snippets and illustrations or photographs of monuments and artifacts (Figure 1).

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[1] Ore 2017; Nielson 2017; Poiron 2021: 81-83; Casey 2021: 74-75. The architecture and landscapes recreated in the game were based on still extant monuments, archaeological excavations, artwork by archaeologist Jean-Claude Golvin, and, for the non-extant structures, like palaces and homes, the use of tomb models, such as the model Egyptian house in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accession number 07.231.10: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544249) (Accessed 17/04/2023).

[2] For a brief overview of archaeogaming, see Rassalle 2021: 4-5. For an example of it in use, see Craig 2021.

[3] For a quick summary of Discovery Tour mode, see Ubisoft 2021. For a review of Discovery Tour mode, which points
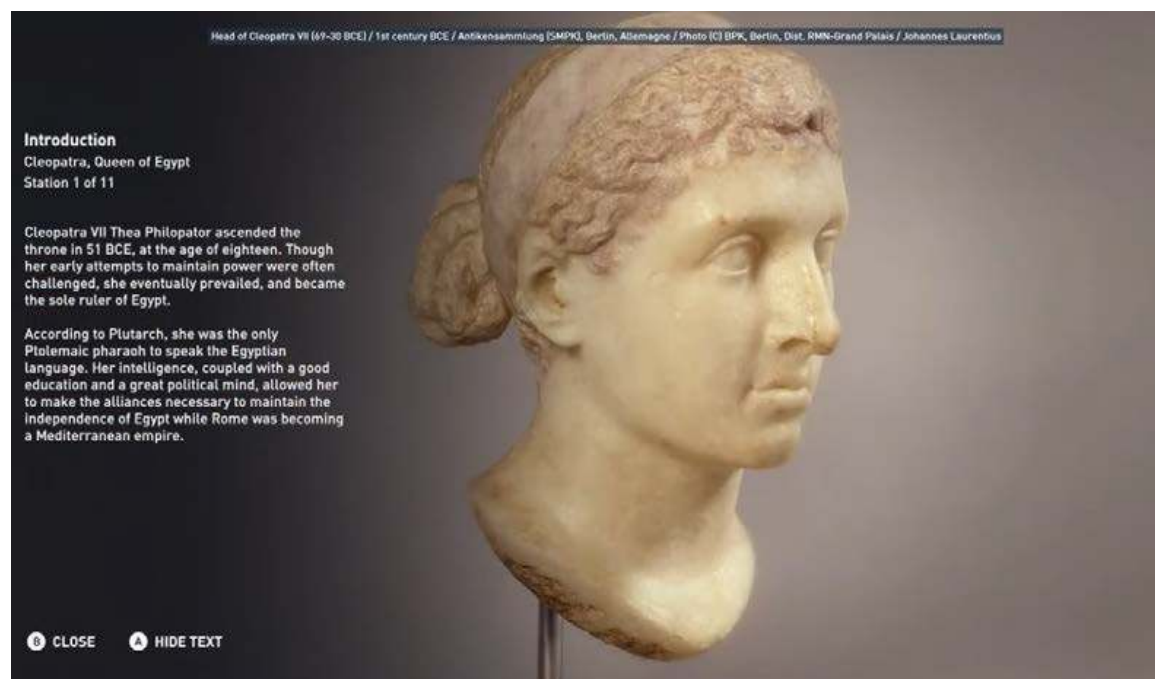
Figure 1. Example of the informative dimension of the Cleopatra Discovery Tour, Station 1. Screenshot taken by the author.

Yet, *Assassin's Creed Origins* also falls short, historically speaking, in several areas. The game creators chose to include specific inaccuracies for various reasons. For instance, mangoes, which were not grown in Egypt during Ptolemaic times, were included as part of the colour palette for the game, and the animal populations, while accurate in regard to species, are much denser than is biologically possible to facilitate questing and crafting game mechanics.[4] As a result, the game allows players to experience Hellenistic Egypt, while never claiming to be fully historically accurate. There is one area, however, where the lack of accuracy is problematic: the historic characters depicted. The ability to talk with notable figures in any of the *Assassin's Creed* games is often lauded as a strength of the franchise; players are drawn in by the ability to chat with Leonardo da Vinci (*Assassin's Creed II*), Plato (*Assassin's Creed Odyssey*), and, of course, Kleopatra VII (*Assassin's Creed Origins*). But, due to the game's reputation for accuracy, this gives players the impression that the figures they are interacting with are truthfully represented. In *Assassin's Creed Origins,* however, the characters of the Ptolemies fall into the same negative tropes that they have been pigeonholed into for the last 2000 years. Ptolemy XIII is a spoilt and treacherous adolescent and Kleopatra VIII is a sultry queen, fully absorbed in her own schemes and pursuit of pleasures. The queen presented in the game is a version of Kleopatra that was created through Augustan propaganda after her death and which has been perpetuated since then; it is a created image of the queen derived from Roman cultural memory, rather than a representation of her as she really was. Even though many historians have demonstrated how inaccurate the Roman portrayal is, the game's creators chose to present the inaccurate, but popular, depiction of Kleopatra, allowing the game to sustain this created image of the queen on a much wider scale than most historians can reach.

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out some of its academic flaws, including a lack of citations, see Walker 2018.

[4] On this topic, see Casey 2021: 75. Poiron mentions another example: the game developers chose to censor nudity on Greek and Roman statues (2021: 83). Although the statues would have been unclothed at the time, Ubisoft wanted to allow use of the game and Discovery Tour mode in classrooms.

The Historic Kleopatra VII

Rather than presenting a full overview of Kleopatra's life—synopses are available in many previous books and articles[5]—here, I highlight key periods of her life in an attempt to expose her real character and reveal how the well-documented events in her life have previously been skewed to fit her into a lascivious queen narrative.

Kleopatra was the daughter of Ptolemy XII Auletes and, most likely, his sister-wife Kleopatra V Tryphaina.[6] She was raised in Alexandria among all the splendour and learning that city had to offer in the 1st century BC. She received a Hellenistic education, as had the preceding male and female members of the royal family, and which was likely supplemented by the nearness of the Library and *Mouseion*.[7] A love of learning and the many languages she spoke are hinted at in later descriptions (Plutarch, *Antony* 27.2-4; Cicero, *Atticus* 15.15.2). Her intellect is confirmed through her engagement in the politics of her day, as she deftly navigated her kingdom's relationship with Rome in a way that several of her male predecessors had not done as efficiently. She ascended the throne at the death of her father in 51 BC, aged eighteen, and held it jointly with her brother, Ptolemy XIII, who was around ten years old.[8] After being raised in the Ptolemaic court, surrounded by the traditions and history of her dynasty, Kleopatra was aware of the responsibilities of her role. She conscientiously emphasised the power and prestige of Egypt as an old and renowned civilisation, including learning the Egyptian language, participating in important religious ceremonies, appearing as Isis in public, and expanding her territory to lands not held since the early reign of the Ptolemies.

After ascending the throne, Kleopatra used her extensive knowledge to actively and skillfully rule Egypt. She made it clear through the queenly titles she adopted, including naming herself *philopatris* (fatherland-loving), that she wanted to be known for her direct involvement in the traditions and rulership of her kingdom. She actualised that title by participating in important religious rituals throughout her reign, a key duty of the ruling monarch, and by placing her name alone or first on administrative documents when co-ruling with her male relations.[9] We may even have evidence of her handwriting on an administrative document, where she signed the bottom with the word γινέσθωι (*genesthoi,* 'so be it'). Several historians have argued that this is an order by Kleopatra herself and evidences that the queen completed routine administrative duties, which, as Miles points out, is in direct contrast 'to the image of her, projected over the centuries, living a life of continuous, sumptuous banqueting'.[10]

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[5] For instance, see these popular biographies: Walker and Ashton 2006; Tyldesley 2008; Schiff 2011; Legras 2021. For an academic overview of the events of Kleopatra's reign, see Hölbl (2001: 231-251).

[6] On the debate over Kleopatra V Tryphaina's parentage of Kleopatra VII, see Sewell-Lasater 2020: 401-406.

[7] We know the names of Ptolemy XIII's tutor (Theodotos), Arsinoe IV's tutor (Ganymede), and the tutor Kleopatra hired to teach her sons and daughter (Nikolaos of Damascus). This indicates Kleopatra also likely had a tutor-guardian, even if their name is unpreserved. On this point, see Tyldesley 2008: 32, 33.

[8] Bennett argues that Ptolemy was a presumed co-ruler at their ascension since he was not named explicitly in papyri as such until year 3 of their reign (2011: s.v. 'Cleopatra VII').

[9] As an example of her participation in religious rituals, see *iBucheum* 13, a stele that describes Kleopatra presiding over the installation of a new Buchis Bull. An online translation of the stele is available online: https://www.attalus. org/egypt/buchis_bull.html (Accessed 17/06/2023). To the second point, official documents were headed by a dating protocol, which provided the name(s) of the ruling monarch(s); the person listed in the first position in the protocol was usually the person holding the most ruling authority—on these protocols, as related to Ptolemaic queens, see Sewell-Lasater 2022: 149, n. 8. For specific examples of Kleopatra VII's dating protocols, see Sewell-Lasater 2020: 449-450 (Appendix C).

[10] On this papyrus, see Miles 2011b: 13-14, n. 40; Jones 2006: 202-204. Miles and Jones note the theory was first proposed by Van Minnen 2000. Other well-known Papyrologists, such as R. S. Bagnall and P. Derow are unconvinced.

Kleopatra's ability to raise an army and challenge her brother in 48 BC (Caesar, *De Bello Civili* 3.103; Appian, *De Bellis Civilibus* 2.84; Plutarch, *Pompey* 77.1) indicates that she must have had a strong base, including a network of *philoi* ('friends' who served the queen in return for her favour), and personal resources and wealth from which to draw to support her endeavours, all of which would have only been made possible by her active governance and networking.[11] Most telling, however, is that Kleopatra inherited a kingdom that had been driven into debt by her father, but, by the latter period of her reign, she had efficiently rebuilt the country's economy, enough that she could finance several of Antony's campaigns without going into debt herself (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 23).

Not only did she effectively administer her kingdom, but Kleopatra also engaged in the marital traditions of her dynasty by marrying and jointly ruling with her brothers in turn, Ptolemy XIII and Ptolemy XIV. Then, after their deaths, she ruled with her son by Julius Caesar, Ptolemy Caesarion. Kleopatra skillfully navigated her co-rule with her son and followed Ptolemaic dynastic ideologies, which dictated she rule jointly with a male partner, instead of attempting to rule on her own. She adopted the imagery of predecessor queens, becoming a living Isis, which allowed her to be depicted as holding dominant power, without removing her son (Ashton 2011: 27-28). In this way, she could be presented as a powerful queen, a living goddess, a protectress of Egypt and of her son, all while promoting Caesarion as her consort and rightful heir, and without diminishing her own power. This demonstrates a masterful wielding of Ptolemaic dynastic policy that is rarely attributed to her, and it also provides insight into one of the many ways she navigated the political landscape of her day. Her efforts reveal that she was cognisant that she was surrounded by polities, including Rome, that would not have fully accepted a kingdom ruled solely by a woman.

In addition to her marriages to her two brothers, Kleopatra engaged in relationships with two Roman men, first Julius Caesar, and then Mark Antony. Although she was characterised as the mistress of each in Roman sources, since both were married to Roman women, these liaisons were presented as legitimate dynastic marriages in Egypt and the children produced from them as legitimate royal children.[12] Far from being evidence of promiscuity on Kleopatra's part, having children with the two most powerful men in Rome should be seen as further evidence of her political acumen. After all, bearing a child who would rule jointly with her and eventually inherit her throne would have been the ultimate enticement to allow Egypt to stay independent of Roman rule, especially if the father wanted that child to gain such power, as both Caesar and Antony may have. Yet, her relationships with these two men, since she was branded as the seducer and mistress of them both, led to the 'myth of the sexually promiscuous Cleopatra' and inspired claims of additional affairs with Gnaeus Pompey (Pompey the Great), Herod, and many additional men, which, as Tyldesley has importantly noted, is a 'harsh legacy indeed for a woman who probably had no more than two, consecutive, sexual relationships' (2008: 170).[13]

See also, Tyldesley 2008: 6, 160-161.

[11] For further analysis of this claim, see Gruen 2011: 42. He also lists several additional examples of Kleopatra's active rulership and engagement with Ptolemaic traditions, including supporting the Apis Bull cult and supplying grain to Alexandria in times of famine.

[12] On how Roman writers stripped the titles of wife and mother from Kleopatra, see Wyke 2009: 342-343.

[13] A similar point is also made by Hughes-Hallett 1990: 22-23.

Caesar first arrived in Egypt in 48 BC, finding it embroiled in a civil war between Kleopatra and Ptolemy XIII (Caesar, *De Bello Civili* 3.106-107; Appian, *De Bellis Civilibus* 2.89-90; Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.11). The first meeting between the queen and the general occurred around this same time. The usually cited tale is that they met when Kleopatra slipped into the palace, rolled in a carpet, only to be unveiled at Caesar's feet, setting the stage for her seduction of the Roman statesman. This story has remained one of the most popular anecdotes of her life, reproduced in paintings, plays, films, and every other type of popular media through the centuries,[14] including *Assassin's Creed Origins,* where the Kleopatra character is rolled in an anachronistic Turkish carpet and carried by the player into her meeting with Caesar (Figure 2). Yet only one source describes this encounter (Plutarch, *Caesar* 49.1-3), and it indicates that she was carried in a bedding sack (στρωματόδεσμον, a leathern, or linen sack for bedclothes), rather than in a carpet. The act of her being rolled out of a carpet at Caesar's feet, it seems, was too striking a visual to pass up in later popular retellings. In reality, however, the carpet/sack story may have never happened, since it would have been beneath the dignity of a queen and living goddess. Rather, Kleopatra and Caesar would have first met when Caesar summoned her to appear before a Roman tribunal with the aim of arbitrating the conflict between the royal siblings (Caesar, *De Bello Civili* 3.107).[15]

Figure 2. Cut scene in Assassin's Creed Origins *where Kleopatra proposes to sneak in to see Caesar rolled in a carpet. Screenshot taken by the author.*

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[14] Jean-Léon Gérôme's, *Cléopâtre et César* (1866), is an example of a painting that utilises the carpet imagery. It also appears in several films, including Cecil B. DeMille's *Cleopatra* (1934) and Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra* (1963). On the influence of the paintings of Gérôme and other nineteenth-century painters on classical Hollywood, see G. Juberías Gracia, 'From Alma-Tadema to Cecil B. DeMille: The Influence of Nineteenth-Century Painting on Classical Hollywood Films Set in Ancient Egypt' in this volume.

[15] On this issue, see Gruen 2011: 43-44 (especially n. 32). It is also strange that so many other authors, who were so quick to malign Kleopatra in every other way, would have neglected to mention such a sensational tale. Cassius Dio (*Roman History* 42.34.3-35) does not mention the carpet/sack story, but states instead that Kleopatra plead her case via intermediaries and was summoned before Caesar. It is also not referenced in Lucan's description of their meeting (*Pharsalia* 10.56-58, 81-84).

After their initial meeting, Caesar stayed in Egypt for the next year, during which time he helped Kleopatra defeat Ptolemy during the siege of Alexandria (Caesar, *De Bello Civili* 3.108-112) and Caesarion was conceived. Kleopatra then visited Caesar in Rome, first in 46 BC and again in 44 BC.[16] These visits are often cited as additional evidence of Kleopatra's lasciviousness, as a time when she neglected her duties while consorting with her lover, but, instead, they demonstrate her active rulership as both were used to pursue the diplomatic mission of protecting Egypt's autonomy by having the kingdom declared a friend and ally of Rome (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 43.27.3).[17] Subsequently, Kleopatra was in the city at the time of Caesar's assassination, and soon after returned to Egypt. From the reanalysis of these events, it is clear that the sexual relationship between Kleopatra and Caesar was initiated by the queen more for diplomatic purposes than simply lust. Far from being a promiscuous seductress or love-struck girl, Kleopatra was an astute politician who knew that having a child with the most powerful man in Rome would bolster her rule.[18]

Kleopatra's relationship with Antony is not included in *Assassin's Creed Origins*, but their affiliation led directly to the Augustan propaganda that would later define her image. Kleopatra's reasons for undertaking this second relationship may have been similar to those driving her association with Caesar: to gain the favour of a powerful Roman political figure and through that connection protect her kingdom.[19] By 40 BC, she had borne twins to Antony, Alexander Helios and Kleopatra Selene, and would bear a third child, Ptolemy Philadelphos, by 36 BC. With Kleopatra's monetary support, Antony engaged in several battles throughout the East, after which he repeatedly returned to Egypt and the queen, and he began presenting himself as an eastern-style ruler, including being worshiped as Dionysus alongside Kleopatra as Isis. Antony participated in royal ceremonies, like the *Donations of Alexandria*, where he proclaimed Kleopatra as the Queen of Kings, declared Caesarion to be the legitimate son of Julius Caesar, and distributed several Roman-held territories to his children with Kleopatra (Plutarch, *Antony* 54.5-9; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 49.40.2-41.4). These actions achieved Kleopatra's goals of bolstering her kingdom and legitimising her children, but the implication that Antony desired to rule as an Egyptian king caused increased friction between Antony and Octavian in Rome.

Wary of yet another Roman civil war, Octavian characterised his feud with Antony as a battle against Kleopatra, Egypt, and their corrupting influences on 'good' Romans (Plutarch, *Antony*

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[16] It was previously thought that Kleopatra went to Rome in 46 BC and stayed there until Caesar's assassination, spending around eighteen months in the city. See, for instance, the description in Tyldesley 2008: 104, 105-160; Hughes-Hallett 1990: 20. Gruen has instead convincingly argued that she went to Rome on two separate visits (2011: 45-49).

[17] During her second visit, Caesar and the Senate were restructuring provincial administration policies, and Kleopatra succeeded at keeping Egypt independent. She was even granted Roman territory in Cyprus (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 42.35.6; Appian, *De Bellis Civilibus* 4.6). On this topic, see Gruen 2011: 45-46, 48.

[18] Caesar also does not seem to have been struck with ardent longing, as is often insinuated, since he invited Kleopatra to Rome, then sent her home, left on campaign, and began a new relationship with Eunoe, the queen of Mauretania (Suetonius, *Iulius Caesar* 52.1). See also, Gruen 2011: 46-47 (especially n. 47). He also made minimal references to her in his personal writings, referring to her twice (Caesar, *De Bello Civili* 3.103, 107), as noted by Gillett 2017: 19; Hughes-Hallett 1990: 36-38.

[19] After the initiation of their relationship, Antony left Egypt in 40 BC and did not return for three years, when he realised that he would need monetary support for his Parthian campaign. In return for that support, Kleopatra aimed to regain territories in the East that had once been under Ptolemaic control. On this topic, see Tyldesley 2008: 157; Hughes-Hallett 1990: 24-25. As with her relationship with Caesar, these are not the actions of two people blinded by lust or love, but rather indicate political manoeuvrings on both their parts.

55.1-2; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.24-28). Octavian, and the writers hoping to gain his favour, would frame Kleopatra as a great seducer and corrupter, Antony as the venal man led astray by Egyptian excess and claims of false divinity, and Egypt as a land of strange gods and oriental despotism. This was the originating point of Roman propaganda against the queen. Octavian was ultimately successful in both the smear campaign against Kleopatra and in declaring war against Egypt. He defeated Antony and Kleopatra's forces at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, and shortly after this both Antony and Kleopatra committed suicide (Plutarch, *Antony* 71-86; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 51.11-14).

Previous Depictions of Kleopatra VII in Literature, Media, and Video Games

Augustan Propaganda, Roman, and Late Antique Literature

The Augustan propaganda that would come to define Kleopatra's character began during her lifetime. A series of letters by Cicero are the most contemporaneous sources (*Atticus* 14.8, 14.20, 15.1, 15.4, 15.15, all written in 44 BC), and they express his dislike of the queen. Cicero was angry with Kleopatra for not delivering a promised manuscript, leading him to state '*reginam odi*' ('I hate the queen': *Atticus* 15.15.2) and expound to his friend Atticus about her arrogance (*superbiam*: *Atticus* 15.15.2). Cicero was an outspoken member of the Senate, so it seems unlikely that he would have kept his dislike constrained only to his letters. Rather, if his opinions about Kleopatra and her affair with Caesar were public knowledge, the negative characterisation of the queen by such a reputable figure could have influenced public opinion about her, even prior to Octavian's efforts towards her character assassination, especially when combined with the public outcry that Cassius Dio says her visits elicited (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 43.27.3). After Cicero, written references to Kleopatra declined, until her name was explicitly returned to the forefront of Roman politics when Octavian began to frame his civil strife against Antony as a war against Kleopatra. As a result, the apogee of Roman writing on the queen took place during Octavian and Antony's civil war and immediately following her death.

Kleopatra's suicide is usually attributed to her devotion to Antony, but, more realistically, it was probably prompted by her desire not to be exhibited in Octavian's triumphal procession (Florus, *Epitome* 2.21.10; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 51.11.3). After Kleopatra's death, Octavian paraded an effigy of her during his triumph, where she was shown reclining on a couch, with snake bites on her arms (Plutarch, *Antony* 86.3; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 51.21.8; Propertius, *Elegies* 3.11.53). Subsequently, Gaius Maecenas, one of Augustus's advisors and friends, offered patronage to several Roman writers who began to reshape the view of Kleopatra in Augustus's favour, namely Horace, Propertius, and Virgil.[20] Although Kleopatra had gone to great lengths to present herself as the loving mother of her dynasty and her country in Egypt, 'in Rome she would become a model of meretricious perversity who thereby challenged the good ordering of the western world' (Wyke 2009: 341). In his *Ode* 1.37, Horace began to identify Kleopatra as the transgressive queen, who 'plotted insane ruin for the Capitol and death for our rule with her flock of base men' (1.37.7-9), but he also praised her: 'the queen, seeking to die more nobly, did not, womanish, shrink from the sword [...] More defiant in a deliberate death [...] never humbled, in a showy triumph' (1.37.21-23, 29, 32). Propertius, in his *Elegy* 3.11, was the

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[20]   On these sources, see Gillett 2017: 20; Wyke 2009: 334.

first to refer directly to Kleopatra's supposed promiscuity, by referring to her as 'the whore-queen of incestuous Canopus' (*incesti meretrix regina Canopi*, 3.11.39). His *Elegy* 4.6 was also one of the first efforts to characterise Octavian as the hero of Actium with Antony and Kleopatra as the villains: 'One fleet was cursed by Trojan Quirinus, and javelins flew shamefully under a woman's command; on the other side Augustus's ship, it sails full with Jove's favour' (4.6.21-23). Similarly, Virgil, in his epic *Aeneid*, makes more overt reference to Kleopatra and her defeat at Actium, again presenting Augustus as the hero, and Kleopatra as the defeated foe (8.675-731).

In these three authors the groundwork was laid for several themes that would come to define Kleopatra over the next few centuries: Kleopatra the transgressive queen, Kleopatra the promiscuous queen, Kleopatra and Antony as the villains with Octavian/Augustus as the hero, and, finally, making negative remarks about the queen, while also being unable to fully avoid mentioning some of her strengths. As noted by Gillett, 'In order to make Augustus saviour of the Roman west, the threat of Cleopatra needed to be heightened and she needed to be transformed into a worthy enemy' (2017: 20). To take it a step further, not only did she have to be a 'worthy' enemy by Roman standards, but she also needed to be an enemy who was seen as deserving of punishment on account of her wrongdoings and actions as an unnatural woman. Rome had never had a political opponent who was also a woman, and, in Roman culture, women did not have political power and importance. So, rather than presenting Kleopatra as a truly worthy opponent, by describing her with her realistic attributes of intelligence and political acumen, traits which the Romans reserved for males, Kleopatra had to be recharacterised into an enemy that fit the negative Roman qualities ascribed to women, including overt sexuality, lavishness, and a corrupting, foreign influence. Yet this is where some of the positive traits about her do tend to slip into the overall negative narrative. To make Kleopatra a worthy enemy, some of her strengths had to be emphasised, even as they were maligned.

As a result, this new characterisation carried on into the writings of the 1st to the 3rd centuries AD, in the authors Lucan, Appian, Pliny, Plutarch, and Cassius Dio. From Pliny, we have the story of Kleopatra dissolving a giant pearl in vinegar, all to win a bet with Antony (Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 9.119-121). Via this story, Pliny presents a picture of Kleopatra as a queen who was 'cunning, recklessly extravagant, and selfish [...] unnatural and worrying traits for a Roman man to encounter in any woman' (Tyldesley 2008: 154). Similarly, Cassius Dio heightens the idea of Kleopatra as a problematic woman; in a speech he credits to Octavian, he enumerates the qualities that any Roman man should find appalling, including that she corrupted Antony, who thereafter abandoned his Roman customs in favour of Egyptian ways, bowing

> before that woman like Isis or Selene, nam[ing] her children Helios and Selene, and finally call[ing] himself Osiris and Dionysus [...] giv[ing] as gifts whole islands and parts of continents, as if he were the lord of the whole earth and sea' (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.25).

Here, Dio highlights Kleopatra as corrupter and transgressor, and it is a theme he continues throughout his work by reminding his readers regularly that she was both a debaucher and weaker enemy who was 'true to her nature as a woman and an Egyptian' (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.33). In Dio, Kleopatra is clearly made an enemy via Roman xenophobia and misogyny.

Lucan, in his epic *Pharsalia,* describes how Kleopatra was able to seduce both Caesar and Antony with her feminine wiles. He states, 'Who would not grant indulgence to you, Antony, for your insane love, when even the stalwart heart of Caesar burned for her?' (Lucan, *Pharsalia* 10.70-71). He repeatedly refers to her in a negative way, calling her 'Kleopatra the dishonour of Egypt, the savage fury of Latium, the unchaste downfall of Rome' (*Dedecos Aegypti, Latii feralis Erinnys, Romano non casta malo*, 10.58-59), 'evil beauty' (*faciesque incesta*, 10.105), 'dangerous beauty' (*formam nocentem*, 10.138), and 'Egypt's master but Rome's whore' (*Aegypton habet, Romamque meretur*, 10.359). He describes all the extravagance Caesar saw in Egypt (10.109-174), solidifying the idea of Kleopatra as the exotic, excessive oriental monarch. Yet, even in his harsh critique, Lucan could not avoid hinting at some of Kleopatra's positive qualities. For instance, he describes her entreaty to Caesar to help regain her throne, and he credits her with saying 'I will not be the first woman to rule the cities along the Nile: gender makes no difference in Egypt; this land knows how to be ruled by a queen' (10.90-91). She cites her father's will, which left rule of the country to her and her brother jointly, and in this logical argumentation, Kleopatra's intelligence and ability to negotiate political situations is evident.

A similar theme is seen in Appian and Plutarch. Although Appian includes an overall negative attitude towards the queen when he is describing her meeting with Antony at Cilicia, her political acumen is discernable. Appian relates that Antony reproached Kleopatra for not avenging Caesar's death, and, in return, she 'did not apologise, but rather enumerated' the many ways she had tried to aid the campaign (Appian, *De Bellis Civilibus* 5.8). Plutarch also mentions some positives, but overall maintains the narrative of Octavian the hero and Kleopatra the corrupter (see, for instance, Plutarch, *Antony* 36, 58-59, 62). Yet, Plutarch's description of Kleopatra, where he credits her with being intelligent and speaking multiple languages (27.2-4), is one of his most cited passages. As in Lucan, even in the areas where Plutarch maligns the queen, some positive aspects are noticeable. For example, Plutarch notes that Kleopatra knew how to flatter Antony and that she went to great lengths to entertain and entice him with the wealth of Egypt (29). This statement was probably meant to criticise Kleopatra, but what really comes across is her ability to analyse a situation and adapt to it to achieve her desired outcome. In a later section, when describing the preparations for the coming battle of Actium, Plutarch states, 'Kleopatra was no less intelligent than any of the kings fighting alongside Antony – for some time, she had been governing a great kingdom by herself' (56.3). This is one of the most explicit statements towards recognition of her intelligence from any Roman chronicler.

Although the Roman writers hinted at Kleopatra's favourable attributes, it was the negative connotations that survived through the ages. Lucan was the most deliberate in drawing attention to and critiquing Kleopatra's perceived extreme sexuality. For example, he stated, 'whom of us does Cleopatra not believe guilty? Only he (if there is such a man) who has not had his way with her' (10.369-370). In this passage, and with his snide aside, 'if there is such a man', he presents Kleopatra as a promiscuous woman, connecting her with a commonly seen misogynist theme: maligning a woman by indicating that she has had many sexual partners. This supposition was then carried forward into future centuries, into authors like Sextus Aurelius Victor, in the 4th century AD, who said that Kleopatra was 'so lustful that she often prostituted herself, and so beautiful that many men bought a night with her at the price of their lives' (*De Viris Illustribus Urbis Romae* 86.2). This account is directly referenced in the player's first meeting with Kleopatra in *Assassin's Creed Origins* (Figure 3)*.*

Figure 3. Kleopatra's introduction cut scene in Assassin's Creed Origins. *Kleopatra states 'I will sleep with anyone! As long as they agree to be executed in the morning!' Screenshot taken by the author.*

The efforts of the Roman chroniclers to create this image of Kleopatra as the transgressive woman developed into a cultural memory representation of the queen:[21] a caricatured version of her that was different from the reality of her during her lifetime, which was then perpetuated through the centuries and into the modern world. Consequently, the created image of the queen is more well-known today than the reality.

Medieval and Renaissance Depictions of Kleopatra

The image of Kleopatra the seductress and the ostentatious oriental queen was then repeated by medieval and Renaissance writers. Several of the Roman authors, like Plutarch and Pliny, were influential: 'Pliny was so widely read in the medieval period and Renaissance that his interpretation of history became a foundation for Western views' of Kleopatra and Egypt (Miles 2011b: 5).[22] Furthermore, since the Roman writers had gone to such lengths to emphasise her sexuality, glorifying her desirability in the process, the idea of Kleopatra the great beauty would become a key motif of later writings, even though Plutarch had pointed out she was not necessarily beautiful (*Antony* 27.2). The most explicit example of this, the combining of Kleopatra the transgressor and Kleopatra the great beauty, is first seen in Boccaccio, who stated: '[Kleopatra] gained her kingdom through crime. She was truly notable for almost nothing, except her ancestry and her beauty; rather, she was known throughout the world for her greed, cruelty, and excess'.[23] Dante, in his *Divine Comedy*, discussed Kleopatra as part of the

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[21] On the concept of cultural memory, see Assmann 1988.

[22] This section is looking specifically at western European sources, since they shaped the view of Kleopatra in the current, Western pop culture that is the focus of this chapter. But, as has been shown in sources like Tyldesley 2008, Jones 2006, etc., the Arabic tradition of Kleopatra was much more positive than the Western.

[23] For this quotation, see Jones 2006: 209, who excerpts Boccaccio's *On Famous Women*.

Inferno, where she was placed in the Second Circle for those overcome by lust (Canto V). Then, several later Renaissance sources expanded on the theme, claiming that Kleopatra's libido was such that she prostituted herself. For instance, the *Letters on the Infamous Libido of Cleopatra the Queen*, also known as the *Soranian Letters,* published by German printers in 1606, stated that 'subordinating her womanly modesty to desire, she broke into such impatience for crime that in a single night, after donning a hood, she accepted, in a brothel as a prostitute, the embraces of one hundred and six men'.[24]

Just as with the ancients, there were some medieval and Renaissance writers who praised Kleopatra, especially since many of them used Plutarch as their source material. For instance, in Chaucer Kleopatra is presented as a medieval-style queen whose love for Antony reflected the tenets of courtly love when he states, 'Was never unto hir love a trewer queen'.[25] Similarly, Shakespeare, in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607), depicted Kleopatra as a confident queen, driven to mistakes by her passion for Antony. His Kleopatra is greedy and self-centered but redeemed by love. Yet he still calls Antony a 'strumpet's Fool' and claims the 'sexually voracious' Kleopatra seduced Pompey, so her perceived promiscuity is not entirely absent from the narrative.[26] Furthermore, even though Kleopatra is praised in these sources, the admiration was for characteristics associated with love and devotion, ideals that still concerned her love-life, rather than any intelligence or her political actions as queen. As a case in point, in Shakespeare Kleopatra's palace is a place of *ennui*, where no work is done and Kleopatra only pines for Antony, rather than it being, more realistically, the centre of an efficient bureaucracy with Kleopatra as head administrator (Hughes-Hallett 1990: 154). Kleopatra was unquestionably fit into the period's concept of what the ideal woman was, and she was still considered a 'bad' woman who was only redeemed by her devotion to Antony and her willingness to die for love. This focus on Kleopatra's love life, even when characterised as good, conclusively shaped the modern perception of the queen as the temptress and/or love sick fool, especially in Shakespeare's characterisation, which has often been cited as if it were a primary source, even by academics (Tyldesley 2008: 215, esp. n. 14).

Modern Popular Culture Depictions of Kleopatra in Film and Media

Medieval and Renaissance writers, using select ancients as their source material, built on the theme of Kleopatra as the promiscuous woman, which then continued to be repeated, both in literature and art, after the Renaissance.[27] For instance, Kleopatra was ensconced as a seductress by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers, such as Alexander Pushkin in his *Egyptian Nights* (1835), which repeated the story from Aurelius Victor of Kleopatra giving men a night with her at the price of their lives.[28] Depictions like Pushkin's and the Egyptomania trend in early Western art (inspired by Napoleon's expedition to Egypt) then became the basis

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[24] The translation of this excerpt is taken from Rowland 2011: 133. These letters claimed to be correspondence between Mark Antony, the physician Quintus Soranus, and Kleopatra VII. It is now accepted that they were a forgery by Melchior Goldast von Haiminsfeld. As a result, rather than presenting an accurate view of the queen, they represent the sixteenth-century preconception of Kleopatra's personality, repeating yet again this idea of her as temptress and harlot.

[25] Transliteration taken from Jones 2006: 221, who excerpts Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women.*

[26] On these examples, see Jones 2006: 224; Tyldesley 2008: 48.

[27] For a survey of the literature featuring Kleopatra during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries and the themes that developed therein, see Hughes-Hallett 1990: 160-184.

[28] On this topic, see Jones (2006: 260, 262). Several additional examples of stories that framed Kleopatra as a ruthless, promiscuous, and often cruel woman are discussed in Hughes-Hallett (1990: 225-251).

for the early film versions of the queen (Miles 2011a: xi). Pucci has estimated that over 230 paintings and statues of Kleopatra were produced in the 17th and 18th centuries, and between 1552 and 1997 200 plays and novels, 45 operas, five ballets, and 43 movies have included her as a main character (2011: 195).[29] Through these depictions Kleopatra was confirmed as the *femme fatale*, the seductress who causes the destruction of the man (or men) she entraps. This was then translated to the filmic Kleopatras, Thea Bara (*Cleopatra*, 1917), Claudette Colbert (*Cleopatra*, 1934), and Elizabeth Taylor (*Cleopatra*, 1963).[30]

The 1917 version of *Cleopatra* is now lost, but Bara, who was quoted as saying 'I *am* Cleopatra', was marketed in conjunction with the release of the film as a vamp, a 'home-breaker who takes pleasure in ruthlessly seducing men, and abandons them, once drained of their fortunes and will to live' (Wyke and Montserrat 2011: 178).[31] The popularity of the film ensured that the image of Kleopatra, the sex symbol, would become a key staple of future filmic Kleopatras. By the time Colbert depicted the queen, she was still the seductress, but now she was also sharp-witted and chic. Colbert's Kleopatra represented a time when more women were going into the work force and had, just 14 years earlier in 1920, earned the right to vote in America, so she could be witty and sexually liberated in a way that would make women want to imitate her and men desire to sleep with her. Women could emulate Colbert's Kleopatra by purchasing Kleopatra-inspired and Egypt-themed products and clothing, items that were widely available, since this movie was produced during a second wave of Egyptomania, known as Tutmania, that was inspired by the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun just 12 years earlier in 1922.[32]

Figure 4. Scene from Joseph L. Mankiewicz's Cleopatra, *starring Elizabeth Taylor (1963). Screenshot taken by the author.*

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[29] To this can also be added the Kleopatra-themed tapestries, bronze figures, porcelain ornaments, vases, and snuffboxes cited by Hughes-Hallett that adorned the royal courts of Europe (1990: 160).
[30] The three most famous films are highlighted here. Space prevents inclusion of additional well-known stage and filmic Kleopatras, such as the stage production of *Cléopâtre* (1890), staring Sarah Bernhardt, the silent film *Cleopatra* (1912), staring Helen Gardner, or *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1946), staring Vivian Leigh, which was based on the child-like Kleopatra of George Bernard Shaw's play of the same name (1898). On the actresses who played Kleopatra in the cinema, see Wenzel (2005: 93-125).
[31] On Bara's Kleopatra, see also Hughes-Hallett 1990: 267; McGeough 2022: 128-129.
[32] On this issue of consumerism, see Wyke and Montserrat 2011: 183; McGeough 2022: 131.

McGeough also points out, however, that while Colbert's Kleopatra was a figure whom many women desired to imitate, she also served as 'a warning to contemporary society about the dangers of female leadership' (2022: 125), demonstrating that the concept of Kleopatra as the corrupter was also carried into these filmic versions from the literary sources.

To this day, Elizabeth Taylor is the most famous Kleopatra (Figure 4). Taylor was heavily identified with Kleopatra on account of her glamour and luxurious lifestyle, but she was also associated with the queen in a negative way as a sexually promiscuous and adulterous woman, since she had an extramarital affair with her co-star Richard Burton. For audiences, Taylor embodied everything they knew about Kleopatra, becoming a real-life version of the queen. In all these films, Kleopatra is presented as a wicked woman: she is foreign, she is exotic, and she is a manipulative mistress. As Huges-Hallett has noted, she is a 'good-time girl', which makes her bad, but fun (1990: 269-271). As a result, all the stereotypes concerning who and what Kleopatra was, that had been developing in the centuries since her death, were entrenched in popular culture as the films of this era reached a wider audience than ever before.

Kleopatra in Video Games

Alongside these early films, the 'good-time girl' Kleopatra then regularly appeared in advertisements, first in print and then on television. For instance, beginning in the early 1900s, Kleopatra's image, and the idea that she represented luxury, sexuality, and exotic beauty, was repeatedly utilised by Palmolive to advertise their shampoo. These depictions then formed the basis of our modern perception of the queen, the Kleopatra with a voluptuous, scantily clad body and large, kohl-ringed eyes. Kleopatra became a cigarette brand, a slot machine, and her image was appropriated to be used on all manner of products, from soap to M&Ms, in cartoons and toys,[33] and, of course, in a wide variety of video games.

Video gaming emerged as a hobby in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and it increased in popularity by the 1980s and 1990s when consoles could be purchased for play at home. Games with historical contexts were issued as early as 1981 and became increasingly popular in the world management and wargame genres.[34] *Sid Meier's Civilization* (MicroProse, 1991) and *Age of Empires* (Ensemble Studios, 1997) are two of the most well-known games themed on the ancient past, and Egypt became a principal ancient civilisation featured in them. Kleopatra made her first appearance in *Sid Meier's Civilization II* (MicroProse, 1996),[35] as the leader of the Egyptian civilisation that players could choose as their avatar. From there, games depicting the queen expanded exponentially. She was featured in the city-building game *Pharaoh and Cleopatra* (Impression Games, 1999), *Imperivm: Great Battles of Rome* (Haemimont Games, 2005), *Rise and Fall: Civilizations at War* (Stainless Steel Studios, 2006), *Cleopatra: Riddle of the Tomb* (Kheops Studio, 2007), and *National Geographic Games: Mystery of Cleopatra* (National Geographic, 2010), to name a few.[36] In all of these, Kleopatra is a representative of a playable civilisation, or she

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[33] For an overview of Kleopatra-themed toys, see Kulpa 2022.

[34] On this topic, see MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler 2007: 204-205.

[35] She appeared again in *Civilization III* (Firaxis Games, 2001), *Civilization Revolution* (Firaxis Games, 2008), and *Civilization VI* (Firaxis Games, 2016).

[36] Not included in this list are the hundreds of Kleopatra-themed slots, virtual bingo, and match-three type games that are also available. For instance, in the last 10 years, at least 12 slot-type games have been produced, which feature the name Kleopatra in their title (e.g. *Cleopatra's Coins, Book of Cleopatra, Cleopatra Jewels,* etc.), and there are many more that feature her image in their merchandising without using her name in their title (e.g. *Heart of Egypt* and *Mysterious Egypt* slots).

Figure 5. The Kleopatra boss in Dante's Inferno *(EA and Visceral Games, 2010). Screenshot by the author.*

is a character with whom the player can interact. She is consistently shown with cartoonishly large, kohl-lined eyes, a black bob of some sort, noticeably large breasts, and clothed in a slinky linen sheath dress or, more provocatively, with armour resembling a plated bustier or bikini top. In each, the theme of exoticism and sexuality are clearly emphasised.

Several additional games that feature a Kleopatra character have been published more recently, including *Dante's Inferno* (EA and Visceral Games, 2010), *Gods of Rome* (Gameloft, 2015), *Rise of Kingdoms* (Lilith Games, 2019), *Defense of Egypt: Cleopatra Mission* (First Games interactive, 2016), and *Invincible Cleopatra: Caesar's Dreams* (Jetdogs Studios, 2021). These more recent games are more overt in their exoticisation and sexualisation of Kleopatra. In *Dante's Inferno*, for instance, Kleopatra is a demonic boss of the Second Circle of Hell, Lust, hinting at the description from the game's literary inspiration, Dante's *Inferno*. The player fights Kleopatra as she summons a 'lust storm' and tries to prevent the main character from ascending her 'Carnal Tower'. She is depicted as demonically enhanced, in vaguely Egyptian attire, with a linen skirt, belt, and jeweled collar (Figure 5). She is topless and can spawn minions from her breasts. *Gods of Rome* is a mobile game of the fighting genre, but it is themed with Greek and Roman deities and demigods. Kleopatra is a playable character, and her bio in the game describes her as 'a cold and calculating warrior' and an 'ethereal beauty'. She is dressed in decorative, golden armour, covering only her large breasts, arms, shins, and hips. *Rise of Kingdoms*, *Defense of Egypt*, and *Invincible Cleopatra* each depict her in a similar way to previous games, with the kohl-lined eyes, a sheath dress that emphasises large breasts, and an Egyptian style collar. They reference her reputation for sexuality, since a main component of each game is that Kleopatra uses her charms to defend Egypt, make alliances, or convince opposing players to do her bidding. As a result, these games give us a glimpse into the popular view of Kleopatra at the time when *Assassin's Creed Origins* was released.

The Depiction of Kleopatra VII in *Assassin's Creed Origins*

Assassin's Creed Origins is set primarily during the years 49-43 BC. The gamer plays as Bayek of Siwa and his wife Aya, who both get pulled into the political machinations of the period after their son, Khemu, is killed. In the *Assassin's Creed* world, this game is a precursor, setting up the conflict between the Hidden Ones, a group established by Bayek and Aya, which eventually becomes the Order of Assassins/Assassin Brotherhood, and the Order of the Ancients, which eventually becomes the Templar Order, both of which were introduced in *Assassin's Creed I-III*. The game begins during the civil war between Ptolemy XIII and Kleopatra VII. Bayek and Aya take up the cause of returning Kleopatra to her throne, and, as a result, the player is a driving force in the events of the period, including Kleopatra's alliance with Julius Caesar, the Alexandrian Civil War, and Caesar's assassination in Rome. The player meets with Kleopatra about eight times throughout the main storyline.

In order to hunt down the men he holds responsible for his son's death, Bayek begins working with Apollodoros, a character based on the historical *philos* of Kleopatra, Apollodoros the Sicilian, and through him Bayek meets Kleopatra for the first time. Apollodoros describes Kleopatra to Bayek as enjoying revelry a bit too much, and when Kleopatra first appears on screen, she is at a party, asks for an opium pipe, and then states that she will sleep with anyone who agrees to be executed in the morning (Figure 6). She follows that statement with a quip that the last man to take her up on the offer died happy. In subsequent meetings with the queen, some good characteristics are established; she is shown to speak multiple languages, she is depicted as the rightful ruler of Egypt, and the belief of the period that she was a goddess incarnate is hinted at. But, overall, the negative image of the queen is most noticeable. Not only is she initially established as a party-loving, wanton, and self-centred woman, but that is later reaffirmed, when she meets Julius Caesar. In the interchange, it is heavily implied that she will
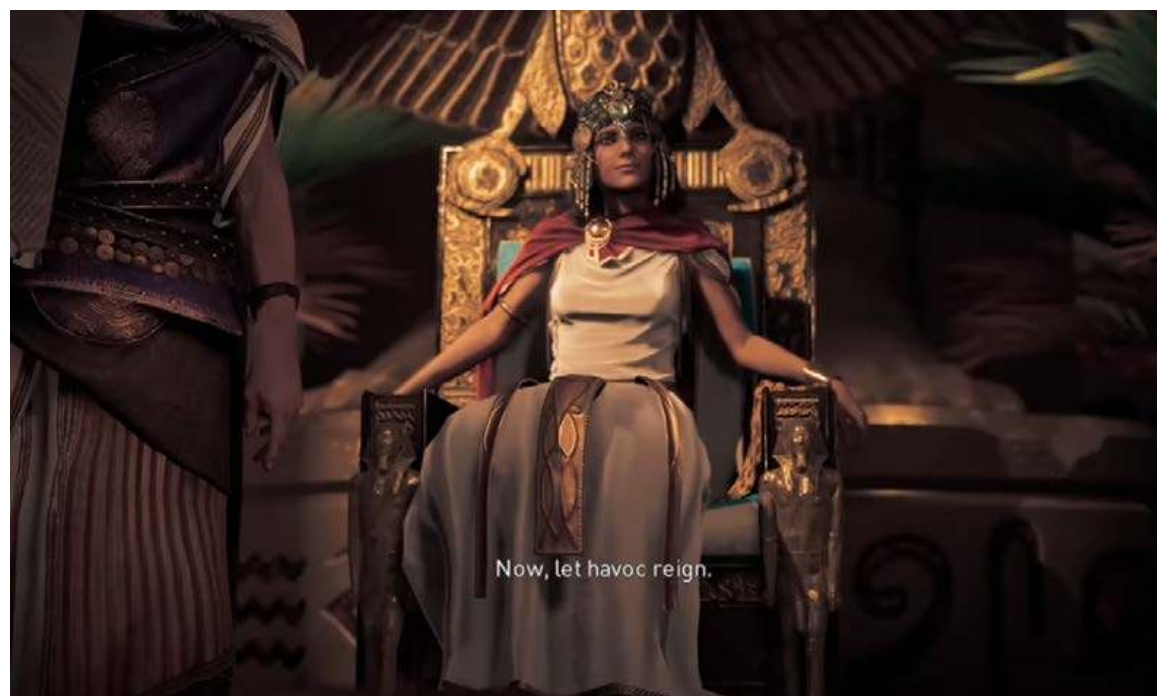

Figure 6. 'Let havoc reign' cut scene in Assassin's Creed Origins*. Screenshot taken by the author.*

Figure 7. Final Kleopatra cut scene in Assassin's Creed Origins. *Screenshot taken by the author.*

win him to her side with sex, and Caesar comments on her beauty, further emphasising the idea that she was exotic and beautiful, using her body, rather than brains, to make alliances.

As the story progresses, Kleopatra is shown to be fickle and power hungry. During the Alexandrian Civil War, the Caesar character states that he will burn the harbour and 'let havoc reign' (Figure 6). Kleopatra shows no interest in that statement, but rather secretly directs the player to assassinate her brother during the chaos. Finally, she betrays the trust that Aya and Bayek have placed in her by joining with the Order of Ancients, who, earlier in the game, she had described as an evil organisation that gained power by abusing the population of Egypt. In the final meeting with the queen, the player has just instigated and participated in the assassination of Julius Caesar, and Aya confronts Kleopatra in Rome as she plays with Caesarion. Aya tells her 'Listen to the cries on the streets. They call you a dead tyrant's whore [...] You are a Queen of liars and snakes...Our people worshipped you' (Figure 7). As a result, the player's last interaction with Kleopatra is fully entrenched in the propaganda of the Augustan poets, even echoing the wording of Propertius and Lucan.

Kleopatra is represented in *Assassin's Creed Origins* as a hypersexual elitist.[37] She is always in slinky clothes or exoticised with elaborate jewellery. Her personal power is emphasised, but it is given negative connotations. She deftly rules, directs her allies, fights her enemies, and makes important political decisions, but all these actions are prejudiced by her hypersexuality and used to indicate that she is power-hungry and disloyal. This idea that the attainment of female power must be coupled with promiscuous sex, an idea which is clearly taken from

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[37] On the sexualisation of Kleopatra in popular culture, see A.I. Fernández Pichel, M. Orriols-Llonch, 'Sex, Gender and Sexualisation of Ancient Egypt in Contemporary Popular Culture' in the present volume. See also Wenzel (2005: 280-282).

the Roman propaganda and its expansion in subsequent centuries, is a key theme for the Kleopatra character. She is the *femme fatale* villainess.

Why is Kleopatra's Depiction in *Assassin's Creed Origins* Problematic?

As established in the first section of this chapter, Kleopatra's ruling actions were guided by her political acumen and undertaken with similar intent to those of her contemporary male monarchs and statesmen. Yet, because she was a woman, her actions were characterised as aggressive, driven by sexual deviance, and overly extravagant, first by the Romans, then through the succeeding ages, and now even in our own time. It has been repeatedly demonstrated, both here and in prior works, that the characterisation of Kleopatra as immoral and promiscuous is inaccurate. This fact is hinted at in the Discovery Tour mode of *Assassin's Creed Origins*, since a tour on Kleopatra is available, and the first blurb on her states, Kleopatra's 'intelligence, coupled with a good education and a great political mind, allowed her to make the alliances necessary to maintain the independence of Egypt while Rome was becoming a Mediterranean empire' (Figure 1). A historical consultant for the game has even stated that depicting the historical figures accurately was 'a major concern', and that the developers strove to break away from the Kleopatra of old Hollywood to portray her 'as less of a seductress and more a highly intelligent, ruthless political figure' (Ore 2017). While the character of Kleopatra in *Assassin's Creed Origins* is definitely ruthless, she is also still clearly characterised as a promiscuous seductress in the main storyline.

This may raise the question for some players, when so much effort and research was put into depicting the geography and architecture within *Assassin's Creed Origins* accurately, why was the character of Kleopatra not treated similarly? The answer can likely be attributed to ratings.[38] Audiences expect to see the stereotypical Kleopatra, the sex-kitten queen, who seduced the greatest men of her age. With that said, if the answer is as simple as ratings, why is the depiction of Kleopatra still problematic, especially for a game that does not claim to be completely historically accurate? Should we even expect that games will endeavour to present historical information accurately when entertainment is the main goal?

This issue of perpetuating stereotypes in popular games is one that has been pointed out previously. Rassalle, for instance, has argued that while games like *Tomb Raider* are responsible for spurring interest in the field of archaeology, they are also responsible for perpetuating the trope of the 'adventurer archaeologist', first promoted by *Indiana Jones*, which 'gives the public a poor idea of what archaeologists actually do', and 'glamorize[s] the looting of ancient sites' (2021: 6-7). In much the same way, *Assassin's Creed Origins* spurs interest in Hellenistic Egypt, but it perpetuates a stereotype of Kleopatra VII that is damaging to the wider understanding of ancient queenship and Ptolemaic Egypt. This is also a perfect example of what MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler have called a failure to grasp 'transmedial potential' (2007: 203). They

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[38] Bruce Shelley, of *Ages of Empires,* argues that a game 'doesn't have to be completely historically accurate, it should contain enough accurate elements that one gets the flavor of the time period'. He further notes that these games are 'commercial product[s]', and that 'creating a truly accurate historical videogame would not only touch on areas we'd rather not deal with, in the end it just wouldn't be any fun' (quotation reproduced in MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler 2007: 205). Shelley's point is echoed by an interviewee in Copplestone 2017: 426, 430, 432. So, a similar attitude regarding ratings vs. accuracy may have been present when deciding how to depict Kleopatra in *Assassin's Creed Origins.*

note the wide dichotomy of games that base their play in historical events and argue that these games need to be held accountable for the history they present (2007: 206).[39]

But ultimately, we cannot expect that game producers will choose accuracy over possible ratings, since profit is their goal. And, in reality, the main point of the *Assassin's Creed Origins* plot is to tell the story of Bayek and Aya and to give a solid backstory for the origins of the Order of Assassins. Kleopatra is simply a side character in that narrative, and her presence in the storyline as a *femme fatale* villain is used to develop the main plot points in this alternative reality, rather than to make a concrete historical statement. The creative team's intentionality, regarding the Kleopatra character, is seen with the inclusion of the Discovery Tour mode, which aims at clarifying where creative liberties were taken. Yet, it should also be pointed out that depicting Kleopatra in a knowingly false way in the main storyline, even if she is only a side character, lends credence to the negative representation of her and reinforces all the stereotypes historians have been fighting against. Further, it strengthens those stereotypes on a much wider scale than most historians are able to reach. To put it simply, perpetuating historical fallacies in popular media only reinforces the popular view of those inaccuracies. So, we are left with a conundrum: do we delight when popular media brings wider attention to ancient topics, even when inaccuracies are perpetuated, or do we ask that popular media do better? Can we do both?

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[39] A similar point is noted in Copplestone 2017: 431.

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Egypt and Role-Playing Games.
Does the *World of Darkness* Universe
Use Ancient Egyptian Sources?

Abraham I. Fernández Pichel and Víctor Sánchez Domínguez

Role-playing games (hereafter RPGs) first appeared as a form of entertainment in the 1970s. Since then, different approaches have been taken to their study from an academic perspective, as a result of which multiple definitions have been proposed that generally focus on the essential elements that characterise them and, above all, on what distinguishes them from other games (Hitchens and Drachen 2008). Examples of these include that of Henriksen (2002: 44), who defines the RPG as 'a medium where a person, through immersion into a role and the world of this role, is given the opportunity to participate in and interact with the contents of this world',[1] or that of Pettersson (2006: 101), who describes RPGs as 'the art of experience', adding that 'making a role-playing game means creating experiences'. Stenros and Hakkarainen (2003: 56), for their part, take a more descriptive view: 'game is what is created in the interaction between players or between player(s) and gamemaster(s) within a specified diegetic framework'.

Regardless of the focus on different specific aspects, most of the definitions of RPGs that we can evoke emphasise mainly the interactivity and eminently narrative dimension of these games, involving the construction of stories starring the characters (Amézquita Castañeda and Moreno Ramos 2001: 34; Rangel Jiménez 2015: 3390).

As a synthesis of these aspects, we can consider that RPGs focus on the player's interpretation of a character in an adventure that will develop according to his or her decisions along with those of other players, and in which the participation of a narrator or gamemaster is essential. This intermediary is in charge of managing the consequences of the decisions taken by the players, following a precise system of rules and providing different narrative elements. Regarding this last aspect, the narrativity of RPGs, the development of the game is established based on a story that is revealed and takes shape as the characters act. The manuals contain scenarios, locations, ideas about the characters, both main (players) and secondary (non-players), and even, in many cases, an indicative script that sets the guidelines for the narrator to shape the adventure in one direction or another. The narrative is, therefore, the means through which the players are immersed in the world described by the creators of each game, and it is through it that they are linked to that fictional world.[2]

Studying these worlds which are created and experienced through narration reveals that since the appearance of the first RPGs there has been a preference for setting their scenarios in different periods of the past, with history and literature playing a fundamental role as the main sources of inspiration. Several authors have thus assessed the relationship between history and the fictions created in RPGs, mainly stressing the importance of historical sources

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[1] English translation of the Swedish text in Hitchens and Drachen (2008: 4).
[2] On the use of narrative and its importance in RPGs, see Grouling Cover 2010; Heliö 2004.

in the general setting of these games (Carbó García 2019; Carbó García and Pérez Miranda 2010). Among the numerous historical periods they recreate, ancient Egypt was an irresistible choice, and the world of the pharaohs has had a decisive influence on the creation of a large number of RPGs, in which many of the usual themes drawn from Egyptomania are evident, such as the fascination with tombs full of treasures, the existence of curses, traps, mummies, explorers, and archaeologists.

This article analyses Egypt as recreated in RPGs, looking first at a brief selection of Egyptian-inspired works and then focusing on the specific case of the presence of narratives inspired by Egyptian history and mythology in some of the books of the *World of Darkness* Universe. From the analysis of these narratives, conclusions can be drawn about the use by this game's creators of various sources, often taken from contemporary popular culture as well as from academic Egyptological research.

Ancient Egypt in Role-playing Games

After the appearance of what is considered the first modern RPG, *Dungeons and Dragons* (hereafter *D&D*) by Dave Anderson and Gary Gigax in 1974, which recreates a typical medieval fantasy universe, and the subsequent proliferation of others that followed the same game systems and similar settings,[3] from the late 1970s and early 1980s onwards we witnessed the appearance of multiple adventures and scenarios set in other temporal contexts. It was at this time that the ancient Egyptian culture burst into the universe of RPGs, with titles such as *Dark Tower* (J.A. Jaquais, 1979) and *Pharaoh* (T. Hickman and L. Hickman, 1982), both modules with Egyptianising settings within the *D&D* rules system. In the former, the players must help a group of followers of the goddess Mithra to recover her main temple, the 'White Tower', occupied by followers of the Egyptian god Seth, while in *Pharaoh* the action takes place inside a pyramid which the characters, following Ra's directives, must access in order to recover a lost sceptre and confront the pharaoh's ghost. *Legendary Duck Tower* (J.A. Jaquays and R. Krafft, 1980), a module of *Rune Quest*, also belongs to this first period of Egyptianising RPGs, although in this case, the Egyptian influence is only perceived in the aesthetics of certain objects and the specific architectural motifs of the settings.

The fashion for Egyptian-inspired settings expanded in the following years, as evidenced by *The Valley of the Pharaohs* (M. Ballent, 1983), set in the Egyptian New Kingdom; *The Egyptian Trilogy* (J.H. Brennan, 1982) or *The Cleopatra Gambit* (E. Sharp and G. Spiegle, 1984). The latter introduced one of the traditional icons of Egyptomania, Cleopatra, into the futuristic universe of the game *Timemaster*, a time-travel adventure in which players have to prevent the assassination of the Ptolemaic queen.

From the mid-1980s to the present day, in parallel with the rise of RPGs, we have witnessed a proliferation of games inspired by ancient Egypt or with Egyptianising settings. Firstly, there are games that present an eminently historical vision of ancient Egypt, either totally excluding or barely incorporating fantastic elements into their narratives: *Basic Egitto* (1998)

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[3] In *D&D*, its authors combined, with unprecedented success, the rule systems of earlier wargames (e.g., *Chain Mail*, 1971) with their knowledge of SimSoc (Simulated Society) and their passion for fantasy, to shape a game in which players entered dungeons and caves, chasing and fighting fantastic creatures while making decisions about how to act and, in this way, progressively creating a personal story.

by Angelo Montaninni, the Spanish game by P. Gil and C. Sánchez named *Saqueadores de Tumbas* (2012), *Egypt: Playground of The Gods* (G. D'Hoogh and P. Elliott, 2004) or *Nefertiti Overdrive* (F. Ronald, 2018). Also noteworthy is the module *Nile Empire: War in Heliopolis* (F. Jandit and J.R. Phythyon, 2002), in which players take part in the struggles against the Hyksos invaders and the subsequent birth of the Egyptian New Kingdom. Secondly, other games and accompanying guides, such as the one published as part of the modules for *Role Master* under the title *Mythic Egypt* (E. Wajenburg, 1990), focused on the mythology of ancient Egypt, a line also followed by GURPS ('Generic Universal Role-Playing System', created in 1986) in its book *Gurps Egypt* (T.C. Kane, 1998). These two books were not games in themselves but compilations including explanations of Egyptian culture and religion along with other interesting narrative data that could be used interactively in order to adapt the Egyptian reality to an RPG. Thirdly, another way in which Egypt was linked to RPGs was through its incidental appearance in some games within the general context of antiquity, as seen in the *OGL Product* game collection, focused on historical fantasy games. Within this collection are *Testament: Roleplaying in the Biblical Era* (S. Bennie, 2003) and, more specifically, *Egyptian Adventures: Hamunaptra* (2004) by S. Kerson, A. Marmell and C.A. Suleiman. These games present narratives inspired by various traditions, such as those based on a biblical theme, to create a pseudo-historical fantasy world where characters wander among idealised visions of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria or ancient Israel.

Alongside the games mentioned above, different campaign scenarios also emerged, located in remote kingdoms or territories inhabited by lineages of pharaohs or where elements explicitly or implicitly inspired by the ancient Egyptian civilisation proliferated. In the 1980s, for example, *D&D* introduced the trilogy *Desert of Desolation*, designed by T. Hickman and L. Hickman, in which, after recovering treasures from inside a pyramid, players travel through Egyptianising landscapes to find the tomb of a wizard charged with slaying a fire demon. The 1990s saw the publication of the *Hollow World* series, featuring the fictional planet of Mystara, some of whose settings are inspired by extinct cultures of the past. Among them, Nithia, recreated in *Nightrage* (A. Varney, 1990) and *Kingdom of Nithia* (N. Ewell and B. Mobley, 1991), is inspired by ancient Egypt. Other modules with an Egyptianising background are those set in the lands of Mulhorand in the book *Old Empires* (S. Bennie, 1990) for the game *Forgotten Realms*, where a society ruled by gods and a priestly caste with clear analogies to ancient Egyptian culture is described. In 2002 Gary Gygax published *Necropolis*, a campaign for *D&D (3rd ed.)* set in the fantastic kingdom of Khemit, a kingdom with clear Egyptian visual influences, for which the *Set's Daughters* module was developed (J. Barnson and B. Webb, 2003). Other *D&D* modules were *Lost Tomb of the Sphinx Queen* (J. Crow and C. Doyle, 2005), *OSRIC: The Lost Pyramid of Imhotep* (A. Warden, 2009) and *Beneath the Festered Sun* (P. Coelho, 2016).

Likewise, following the adaptations of the Conan universe by *D&D* (1984) and *GURPS* (1988), in 2002 the publisher Mongoose created a specific game integrating the module *Stygia: Serpent of the South* (V. Darlage, 2006), which exploited the influence of ancient Egypt found in Robert E. Howard's novels. Similarly, the game *Barbarians of Lemuria*, inspired by the novels of Lin Carter, brought out the modules *Atisi (BoL)* (2016) and *Atisi Ancient World* (2018). Within this theme, *Pathfinder*, one of the most successful medieval fantasy games in recent years, introduced the adventure *Entombed with the Pharaohs* (M. Kortes, 2007) set in Osirion, a kingdom on the banks of the river Sphinx ruled by a dynasty of god-kings. This mythical place was also to be the main setting for *Osirion, Land of Pharaohs* (J. Nelson and T. Stewart, 2008). Published later within this *Pathfinder* universe was the *Mummy's Mask* series (2014), which includes more than

a dozen books in which the central plot follows the adventures of the players in their search for treasures, and a mission focused on recovering the funerary mask of an ancient pharaoh used by the villains to create an army of the undead.

Among these alternative universes where we find Egyptianising kingdoms, we should also mention the territory of Nehekhara, taken from the *Warhammer Fantasy* wargame, and the lost kingdom of Ahn'Qiraj from the *Warcraft* universe. On the one hand, Nehekhara is the cradle of a civilisation that fell victim in the past to a curse that turned the population into undead beings ruled by pharaohs from beyond the grave.[4] On the other hand, the game *World of Warcraft* includes among its creatures a culture of insect-like beings linked to the Egyptian world through the desert kingdom of Ahn'Qiraj and the ancient Black Empire, places that will serve as the setting for *Warcraft: the role playing Game* (2003) and *World of Warcraft: The role-playing game* (2005).

Finally, we include in this section on RPGs and Egyptomania the adaptation into this type of game of Howard Philip Lovecraft's literary universe, and then the fiction recreated by *Stargate.* Firstly, Lovecraft's work includes constant allusions to ancient Egypt (Reinhardt 2008) and his mythology often uses elements of this civilisation in the construction of some of his characters, as in the case of Nyarlathotep or the black pharaoh. This is embodied in the successful *Call of Cthulhu* RPG series (S. Petersen and L. Willis, 1981). Of particular interest for their Egyptomania-inspired backgrounds are the adventures *Masks of Nyarlathotep* (L. Ditillo and L. Willis, 1984), in which players investigate a series of mysteries linked to the cult of the primordial divinity Nyarlathotep in New York, London, Nairobi, or Cairo; and *Acthung! Cthulhu* (Ch. Birch, 2012), which contains *Guide to North Africa* (Ch. Birch, D. Blewer and A. Bund, 2015). This last involves gameplay and scenarios that transport players to World War II and the struggle between the esoteric sections of the Third Reich and the Allies as they vie to get their hands on magical artefacts and relics, including some of Egyptian origin.

Secondly, the fictional *Stargate* universe grew out of the novel of the same name by Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich (1994) and its film adaptation by the latter in the same year. The success of the film was accompanied by an extension of the Stargate universe through new series and novels, as well as the publication of the *Stargate SG-1 Roleplaying Game* (2003), in which players explore different worlds helping the Tau-ri race against the evil Goa'uld overlords, many of them personified in the gods of Egyptian mythology (Fernández Pichel 2023).

In short, this brief selection, which does not pretend to be exhaustive, shows the recreation in different RPGs of ancient Egypt, or of motifs from this civilisation, as an essential or incidental part of complex narratives. The analysis shows the insertion of this type of content related to Egyptomania in many of the multiple genres of RPGs, mainly in medieval fantasy games, adventure and mystery games, and even in (cosmic) horror and science-fiction games. Its adaptability to such diverse RPGs undoubtedly responds to one of the essential premises of these types of games, which has to do with the possibility offered to the player of playing characters and living stories as far away as possible from the current daily reality. Ancient

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[4] Games Workshop, creator of the *Warhammer Fantasy* wargame, also designed RPGs set in another great futuristic line, *Warhammer 40000*, in which there are civilisations such as the Necrons, whose Egyptian inspiration is unquestionable.

Egypt, due to its temporal distance, its character of lost and rediscovered civilisation, and, above all, its link in the western mentality to magic, mysticism, and fantasy, offers, therefore, a fertile scenario for the development of all types of interactive adventures.[5]

The World of Darkness Universe

From the previous list, some of the publications in the *World of Darkness* Universe (hereafter *WoD*), which include various content inspired by ancient Egypt and its mythology, have been consciously excluded.

The event that inaugurated this universe was the publication of Mark Rein-Hagen's *Vampire: The Masquerade* in 1991, with which the White Wolf company sought to create a whole series of RPGs centred on personal horror. With this purpose, a world was conceived that brought together many elements inspired by different mythologies and tales from all over the world, and in which the main characters were some of the usual monsters of contemporary cinema, literature, or comics. Following this premise, and after the initial success of *Vampire: The Masquerade*, other games were developed in the same universe, such as *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* (1992), *World of Darkness: Mummy* (1992), *Mage: The Ascension* (1993), *Wraith: The Oblivion* (1994) and *Changeling: The Dreaming* (1995).

The general plot of *WoD* is based on the existence of a modern-day dystopian world in which various vampire clans, werewolf packs, fairy courts, witch covens, wizard orders, mummies and other beings coexist. Players play members of these societies of supernatural creatures and participate in some of the universal conflicts that affect them, such as the struggles of the different vampire clans for power, the defense of nature to prevent chaos and decay, or the desire to maintain magic in the world, among others. While each game focuses on one of these species, and they are rarely aware of the existence of the others, there are multiple modules where the crossover and conflict between some of these groups is the main focus. Players are thus offered the possibility to participate in a global adventure in which they can explore different world views from the perspective of different species, in different countries, with different cultures, and even at different times.[6]

One of the essential novelties of these games is that, as mentioned, the player plays the monster, not the hero, for the first time. In treating these traditionally antagonistic characters, a new component is also established that will influence the development of narratives in RPGs: the players are forced to suffer the internal conflict of the characters, who thus acquire a great complexity in the expression of their emotions, feelings, and concerns. This characterisation of the monster was deeply transgressive in the 1990s since, at a time of crisis of values, a game in which ethics and morality were neither the only nor the most desirable of paths was proposed. Instead, ideals linked to rebellion, corruption, anarchy, and free sexuality were imposed.

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[5] In this regard, see Fritze 2016.

[6] White Wolf published different modules of these games set in the Middle Ages: *Vampire Dark Age* (M. Rein-Hagen and E. Skemp, 1996), *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade* (P. Brucato, 1998) and *Dark Age: Werewolf* (N. Peterson, 2003); the Wild West: *Werewolf: The Wild West* (E. Skemp, 1997); or the Victorian Age: *Victorian Age: Vampire* (J. Achilli and M. Rein-Hagen, 2002).

The game also had another characteristic that explains its success: its focus on narrative to the detriment of the use of dice and event tables, typical of systems such as *D&D*, *Runequest* or *Rolemaster*. The narrative of the director (master) thus became essential to generate the necessary dramatic tension, just as the interpretative effort of the players served to enhance its effects.[7]

As a result, *WoD* quickly became a worldwide social phenomenon, causing the spectrum of its players to broaden considerably beyond the traditional RPG users and buyers.[8] Not only the aforementioned games were offered to them, but the universe expanded to other media through novels, card games (*Jihad*, Richard Garfield, 1994), television series (*Kindred: The Embrace*, J. Leekley, 1996) and computer games (*Vampire: The Masquerade Redemption*, Activision, 2001; *Vampire: The Masquerade Bloodline*, Activision, 2006), shaping what some authors define as transmedia reality (Scolari 2009; Ciancia 2019).[9] Likewise, the influence of *Vampire: The Masquerade* has transcended the *WoD* universe itself, having a significant impact on works of enormous commercial success such as the films of the *Twilight* saga (2008-2010) or the series *True Blood* (2008), among others.[10]

These brief considerations about *WoD*'s themes and editorial dissemination are essential for the analysis of the settings, characters and plots inspired by ancient Egypt.

Egypt Recreated in *World of Darkness*

As previously mentioned, the fictional universe created for *WoD* is inhabited by humans and a whole series of fantastic creatures that coexist and interact in a dystopian world set in the present day. Among the latter, we will focus on three main species: vampires, mummies, and werewolves. One of the 13 vampiric clans into which the first group is divided, the 'Setites' or 'followers of Set', have their initial connection with ancient Egypt in common with the other two species, which will explain their joint participation in different events over the millennia and up to the present day. Three main works of the *WoD* universe inform us of these vicissitudes: *Clan Book: Setites* (1995), *Silent Striders: Tribe Book* (1996) and *Mummy Second Edition* (1997).[11]

The analysis of certain narratives integrated into these books, therefore, allows us to define and characterise the ancient Egypt (or Egypts in the plural) recreated in this RPG. In order to achieve a better understanding of this creative process on the part of the game's authors, we will look at the possible Egyptological background, in the academic sense, that can be deduced

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[7] In this respect, one of White Wolf's publications was *The Masquerade: Mind's Eye Theatre* (M. Rein-Hagen, 1993), the first rulebook for playing a live action role-playing game or LARP.

[8] See *World of Darkness: The documentary* (2017) by Giles Alderson (https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/film106317.html).

[9] *WoD* did not have a cinematic version, although the obvious narrative analogies of this universe with the films of the *Underworld* saga (2003-2016) led the company White Wolf to sue the distributor Sony Screen Gemspor for plagiarism.

[10] In the case of *Twilight*, the similarities with the world of *Vampire: The Masquerade* are unmistakable, as evidenced mainly by the existence in the films of a society of Ancients who set a code of conduct among vampires and the development of a global conflict between vampires and werewolves with deep spiritual implications. As for *True Blood*, the analogies are even more obvious: the series, like the games, depicts a vampire society composed of clans, kings, queens and sheriffs, in which other creatures, such as fairies, werewolves and witches, also have a place.

[11] The contents analysed in this article, although scattered in these three books, are mainly collected in their opening pages: Watts 1995: 11-22; Skemp and Hatch 1996: 15-26; Davis and Estes 1997: 15-32.

from the design of its settings and some of its characters. In doing so, we intend to find an answer to the question posed in the title of this article: Does the *World of Darkness* universe use ancient Egyptian sources?

A first indication of such an approach might be drawn from the mention of a scientific advisor in the credits of the game, in this case, an Egyptologist or historian whose collaboration in the project would imply an academic approach (to a greater or lesser extent) as the origin of certain narratives or motifs used in the game. However, no such advisor is credited in any of the *WoD* books. A more eloquent indication is provided by *Mummy Second Edition*, whose introduction includes a recommended bibliography and filmography for the master and players (Davis and Estes 1997: 9-11). In general, these books focus on the history and religion of the ancient Egyptians, with three main themes: mummies, magic, and everyday life. For religion, the main works suggested are those of the British Egyptologist Ernest Wallis Budge, both of which are more than a century old (!): *Egyptian Religion* (1899) and *Egyptian Magic* (1901). The direct reading of some primary historical sources is also recommended, such as the translation by the same author of the spells or recitations of the Book of the Dead, contained in different funerary papyri in the British Museum in London: *The Book of the Dead* (1899). Alongside these works are several encyclopaedias or works dealing with general aspects of the religion of ancient civilisations, such as Stanislov Grof's *Books of the Dead: Manuals for Living and Dying* (1994), S.H. Hooke's *Middle Eastern Mythology* (1963) or even the *Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*. As for the dynastic history of ancient Egypt, mention should be made of Leonard Contrell's *Life under the Pharaohs* (1957) and Margaret Bunson's *A Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (1991). The latter work, and Wallis Budge's *Egyptian Language: Easy Lessons in Egyptian Hieroglyphs* (1910), once again seem to be the main sources used to select the numerous terms taken from the Egyptian language that are found in the game.

Regarding the recommended works of fiction, firstly, some novels of the horror and mystery genre are included, with authors such as Bram Stoker, Marie Corelli, Agatha Christie or, from a more recent period, Anne Rice. Secondly, only the cinematic versions of *The Mummy* by the Hammer and Universal production companies from the 1930s to the 1970s are included.

In short, these elements, although far from allowing us to categorically establish the sources used in the creation of the RPGs of the *WoD* universe, suggest the participation in this textual genesis of a limited corpus of scientific literature, often outdated and of an eminently informative nature, and also of emblematic works of popular culture, mainly Hollywood cinema and genre literature of the 19th and 20th centuries.

If we then turn to the narratives used in *WoD* and its different books, that is, to an examination of the diegesis of their contents, we find confirmation of the above premises. To exemplify these issues, we will look at two main themes of ancient Egyptian culture recreated in *WoD*: the world of origins and the myth of Osiris.

The Origins of Egyptian Civilisation

According to the *WoD* narrative, Cain murdered his brother Abel and began his wanderings through the world (Genesis 4:1-13), but in a plotline diverging from the biblical source, he fell victim to a curse that turned him into a vampire. Before this point, the story in *WoD* is of no

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importance, and the reference to episodes of biblical origins and life in paradise adds nothing to our understanding of what will happen later in the game.[12] Cain then passes on his curse to others, thus creating a vampire lineage that will progressively populate the entire world. Vampires have therefore been present throughout human history.

The Nile Valley was one of the *WoD* settings for the spread of vampirism, as *Clan Book: Setites* recounts. This is an Egypt prior to the establishment of the historical dynasties at the end of the 4th millennium BC.[13] At this time, the land of the Nile was ruled by a military leader, Ra, who unified the two parts of the country with the help of his grandsons, Osiris and Seth, opponents and antagonists and sons of Geb and Nut. With the appearance of these and other characters, such as Isis and Neftys, wives of Osiris and Seth respectively, we see that *WoD* uses the names of the gods of the so-called 'Heliopolitan Ennead' as the main protagonists of the narrative.[14] However, in the case of *WoD* we are not yet in the presence of gods: in these initial moments, Ra, Seth or Osiris are characters evoked in their human and supposedly historical dimension.[15]

This reconstruction of events has certain analogies with what some historical sources from the pharaonic past tell us. Thus, the Turin Royal Canon of the 19th Dynasty (Turin papyrus N.1874, verso) records in its first column of text the names of the divine kings who ruled Egypt before the 1st Dynasty, including at the beginning of the document, among others, Geb, Osiris, Seth, Horus, Thoth and Maat (Kitchen 1996: 540-541; Redford 1986: 1-18, 231-234). During the Persian domination of Egypt (525-404 BC), the Greek historian Herodotus travelled to Egypt and wrote a work devoted to the history of the kingdom, of whose beginnings he states: 'Before these men, they said, the rulers of Egypt were gods, but none had been contemporary with the human priests' (Herodotus, *Histories* 2.144.2). Much later, in the 3rd century BC, at the time of the Ptolemies, Maneton of Sebennytos in his work *Aegyptiaca* compiled a list of the kings of the 31 historical dynasties of Egypt, before which the author places the reign of Hephaestus, Helios, Sosis, Chronos, Osiris, Typhon and, finally, Horus (*Aegyptiaca* 1, Fr. 1).[16] To these testimonies we must add *De Iside et Osiride* by Plutarch (1st-2nd century AD), as we shall see later.

Other ancient sources describe the power exercised by the gods over the human world after creation. One of them is the *Myth of the Heavenly Cow*, known to us from various accounts from the New Kingdom (1550-1070 BC) (Hornung 1982). In this myth, the sun-god Ra, as king, has to deal with the revolt of mankind, after which he decides to impose the physical separation

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[12] Most *WoD* books make explicit reference to these early events, and the game itself took advantage of its publishing success to create a Cainite bible called *Book of Nod* (Chupp and Greenberg 1997).

[13] There are no precise chronological references in the book to these foundational events. On one occasion, it is simply alluded to as occurring some 7000 years before the present, i.e. around 5000 BC (Watts 1995: 11).

[14] Only the first couple formed by the sun-god Ra according to the Heliopolitan cosmogony, Shu, and Tefnut, are absent from the account mainly transmitted by *Clan Book: Setites*.

[15] In *Mummy Second Edition* this question is approached with a certain ambiguity. Thus, certain characters, such as Isis, are considered to be of divine lineage but not gods and, at the same time, it is pointed out how Egypt originally witnessed the reign of the gods and that Osiris was the first king of the unified country (Davis and Estes 1997: 16). Aware of the difficulties that masters and players might find in these apparent contradictions, the revised version of *Clan Book: Setites*, which appeared in 2001 as *Clan Book: Followers of Set*, states of Osiris and Set: 'Our lineage began - appropriately, many would say - with treachery and a brother's murder. No, not Caine and Abel. Our tale is much older than that Hebrew fable, and the two brothers were gods' (Shomshak 2001: 12).

[16] In this list of god-kings, the author mainly takes their Greek names. This *interpretatio graeca* of the divinities corresponds to the sequence Ptah, Ra, Shu, Geb, Osiris, Seth, and Horus of Egyptian mythology.

between the hitherto confused human and divine spheres. Some aspects of the myth are also emphasised by the so-called *Myth of the Wandering Goddess*, mainly known from Greco-Roman testimonies (Junker 1911; Inconnu-Bocquillon 2001).

Similarly, in the evocation of Ra and his warrior facet in *WoD* we find echoes of the existence of different proto-state units in Egypt in the predynastic period that were later unified under the dual authority of the pharaoh, king of the Two Lands: Upper Egypt (south) and Lower Egypt (north).[17] Thus, in *WoD*, Ra is said to have conquered the whole country and to have formed a powerful kingdom whose authority was recognised by the early inhabitants of the Nile Valley. In this way, Ra plays the role that ancient Egyptian tradition attributed to the pharaoh Menes as the unifier of the country and founder of pharaonic kingship around 3100 BC.[18] As we have seen above, however, *WoD* places this territorial unification of the northern and southern kingdoms at a time well before the rise of the 1st Dynasty, and Menes himself is mentioned in *Mummy: Second Edition* as the first pharaoh of Egypt in later times (Davis and Estes 1997: 23-24). The successive reigns of Osiris and Seth in the game likewise evoke these predynastic events, with Osiris representing the northern territories while Seth dominates the south of the country.[19]

The *WoD* universe thus combines two complementary images relating to the beginning of Egyptian civilisation: on the one hand, the historical (unification of Egypt) and, on the other, the mythological (reign of the gods).

This is the initial setting for the fiction recreated in the three RPG books analysed here, in which we find narratives taken mainly from the biblical tradition and the history of ancient Egypt. In addition to these elements, there is also the influence of vampire fantasy.

In the game, after the murder of Geb and Nut by his father Ra, Seth opposes his grandfather's actions and goes into exile in the deserts near the Nile Valley. Osiris, on the other hand, decides to stay with Ra, thus accentuating his opposition to his brother and rival Seth. When Ra dies, Osiris succeeds him on the throne and deifies his grandfather as sun-god, revered throughout Egypt. On hearing this news, Seth returns to Egypt and claims the legitimacy of reigning in one part of the country while the other would be held by Osiris, both as successors of King Ra. Osiris opposes such a division and expels his brother from Egypt, condemning him to wander in the deserts. In this second exile, Seth meets a daughter of Cain who, therefore, belongs to the second generation of vampires. This vampire, whose name we do not know, makes Seth a member of her cursed lineage.

Seth's third-generation kin execute their second-generation predecessors, prompting Seth to launch a great war to wipe out the killers of his creator or sire, the unnamed vampire, in a

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[17]   A synthesis of the end of Egyptian prehistory and the emergence of the unified Egyptian state can be found in Campagno (2013), with an abundant bibliography. Among the different hypotheses that propose the achievement of political unification in Egypt, the creators of *WoD* opt for that of warfare between the different parts of the country.
[18]   The historicity of the pharaoh Menes and his identification with Narmer, attested by various pre-dynastic objects, including his famous palette in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, is still the subject of debate (Vercoutter 1992: 199-209). In any case, the ancient Egyptians recalled the existence of a personage by the name of *Mnj* at the beginning of the dynastic line of pharaohs, as reflected, among others, in the royal list of the temple of Seti I at Abydos (Kitchen 1975: 178; 1993: 153), the Turin Canon (Ryholt 2004: 141-143) and, later, Maneton's *Aegyptiaca*.
[19]   The geographical distribution of these two characters will be discussed later.

conflict that is still raging today.[20] This war is called *jihad*, thus taking the Koranic designation. In order to form an army to fight for his cause, Seth returns to Egypt, where he discovers that Osiris has also been turned into a vampire. The book *Mummy Second Edition* reports this event, telling how an enigmatic character, Typhon, arrives at the court ruled by Osiris and, after meeting him in the course of several nocturnal visits, the king shows a progressive weakening.[21] Along with this symptom of transformation, Osiris also acquires new abilities, including an enormous strength. He then becomes a god, but the Maat, the balance and cosmic order of the Egyptian cosmos, has been altered, for the god-king is now a vampire.

From this moment on, along with Seth's *jihad*, we witness the clashes in Egypt between Seth and his brother Osiris and other members of the Osirian circle, such as Horus and Isis, in what will be a war between vampires, in which the mummies of Horus and the werewolves also take part. These events are the starting point for the next section of this paper, but before that, it is worth addressing several questions about the vampire's involvement in *WoD*'s Egyptianising fiction.

Firstly, in the origins of the Egyptian civilisation recreated in this universe, the insertion of the story of Cain and Abel and its consequences in the conversion of the predynastic Egyptian god-kings into vampires touches on an issue commonly recreated in contemporary popular culture: that of ancient Egypt as the origin of human civilisations and as a place of eternity and immortality. Egyptomania has contributed to these tropes from its beginnings, based primarily on the temporal distance of this millennia-old culture and its traditional association with tombs, mummies, and life beyond death (Lupton 2009; Versluys 2017). A modern manifestation of these leitmotifs is found in several works in which the figure of the vampire appears linked to ancient Egypt. In Anne Rice's *The Queen of the Damned* (1988), Queen Akasha of the pre-pharaonic kingdom of Kemet is the first vampire in history.[22] In the literary tetralogy *Les gardiens d'Apophis* (2019-2021) by R.B. Devaux, the Egyptian gods create vampires at the beginning of time to protect them. Other vampire characters inspired by ancient Egypt are Purgatori, in the Chaos Comic! publications, or Queen Lysis in the story *La tumba de Lisis*, from *Mort Cinder* (1962) by Héctor Germán Oesterheld and Alberto Breccia. In all these cases, the vampire is a creature that defies mortality, an undead, and precisely this notion of permanence finds a privileged setting in a civilisation which, like that of ancient Egypt, attaches decisive importance to the postmortem existence of the individual in the afterlife. To this, we can also add the traditional aura of mystery, magic, and mysticism that current popular opinion gives to the ancient civilisation of the Nile.

Secondly, in the characterisation of the Egyptian vampire in *WoD,* we witness a reworking of the classical vampire, as evidenced in the preceding pages, and other narratives integrated into the different RPG books of this universe.[23] It is said of Osiris that, with each nocturnal

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[20] The term 'sire' generally defines dignitaries and members of the nobility. In *WoD* it retains a part of this meaning to respectfully qualify one who turns a human into a vampire.

[21] Typhon is a monstrous and malignant divinity in Greek mythology, mainly related to storms. By virtue of this he was identified with Seth, who was habitually referred to as Typhon in the works of the Greco-Latin authors. See in this respect Fabre 2001. In *WoD*, however, Seth and Typhon appear on the one hand unified, as in the case of the statue of Typhon that presides over the temples of the Setites all over the world (Typhon = Seth) (Watts 1995: 37), but on the other hand as separate beings, as in the present account of Osiris becoming a vampire.

[22] Kemet is the name of Egypt in the ancient Egyptian language: *Kmt* 'The black (land)'.

[23] We do not intend to undertake a detailed analysis of the characteristics of the classic vampire in popular culture, but simply to look at some of their recreations in the context of *WoD* narratives.

visit by Typhon to his palace, he grows paler and paler as if he lacks blood. In this progressive transformation from human to vampire, we find echoes of the passage from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) in which the young Lucy Westenra is bitten every night by the Transylvanian vampire in her Whitby residence.[24] The importance of blood in relation to Seth in *WoD* speaks to the ritual of conversion of Seth's followers or members of the vampiric Setite clan (Figure 1), during which the newly initiated have to drink the blood of their sire or creator. Finally, in a slightly different context that nevertheless has to do with the supernatural, Seth's link to blood features in Alex Kutzman's recent cinematic version of *The Mummy* (2017), in which the Egyptian princess Ahmanet seeks to retain her right to rule Egypt through a blood pact with the god of darkness, Seth.

Once converted, the new Setites must stay away from the light as they are now subject to the same curse that fell upon the original vampire, Cain, and is shared by Seth.[25] This aversion to light, which defines the nature of

Figure 1. Priestess of the setite vampiric clan in a temple dedicated to this god (drawing © María Luisa Rodríguez Jiménez).

the vampire in many works of popular culture, receives an explanation in *WoD* that refers, on the one hand, to Seth's hatred for Ra, the murderer of his parents and who, after his death, became the sun-god of the Egyptians, and was therefore linked to the light of the sun, and, on the other hand, to the relationship of the Setites with the god Apophis, dweller in the darkness of the underworld. This explains the chiefly nocturnal way of life of the Setites in *WoD*. Typhon appears at night and disappears in the morning, and in the context of the struggles between Seth and Osiris, the latter's followers attack during the day to take advantage of the former's weakness during his resting and inactive phase. In Neil Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), a film adaptation of Anne Rice's play of the same name (1976), the vampire Louis can see the dawn again in the images of the invention that emerged at the end of the 19th century,

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[24] It is also said of Lucy Westenra in *Dracula* that she grows paler with each new day (Stoker 1897: 90). The pallor of the vampire and his victims is already present in the first literary testimonies of the vampiric genre, as Goethe's poem *Die Braut von Corinth* (1797) shows: 'Wie der Schnee so weiß, / aber kalt wie Eis / ist das Liebchen, das du dir erwählt' (110-112).

[25] This and other curses were sent by the four archangels to Cain after the murder of Abel and the appearance of Lilith (Chupp and Greenberg 1997: 30-39).

the cinematograph. The Setites in *WoD*, on the other hand, are sensitive not only to daylight, but also to any object that emits light, such as fire or a camera or, relatedly, a television or cinema screen.

Similarly, the vampire's capacity for transformation is taken from the classic vampire. For example, Stoker's Dracula introduced the relationship between the vampire and the bat (for which, however, there are antecedents in nineteenth-century literature (Dodd 2019)). In this work, the Count also takes the form of a wolf or even fog. In *WoD*, on the other hand, this aspect is approached in two different ways. Firstly, the Setites have an ability called 'serpenthis', by which they can transform themselves into serpents and thus evoke the original link of this clan with Apophis, a god of ophidian appearance (Shomshak 2001: 65-67). Secondly, when they become vampires, both Seth and Osiris (and all their followers) develop an internal quality called 'Beast', which must be restrained to prevent the transformation into a monster and the spiritual doom of the individual.

In summary, the Egyptian vampires in *WoD* are creatures of the night, blood-drinking and changeable in form and appearance, all characteristics found originally in the depiction of the classical vampire in literature and film (Siruela 2022). The way in which these issues are combined with elements from biblical tradition, ancient Egyptian history, and mythology confirms the reworking of these ancient and recent documentary materials in a novel way. This dynamic is then continued in *WoD*'s evocation of the Osiris myth.

The Osiris Myth According to World of Darkness

The existence of mythical narratives in ancient Egypt is a subject that has given rise to much debate among scholars in the discipline (Goebs 2002: 27-38; Meeks 2006: 163-170; Sternberg 1985: 10-20). For a significant period during the historical development of this civilisation, references to the divinities of Egyptian religion and the mythical events that concern their interactions consist of brief, scattered allusions to episodes or mythemes of broader narratives. They are found in texts of various types and content, such as hymns, ritual, funerary and magical texts, and literary tales, among others. Myths, known to us mainly from ancient Greek religion, only appear in Egypt later (Assmann 1977). The famous 'Myth of Osiris' is no exception. As early as the *Pyramid Texts*, which were written down at the end of the 5th Dynasty (c. 2375-2345 BC), we have numerous mythemes evoking some of the essential events of the myth. However, it was not until the late 1st or early 2nd century AD that the Latin author Plutarch retells the myth in full form in his work *De Iside et Osiride*.

Through this and other sources[26] we can reconstruct the essential content of the narrative of the myth: Osiris, king of Egypt, is murdered by his brother Seth, who thus succeeds in usurping the throne. There are several variants on how the fratricide took place, including Seth's attack by the river at Nedyet, Gehesty or This, depending on the source (Vernus 1991), or Osiris being placed in a sarcophagus and then thrown into the waters of the Nile and carried to Byblos in the eastern Mediterranean. The myth also alludes to the dismemberment of Osiris's body by Seth, who distributes each part of the divine body throughout the different territories of Egypt. With the help of her sister Neftys, Isis manages to reunite all of Osiris's body parts and,

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[26] Various allusions to the myth are also found in Herodotus, *Histories* 2 and in Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 1. A recent synthesis of the Osiris myth and its Egyptian and Greco-Roman sources can be found in Shaw (2014: 67-82).

thanks to her magical powers, she endows Osiris with the vital breath necessary for him to procreate with her, and she becomes pregnant with the god Horus. The posthumous son, the legitimate successor to the throne of Egypt, then begins a long struggle against his uncle Seth to avenge Osiris and restore order (Maat).

These general outlines of the myth are followed in *WoD* with great fidelity. However, secondary narratives are introduced that extend the plots and subplots of the myth with elements taken from the vampire fantasy genre. This reworking of the source material affects the characterisation of the main *dramatis personae* of the Osiris constellation and the nature of the conflicts in which they are involved.

In the first of these conflicts, Osiris and Seth are two vampires at odds with each other for earthly power in Egypt. Osiris represents the beneficent side, so to speak, of vampirism, rejecting the brutal and degrading aspects that are characteristic of these creatures. The story of his death and subsequent resurrection in the myth undoubtedly suggests the alignment of the god with the figure of the vampire, setting it in a general context, in this case that of Egyptian civilisation, which, moreover, is linked mainly to fantasy, horror, and mystery in popular culture, as we pointed out earlier. Seth, for his part, embodies the ruthless vampire, in keeping with his role as a villain in the myth of Osiris and other sources from the pharaonic past. In these sources, we also find mention of Seth's relationship with blood, as evidenced mainly by spell 175 of the *Book of the Dead* or certain passages in the Salt papyrus 825, among others.[27]

The opposition between the two vampires is justified in *WoD*: firstly by their original links to the two parts of Egypt, Seth to the south and Osiris to the north; secondly by Seth's rejection and Osiris's apparent connivance in the murder of his parents, Geb and Nut; and, finally, by the infidelity committed by Neftys, Seth's wife, with Osiris during the former's exile in the desert. The first of these dualities, which we can call 'geographical', is apparently a variant of the traditional linking of Horus to the northern territories (Lower Egypt) and Seth to the south (Upper Egypt) (Griffiths 1960; Velde 1967: 61). Echoes of the predynastic relevance of Hierakompolis, the 'City of the Falcon' (= Horus), and of Nagada, whose local god in later historical times was Seth, are also identified in this dichotomy. However, no document from this period mentions Osiris, whose first attestations in ancient sources appear in the 5th Dynasty (Nuzzolo 2020). As for the second opposition, concerning Geb and Nut, this is based on a passage in Plutarch's account (*De Iside et Osiride* 12) according to which Ra, dissatisfied with the union of Cronus (Geb) and his daughter Rhea (Nut) forbids the latter to bear his children during the existing days of the year. In order to allow her to carry out her task, the 'epagomenal days' or additional days are instituted at the end of the official Egyptian calendar, on which Nut's five children are then born. This mytheme parallels Egyptian temple inscriptions from the Greco-Roman period (Tillier 2014). In *WoD*, however, Ra intends to prevent the birth of Osiris and Seth in order to eliminate possible future rivals who might dispute his claim to the throne of Egypt. Ra kills his offspring Geb and Nut for having contravened his wishes. Finally, in the case of the third opposition, Neftys's infidelity with Osiris is documented again in Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride* 38, 59), as well as in different testimonies from the pharaonic period (Lieven 2006; Gaber 2015).

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[27] *Book of the Dead* 175 (Barguet 1979: 262); papyrus Salt 825 (pBM 10051), V, 1, 2 (Derchain 1965: 41, 138).

Other enemies of Seth in the game are Horus, the avenger of his father Osiris, and Ra. In the case of the confrontation with Horus, the *WoD* universe establishes a crossover between two of the main species: the vampires and the mummies. These episodes of the narrative are reported in *Mummy Second Edition*. After his second exile, Seth returns to Egypt and plans the defeat of Osiris. To this end, he gives his brother a sarcophagus and, when Osiris enters it, the sarcophagus is closed, leaving the vampire inside. Seth then throws the sarcophagus into the Nile and occupies the throne of Egypt. Isis, Neftys, and Horus then flee to Chemnis, in the marshlands of the Nile delta. Plutarch's account is the main source for the reconstruction of these events (*De Iside et Osiride* 13), as well as for the episode of the dismemberment of the body of Osiris which is also evoked in the game (*De Iside et Osiride* 8, 18). From this point on, various elements are added to the *WoD* narrative: Seth imprisons Horus, Isis, and Neftys, whom he repeatedly tortures, causing the loss of Horus's eye. With the help of some followers of Osiris, the captives manage to escape and take refuge in the domain of Meshta, a fictional character without Egyptian precedent, where they slowly recover from the wounds inflicted by Seth. The magic of Isis and Neftys accomplishes the reunion of Osiris's body parts with the help of the god Thoth. This passage, which Egyptian art reproduces visually through the image of Osiris lying on a sarcophagus lid in the company of Isis and Neftys,[28] takes on a distinctly cinematic dimension in *WoD*: in the presence of the main characters in the drama a vampiric rite takes place in which we witness the vivification of Osiris's corpse through contact with the blood of his followers. Then a deformed being of darkness emerges from the body of the god and this gradually take on the features of Osiris as he was before his dismemberment.

Reborn and possessing knowledge of the afterlife he has inhabited, Osiris knows how to save his son Horus, who languishes bleeding to death after losing his eye. Together Osiris, Isis and Neftys devise the 'Great Rite', a process to create immortal mummies, the first of which will be Horus himself. Wary of the plans against him, Seth attacks Osiris and Isis, taking advantage of their weakness after the rite, and kills Osiris again, in a conflict involving the Setites against the Sons of Osiris, the vampiric descendants of both. Only Horus, now rehabilitated, is left standing, and he manages to strike his uncle and tear off his penis, subsequently recovering his own eye and fleeing to take refuge with his mother in the Sinai desert. From then on Horus swears revenge against Seth and the Setites, occasionally collaborating with the werewolves, the so-called 'silent striders', who are beings that have inhabited the Nile valley since time immemorial (Figure 2). Thus a new *jihad* begins, this time led by Horus and which, like the preceding *jihad* of Seth, continues to the present day, passing through successive phases of action and calm between the opposing sides in a constant game of (momentary) life and death between the leader of the vampires, Seth, and the leader of the mummies, Horus.

This brief synopsis of events before the reign of the pharaohs of the historical dynasties in *WoD* evidences a synthesis of diverse narratives (mythemes) that form a contemporary extended version of the Osiris myth. Alongside the main ancient narrative, the myth of the eye of Horus and the myth of the castration of Seth by Horus are also introduced.[29] Other secondary motifs are also of interest in the context of reformulation of the myth, such as the dismemberment of the body of Osiris into 13 parts, as opposed to the usual 42 relating to each of the provinces of ancient Egypt or the 14 recorded by Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride*,

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[28]   One of the most prominent examples of this scene is found on the north wall of room VIII of the temple of Opet at Karnak. See Witt 1962: pl. 4.
[29]   For these myths and mythems, see Velde 1967: 46-58; Griffiths 1958; Westendorf 1980.

18) (Coulon 2005: 15-21); the participation of the ferryman Anubis and his encounter with Osiris in the afterlife, derived from the role of the jackal god as the companion of the deceased in the Egyptian funerary texts; or the revelation of the true and secret name of the god Ra as a means to control the universe by the magician Isis, echoes of which are evident in a well-known myth attested by several papyri from the Ramesside period (Borghouts 1978: 51-55).

The last of Seth's enemies is Ra. The latter's intervention in the *WoD* universe, as seen above, precedes the main events of the Osiris myth. However, precisely in these opening moments, the conflict between Osiris and Seth is explicitly introduced. The genealogical scheme of the Heliopolitan Ennead is thus endowed, in the game, with a narrative that reinforces this opposition between Seth and Ra, through the description of the

Figure 2. An Egyptian werewolf or silent strider (drawing © María Luisa Rodríguez Jiménez).

murder of Geb and Nut by their father, King Ra. Seth directly opposes the acts of his grandfather, who, having become a sun-god after his death, symbolises the light that destroys the Setites. This creates an interesting interplay of thematic exchanges between *WoD* and ancient Egyptian mythology.

Seth embodies darkness, decay, and corruption in the game, representing the true personification of evil. However, in Egyptian religion, alongside this negative facet of the god, there is also a beneficent one, which has to do, interestingly enough, with his involvement in solar theology. Mainly from the New Kingdom onwards, royal tombs were decorated with depictions of the nocturnal journey of the boat of the sun-god through the underworld (Hornung 1992; Quirke 2001: 43-54). These motifs were also reproduced on the walls of some private tombs of the period and on the *Book of the Dead* papyri included in the burial equipment of these tombs. In these testimonies, the journey of the sun-god and his divine crew through the daytime sky is followed, after the sun has set and died, by his journey through the subterranean spaces of the afterlife, only to reappear at dawn in the eastern sky and restart a new day in an eternal cycle of death and resurrection. This journey is a critical moment in which multiple dangers threaten the victorious return of the sun. One of these

decisive moments takes place in the middle of the night: the fight against the serpent Apophis. The beast attacks the solar boat and tries to stop its march toward dawn. However, the sun manages to defeat this creature thanks to the help of Seth, who stands at the bow of the boat and, armed with his harpoon, attacks and momentarily defeats Apophis (Velde 1967: 99-108). Seth is thus an auxiliary of the sun-god charged with defeating the forces of chaos that oppose the Maat. In *WoD*, however, Seth is an ally of Apophis, and every Setite worships the serpent as an all-powerful supreme entity. Therefore, the negative side of Seth, as it appears primarily in the Osiris myth, prevails in the game, which also transforms the positive side of Seth into a partnership with the forces of darkness embodied by the serpent Apophis. Together, Seth and Apophis thus have the common goal of destroying the sun-god Ra.[30]

To conclude this section, we would like to add another case in which historical documentation could justify Seth's opposition to the sun-god and the light which the sun emits. In Egyptian mythology, Seth is often the god of confusion, chaos, and, as an atmospheric manifestation of these, the storm (Cannuyer 2017). The figure of the Sethian animal even serves as a determinative of the word *nšnj* 'storm, tempest' in the Egyptian language, thus helping to clarify its semantic field. We could thus conclude that, as a momentary concealment of the sun's rays on the surface, the storm is opposed to the sun, and we would therefore find here a possible reason to explain the mythical confrontation between Ra and Seth. However, although this motif is included in numerous Egyptian cosmogonies in which the creation of the world and living beings by the sun-god includes, as an essential episode, the dissipation of the clouds that hide the light, and, by extension, of the storm (Fernández Pichel 2018: 37-40), in no case does Seth appear mentioned in this context.

Conclusions

The presence of complex narratives or incidental Egyptianising motifs in the settings and character design of RPGs has been a common phenomenon since the end of the last century. The very perception of this civilisation in popular culture, in which it is frequently linked to mystery, the supernatural, and death, justifies its suitability in the design of adventures set in the remote past or in a dystopian future, taking part in diverse genres such as historical fantasy, science fiction or horror, among others. Some of the most successful games within this ancient Egyptian-inspired trend belong to *WoD*.

The Egypt of the *WoD* universe is a world populated from the beginning by vampires, mummies, and werewolves that coexist, often secretly, with humans throughout the different eras and up to the present day. In the early history of Egypt, according to *WoD*, we find the origin of the struggles between the great vampires, Seth and Osiris, and the curse of their lineages since the time of Cain. The biblical fratricide (Cain and Abel) finds obvious thematic analogies with the myth of Osiris, which is nothing more than another story of a brother (Seth) who murders his brother (Osiris). Undoubtedly, this parallel must have been fundamental to the initial conception of the narratives that make up the game.

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[30] In *Clan Book: Followers of Set*, Seth's origins are altered with respect to what was expressed in the preceding volume, *Clan Book: Setites*. Since then, his connection to the struggle against Apophis is explicitly mentioned (Shomshak 2001: 13, 40).

The way of integrating the main episodes of the Osiris myth into a new narrative specific to the game combines, as we have shown by examples, elements taken from Egyptian history and religion, from the biblical tradition, and from popular culture (mainly vampire fantasy and horror films), together with other secondary elements taken from classical culture or even from Islam. With regard to the first of these cases and the main theme of this article, that of Egyptian history and religion, one of the works analysed, *Mummy Second Edition*, provides a bibliography and filmography for masters and players. These works are of little academic use, although most of them are undoubtedly informative. The most important of these works is certainly *Egyptian Religion* (1899) by E.A. Wallis Budge, an essential part of which is devoted to Osiris as the god of resurrection, and which includes numerous passages from *De Iside et Osiride* (Wallis Budge 1899: 41-84). The same can be said of other books included by the authors of *Mummy Second Edition*: in S.H. Hooke's *Middle Eastern Mythology*, for example, the Osiris myth and solar theology are the only Egyptological contents selected by the author (1963: 65-78), and in Stanislov Grof's *Books of the Dead: Manuals for Living and Dying* (1994), there are only two sections relating to Egypt, one again focusing on the Osiris myth and the other on Heliopolitan cosmogony and solar theology (1994: 7-11, 66-69).

In short, there is a clear correspondence between the contents included in these general monographs and the Egyptological themes recreated in *WoD*. This allows us to consider that this bibliography aimed at readers in general, masters, and players is also a compendium of scientific literature at the service of the creators of the game. In view of this, the Egypt reimagined in the *WoD* universe makes limited but evident use of historical sources, mainly in the form of secondary literature rather than through direct access to the documentation of the Egyptian past or the classical world. Of these, Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* is the most important. This is evident in the 2001 revised version of the Setite book, *Clan Book: Followers of Set*, which introduces Plutarch into the fictional universe of *WoD* and designates him as the compiler and narrator of the events that the first Setites themselves experienced in the beginning (Shomshak 2001: 12). In this sense, through a simple metanarrative resource, this book collects the testimony of a vampire about the origins of his clan, while at the same time expressing Plutarch's relevance in the knowledge of that same narrative. Classical author and vampiric narrator thus become one and confer on Plutarch his function as the main historical source in the creation of the Egypt recreated in the *WoD* universe.

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Of Mummies and Memes: A Digital Ethnographic Approach to 'Vernacular Egyptology' on TikTok

Samuel Fernández-Pichel

Introduction

> How can one write a proper phenomenology of asynchronous connections and their cultural effects, formulate a ruthless critique of everything hardwired into the social body of the network, while not looking at what's going on inside? (Lovink 2019).

Despite its uneven historical developments, Egyptology in the 21st century is a firmly established academic discipline.[1] The question may arise, however, as to how and to what extent this particular field of knowledge is being (re)signified, transformed and disseminated in the mutable sphere of digital culture, and, specifically, on social networking sites (SNSs). In everyday usage, these sites function as mediated, multifaceted spaces in which profit-seeking coexists with new forms of sociality, public discussion, and education (Van Dijck, Poell, de Waal 2018; Van Dijck 2013). As noted by Jenkins (2008), participation in these networked, online environments is characterised by a high degree of 'messiness' and unpredictability, as well as by the abolition of the once clearly delineated frontiers that separated experts from non-experts.[2] From the perspective of Egyptology as a science of historical knowledge, traditional scholars may feel suspicious about the adequacy of SNSs to host informed approaches to ancient Egypt; some may even feel tempted to dismiss social media altogether on the grounds that the lax participation standards may only fuel recurring misconceptions about the subject.

In fact, the 'lure' of ancient Egypt (i.e., the western fascination with the 'Otherness' that the Egyptian world represents) permeates, even if unavowedly, the establishment of Egyptology as a discipline (Morkot 2005: 51-69; Hornung 2001). From the Napoleonic expedition of 1798 to the present practices of 'Egyptomania' (Brier 2013; Humbert 1989), a certain attitude persists: one that indicates the ongoing tensions between evidence-based systematisations of the past and the pull of the exotic (Morkot 2005: 51-53). Arguably, the most problematic output of this tension is the circulation of an 'Egyptological bias', which can be described as a 'false perception' about the foundations and the role of Egyptology (Fernández Pichel 2021: 120). Unwelcomed by scholars of ancient Egypt, this bias, nevertheless, persists through a multiplicity of media including, among others, textbooks, movies, documentaries, web coverage and video games, all distorting the public awareness of the topic. If the lure of ancient Egypt has proved to be an enduring one, why would SNSs differ in this respect? What are we to expect other than a digital ecosystem in which long-standing clichés are repackaged and spread according to novel, more playful textualities?

This research attempts to frame some preliminary answers to these questions by the very act of 'observing', of entering and describing an area of constant virtual exchanges in which

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[1] For an introduction to the history of Egyptology, see Carruthers 2014 and Hornung 2000.
[2] See also Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013.

specific imaginaries of ancient Egypt, constituting a popular or 'vernacular Egyptology' of sorts, are being put in place, negotiated and performed on a scale that largely extends beyond the borders of both the academic episteme and formal education.[3] Among the complex and varied arrays of techno-social assemblages that SNSs represent, I have chosen to focus on the Chinese-owned short-video app TikTok for a number of reasons: TikTok's current relevance and memetic potential, the particular demographics of its user base (it is most popular with younger generations), and the mix of entertainment and educational approaches that characterises much of the content produced and shared on the platform.[4] According to Zulli and Zulli (2022), the set of affordances of TikTok has contributed to take social and digital practices of imitation and replication (this is, *memefication*) to new levels, whereby the platform itself becomes a meme, a replicator of networks based on the principle of *imitation publics* (2022: 1873).[5] Given the enhanced virality of TikTok, it is worth asking how Egyptology is being 'memefied' on the platform. With this aim in mind, this paper reflects an early, exploratory, and time-framed observation of Egyptology-tagged videos on TikTok that is irrevocably inspired by literary and digital ethnographic flânerie.

Notes on Method

Filip Taterka (2016) warns that any attempt at analysing ancient Egyptian motifs in popular culture faces some methodological limitations. In many instances, the Egyptianising products of popular culture show untraceable or diffuse authorship, and their creation seems to be inspired in shared imaginaries about pharaonic Egypt that do not necessarily correspond with any real historical sources or the material remains of ancient Egyptian civilisation. In the absence of solid methodologies for the study of Egyptology and popular culture, these problems have led researchers to develop phenomenological and descriptive approaches that try to establish principles for further investigations (2016: 207). In this vein, the perspective adopted here turns to the digital ethnographic method of 'floating observation' (Moreno Acosta 2017; 2015; Neve 2007; Pétonnet 1982) by engaging with the TikTok virtual ecosystem in a urban-cartographic metaphor.

Floating observation originated in the 1980s in the work of French anthropologist Colette Pétonnet as a means of grasping the intermittent flows and disruptions of the contemporary city. The method has subsequently been updated by digital ethnographers to take into account the ephemeral nature of online, networked communication and exchanges. In Pétonnet's original conception floating observation proposes an open, attentive perception that asks the researcher-ethnographer to

> [remain] vacant and available in all circumstances...not focusing attention on a precise object, but letting it 'float' so that the information penetrates it without filter, without

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[3] I draw here on Burgess's theorisation of 'vernacular creativity' as 'both an ideal and a heuristic device, to describe and illuminate creative practices that emerge from highly particular and non-elite social contexts and communicative conventions' (2006: 206). I have repurposed the concept with the aim of exploring the mediated, platform-based, everyday production of contents related to ancient Egypt on the part of users on TikTok. My approach shares Burgess's emphasis on the ordinary, popular culture, and the role of media-savvy amateur-producers/creators.

[4] TikTok was the most downloaded app globally of 2022 (672 million) (Koetsier 2023). For updated statistics on the platform, see, for instance, Kemp (2023). For scholarly resources and events, check the website of the TikTok Cultures Research Network: https://tiktokcultures.com/ (Accessed 06/06/2023).

[5] Following Shifman, memes can be described as 'units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated and transformed by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience' (2013: 367).

preconceptions, until reference points, convergences, appear and we then manage to discover the underlying rules (1982: par. 8).

As pointed out by Álvarez Cadavid (2009: 23), 'las formas de registro deben al mismo tiempo ser tan sensibles que puedan captar lo que aparece de súbito'.[6] Given the instability of the (virtual) medium, floating observation relies on unfocused perception, sensitivity to the 'invisible', and the search for underlying patterns of meaning (Neve 2007: 185-188).[7] Ultimately, the attention to fragments and hidden connections must always be guided by a critical perspective (Moreno Acosta 2017; 2015; Neve 2007).

Floating observation is informed by some defining features of digital ethnography (Abidin and de Seta 2020; Álvarez Cadavid 2009; Hine 2000; Pink et al. 2016). Abidin and de Seta (2020: 10-11) have stressed the 'inward turn' at the core of the methodological choices of digital ethnographers, who, in designing research, have opted for self-reflexive and adaptive approaches to the object of their enquiry (Hine 2000: 65-66). As internet-based, mediated interactions have dramatically altered the classical ethnographic frameworks of time, participation, community and location, researchers have pursued the goal of transparency, self-disclosure, and flexibility (Abidin and de Seta 2020: 10-11) to cope with this changing environment.

In line with this, I adopted an approach to floating observation that involved several interrelated processes. Firstly, I followed the 'walkthrough method' (Light, Burgess and Duguay 2018) to get acquainted with the TikTok app. I began by opening a research account on the platform in mid-October 2022, spending a few days exploring its affordances both on the mobile and laptop software versions. To meet the intended goals of my research, as well as being consistent with the urban-cartographic principles that inspired it, I conducted my observation by 'wandering' a specific pair of hashtags (in both English and Spanish, my two primary languages): #Egyptology and #Egiptología (Figure 1 and 2). Summarising the findings of recent scholarship, Zulli and Zulli (2020: 1874) state that the hashtag

> serves as a conduit for distributed individuals to locate, self-organize, and collectively contribute to the information streams on many SNSs resulting in issue and affective publics that converge around a topic or event.

Additionally, hashtags work as 'affinity spaces' (Gee 2018; 2005) in which informal education may breed (Marcelo and Marcelo 2021: 74-75). Soon, in the manner of someone who aimlessly walks the streets and alleyways of a city they visit for the first time, the tagging practices of the users of the platform allowed me to deviate from the main route to briefly explore related hashtags (#Egyptologist, #Egiptólogo, #ancientEgypt, #Nefertari, #KingTut...). This decision helped me to circumvent the potential shortcomings of an excessively limited observation, of my 'floating' being too predictable and narrow in scope.[8]

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[6] 'Data recording must, at the same time, be so sensitive that it can capture what suddenly appears'. (Author's translation).

[7] In a similar vein, Laurie E. Gries's 'meme-tracking' method embraces Guy Debord's psychogeographical *dérive* and Lyotard's idea of 'peregrination' for the purpose of tracing and describing digital images (2015: 96-101).

[8] My language choices have inevitably determined the outcome of my research. Although the TikTok app features some translation tools, I chose to exclude those videos in which the audio track was recorded in any languages other than English or Spanish, as I could not double-check the suitability of translations on the platform. I hope that the
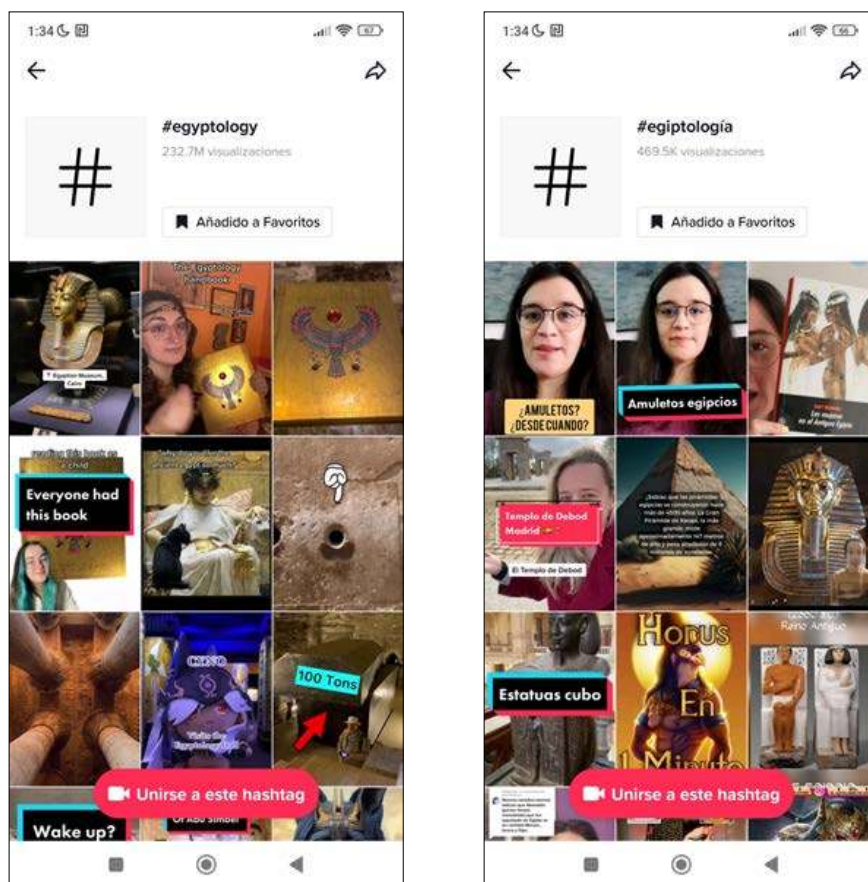
Figures 1 and 2. Screenshots of the the TikTok archive of #Egyptology and #Egiptología.

The data collection took four and a half months (from mid-October 2022 to late February 2023), and two field diaries were set up to include information on videos. Over this period, I would 'stroll' or scroll up and down the aforementioned hashtags for 45 minutes to an hour and a half every other day. The main field diary was used as a spreadsheet, and included screenshots, links, and detailed descriptions of individual videos. A few weeks into the process, I added a second field diary, this time in the form of a notepad, in which I would record thematic and formal recurrences in addition to early sketches of likely trends that would later be tested and refined. In all, I registered a corpus of over 300 videos.

To annotate the videos, I drew on Schellewald's (2021) taxonomy of communicative forms on TikTok. In his own words, these forms are 'platform-specific languages or memes, trends, and aesthetic styles that are specific to TikTok and the meaning-making practices of its users' (2021: 1439). The ever-expanding aggregate of these trends works as a 'common background' on the platform, one against which current users or newcomers may react or to which they may contribute. Consequently, the challenge of the ethnographer becomes the creation of some 'contextual awareness' (2021: 1441) about the specificities of the online ecosystem, and,

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implicit risk of 'Western-centric' bias in my paper can be rectified soon by widening the scope of research to include other languages, most notably Egyptian Arabic.

in regard to my research, about the meaning-making practices and implicit imaginaries that are brought about by Egyptology-tagged contents on TikTok.

My observations on the TikTok app deliberately avoided specific platform engagement and content creation. I only occasionally scrolled the 'For You' page, preferring instead to rely on the search affordances of the platform to start my *dérive* routine.[9] Similarly, I avoided liking or saving any contents on the platform to prevent the algorithm from distorting or personalising my 'wanderings' too much. I positioned myself as a 'lurker' (Álvarez Cadavid 2009: 24-25; Neve 2007: 189): observing from the periphery, not (yet) participating, with the aim of becoming a *narrador-investigador* ('researcher-storyteller') (Moreno Acosta 2015: par. 16). My primary task was descriptive: it involved finding patterns of meaning in the same manner as one manages to understand the layout of a city without ever looking from above, but only from the ground. Because, as noted by Moreno Acosta (2015: closing par.):

> [E]l ejercicio de recorrer para describir estos nuevos espacios y sus particularidades, resulta absolutamente necesario a la hora de comprender que [sic] tipo de discursos digitalizados (sonoros, visuales, textuales) son creados y puestos a circular, pero también que [sic] tipo de conocimiento y que [sic] tipo de sujetos se están construyendo a partir de estos procesos.[10]

Notes on Observation

Branding the Past: Tourism Imaginaries on Ancient Egypt

'Egypt: Where It All Begins' (@egyptology3, 6754 Followers, 30.8K Likes) –'Habibi come to Egypt' (sound file, 14.9K videos) – 'Visit Egypt' (creator playlist) (@sekhmet_egy_2, 57.5K Followers, 365.3K Likes) - Great Pyramid of Giza (774 videos) - Templo de Luxor (1104 videos) – 'Celebrating 200 years of Egyptology' (@antonellainegitto).

Regardless of the departing points (i.e., the ephemeral anchorage of some guiding hashtags), the strolls always lead the researcher through a 'temporal collage' (Castells 1996) of vertical, downwards immersions: the vertical format of the TikTok interface on a mobile phone screen and the vertiginous visuality of digital images (Steyerl 2014). The dislocation of networked time shifts promptly between the seemingly contrasting scales and locations: from bedrooms in mid shot to panoramic views of the desert plateaus of Giza and Saqqara. A sense of continuity emerges out of this unexpected concatenation: in private homes stuffed with Egypt-themed collectables, young users of the platform dress up in ancient Egyptian attire while in Aswan, with the perpetual 'now-time' of celebrity culture, the British model and influencer Demi Rose embodies Cleopatra as she looks down at views of the River Nile from a balcony, the way a 'Goddess of the Nile' would do (Figures 3 and 4). It is a fascination that travels, traversing distant geographies across a variety of formats, from the 'homecasting', amateur routines of western users to the on-site, staged fulfilment of an exotic dream of otherness.

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[9] On TikTok, the 'For You' feed curates the stream of videos according to the user's experience and personal interests.
[10] 'The practice of walking to describe these new spaces and their particularities is absolutely necessary in order to understand what kind of digitalised discourses (sound, visual, textual) are created and circulated, but also what kind of knowledge and what kind of subjects are being built from these processes'. (Author's translation).
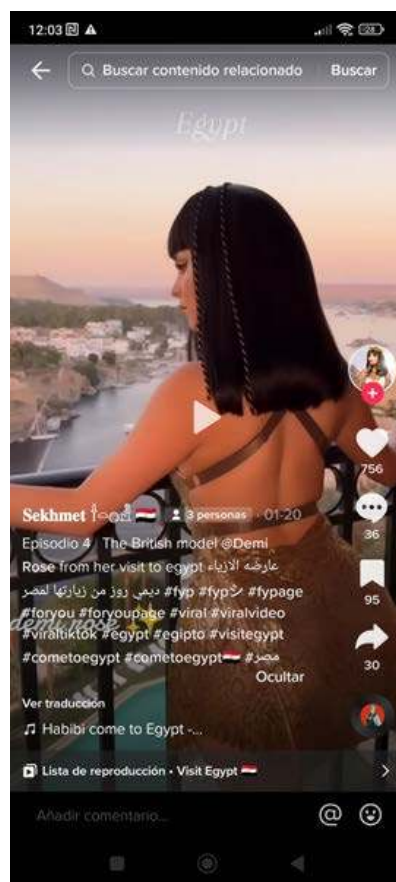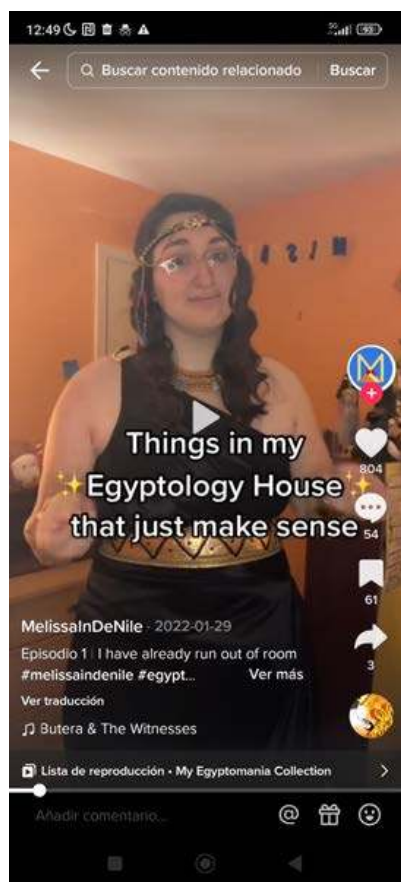
*Figures 3 and 4. Two forms of producing Egyptology-themed contents on TikTok
(homecasting v. celebrity culture).*

On TikTok, the researcher soon perceives, these performances are shared against the backdrop of an ineluctable and protean tourism imaginary. The platform abounds with multi-tagged videos in which the Egyptology hashtag leads to, or intersects with, varied forms of destination branding and the overall commodification of the tourist experience. Some of these videos take the form of brief, sketchy on-site recordings of tours to pyramid complexes or necropolises while others mainly serve the purpose of promoting the services of local Egyptian tourist guides, archaeologists or Egyptologists. Regarding their format, the documentary approach (Schellewald 2021: 1445-1446) prevails in much of this content: some visitors build vlogs, series are posted on the platform as playlists, tourist guides show their knowledge and skills, and there is even a set of profiles which consistently post videos with tourism-related content promoting a sense of national or patriotic pride attached to Egypt's cultural and historical legacy. Following a remarkable and platform-specific trend on TikTok, another group of videos can be found where a comedic element (Schellewald 2021: 1443-1445) sets the tone for the recording of visual pranks and dance challenges that are performed in the field (during visits to the many archaeological sites and monuments of Egypt).

Leïla Vignal (2010) has noted that the geography of tourism in Egypt was radically altered from the 1990s onwards as globalisation and state-promoted liberalising economic practices resulted in the reconfiguration of the tourist experience in the country. The emergence of global tourism on the coastal regions (the Red Sea and, to a lesser extent, the Mediterranean coast) contested the

former primacy of the Upper Valley of the Nile, where the main archaeological sites are located. The popularity of the new destinations on the Egyptian coast benefits from an 'extra-territorial' approach to tourist locations which are detached from the established Egyptian destinations, and re-created according to transnational standards of consumption. Nevertheless, observing the activity of users on the TikTok platform shows two complementary processes: on the one hand, the historical-archaeological shrines of ancient Egyptian civilisation fare well within the symbolic economy of TikTok. On the other hand, the widespread use of the Egyptology hashtag, when sharing and posting this sub-set of tourism-related content, seems to indicate that the discipline is being transfigured. This transfiguration results in Egyptology functioning as one more legitimising source for the aims of destination branding and value creation.

'All Matters Egyptian': Material Culture as 'Vernacular Archaeology'

'To the Ancients Egypt was already Ancient' (@The_holy-egypt, 450.3K Followers, 3.8M Likes) – 'MET artifacts, Archeology, Egyptian Creations, Before and After, History, Papyrus Art, Jewelry, Mythology, Hieroglyphs Lessons, Temples, Reconstruction' (creator playlists) (@egyptologylessons, 176.5K Followers, 1.1M Likes).

There is another road which the researcher may wander; one that leads to a different kind of evidence. The 'consumable' and profit-driven idealisations of ancient Egyptian culture are replaced by a visual and aural fixation on its material traces, its remnants. A significant
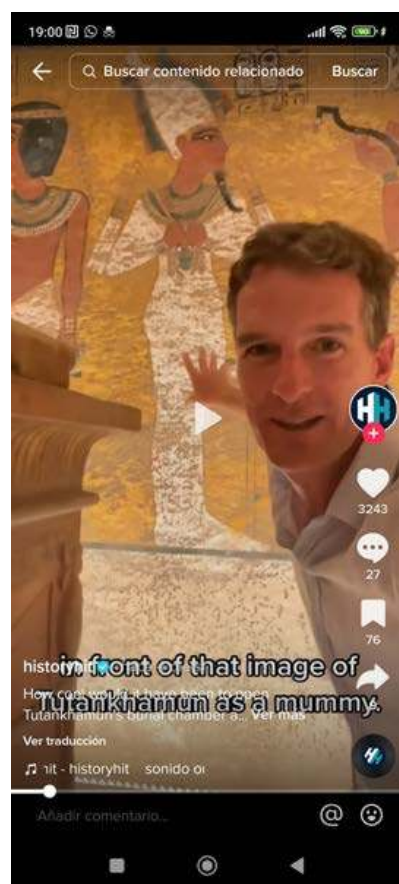
Figures 5 and 6. Examples of TikTokers' fascination about ancient Egypt's material culture.

number of TikTok videos primarily include content showing the Egyptian past as consisting of an array of human and non-human remains including mummies, ostraka, sculptures, sarcophagi, papyri, scribal palettes, and wall inscriptions. (Figures 5 and 6). The approach to these remains may differ: one can find, for instance, single-take videos in which mummified bodies are examined in a way that mimics the scientific procedures of forensic archaeologists; in other videos the editing affordances of the platform are used to produce short montage pieces of objects with voiceover commentaries or background music.

In terms of the communicative design, these videos offer a combination of the documentary and explanatory modes (Schellewald 2021: 1448): self-expression and knowledge-sharing converge in pieces aimed at meeting the interrogation of or curiosity about the topic of Egyptology from both interest-based communities and average amateur users. This is best exemplified by the remarkable trend of videos of 'curated' visits to museums, which portray users lingering in specific sections or areas of museums (such as The Egyptian Museum in Cairo) as they elaborate on particular exhibits. Mobile phone cameras seem, in this way, to re-capture cinema's old aspiration to open windows onto the world (and, for that very reason, to re-stage deeply ingrained colonialist aesthetic impulses). Some of these videos are produced and posted by professional historians or archaeologists, who use platform exposure to display their expertise, but, in other cases, the contents simply mark the non-experts' fascination and insatiable appetite for images of ancient Egyptian culture. Either posing on camera or simply by voicing their videos, content creators provide access to ancient Egyptian remains in the fashion of a 'vernacular archaeology', whose implicit, informal teaching approach is simultaneously mediated and embodied.

'The (Ancient) Egyptian in Me': Performance and Affect

> 'AI Time Traveler: Cleopatra Taking Selfie' (@aitopia) – 'I wonder if she would see herself in me' (@historical_han_) – 'It's called mummification' (@ladyailla) – 'I'm joining sad archaeology TikTok today' (@flying_archaeologist) – 'Egyptology, doll reviews, cosplay and my cat!' (@victoria_avalor) – 'x: why do you wanna be an archaeologist so bad? You'll be stuck between books' (@aka.moony).

The researcher's strolls bring about an acquaintance with the shared intimacies, desires, and impersonations of the users. The bond that links this trend of videos rests on an affective and embodied approach to vernacular Egyptology: the imagined past is performed, its traces become identifying features of the bodies and voices on display, an occasion is created for self-representation. Theoretically, these performative video acts are directly related to the type of 'self-mediation publicness' in which the users' audiovisual discourses 'do not simply represent pre-existing selves, individual or collective, but constitute such selves in the very process of representing them' (Chouliaraki 2010:229). In practice, what these videos enable those who access them to see and share, what 'appears' in them, is a playful reconfiguration of identities, a virtual reincarnation of the bodies that once were historical, all (re-)enacted by the mediated visualities on TikTok.

It is worth noting several examples of this trend. One of them consists of videos portraying the make-up routines of individuals who, by using the split screen or match editing techniques of the platform, show their faces in close-up next to the iconic images of classical figures, such as Cleopatra (Figure 7). The explanatory mode combines here with self-representation strategies
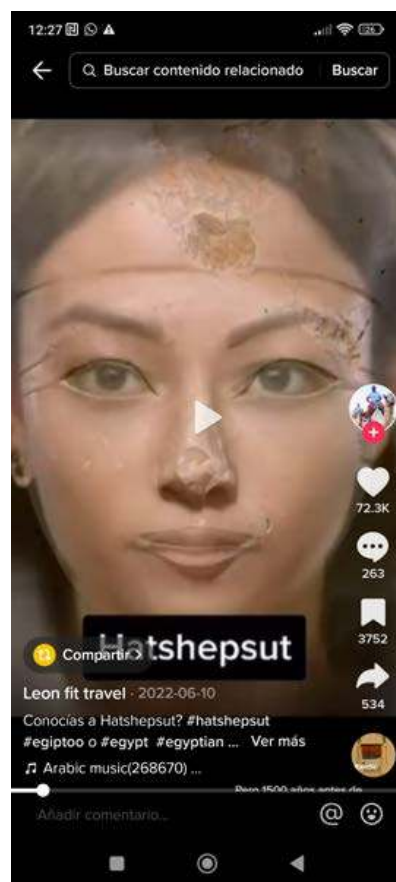
Figures 7 and 8. Two examples of performative approaches to Egyptology-themed contents on TikTok.

to delve into a mixed imaginary where history is filtered through fashion. Other videos linger on recreations of the faces of ancient Egyptian deities and rulers but aim to achieve a kind of 'virtual mysticism' by using digital resources (Figure 8). Morphing software and AI imagery are employed in a variety of videos to recreate the looks of the ancient Egyptian pantheon against electronic orientalist background music and robotic voice overs.[11]

The affective dimension of popular Egyptology is further emphasised in those videos in which mainly young users show their allegiance to the subject of Egyptology. This may take the form of book reviews on Egyptology-related topics, a trend also on other SNSs, most notably YouTube and Instagram. Even more remarkable are the video-replications about callings or vocations (Figures 9 and 10): imitating general trends on TikTok, some users stage their love for Egyptology by posing with an iconic object of affection (such as Egyptology books for children), or just by dancing, dubbing or posing to prove the source of their emotional attachments (i.e., using scenes and dialogues from Stephen Sommer's 1999 feature film *The Mummy,* or captions and commentaries on the 'boy king' Tutankhamun).

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[11] For news coverage on how AI imagery may build deceptive representations of history (including 'resurrected' mummies), see Santos 2023.
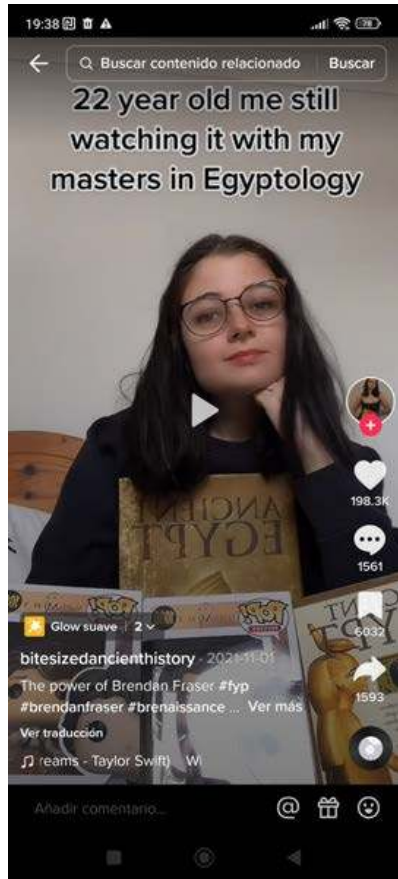
Figures 9 and 10. Examples of TikTokers 'performing' their love for Egyptology.

Enter the Egyptology-themed Influencers

@soysisly (1.1M Followers, 31.3M Likes): 'Me gusta hablar de temas interesantes' - @historical_han_ (169.5K Followers, 12.6M Likes): 'Ancient History & Archaeology' - @annelisethearchaeologist (137.1K Followers, 2.9M Likes): 'Your friendly neighborhood archaeologist' - @bitesizedancienthistory (15.6K Followers, 401.6K Likes): 'Ancient Greek, Roman, and Egyptian facts from a Cambridge grad'.

The meandering itineraries around the Egyptology hashtag on TikTok bring the researcher in contact with some faces and voices that soon become familiar: a small pool of users whose dedication to the subject has granted them the status of micro-celebrities. As noted by recent studies, micro-celebrification strategies, understood here as a deliberate management of media presence on the part of individual users for the purpose of favouring online engagement (Abidin 2018), are playing a remarkable role in the construction of science communication (Zeng, Schäfer and Allgaier 2021) and the development of informal education on SNSs (Marcelo and Marcelo 2021; Vizcaíno-Verdú and Abidin 2022). In practical terms, this group of micro-celebrities operates at the crossroads between public, networked pedagogy and entertainment.

The informative, pedagogical function of Egyptology-themed influencers on TikTok works in several ways. First, my observation identified the 'newscaster' approach adopted by some
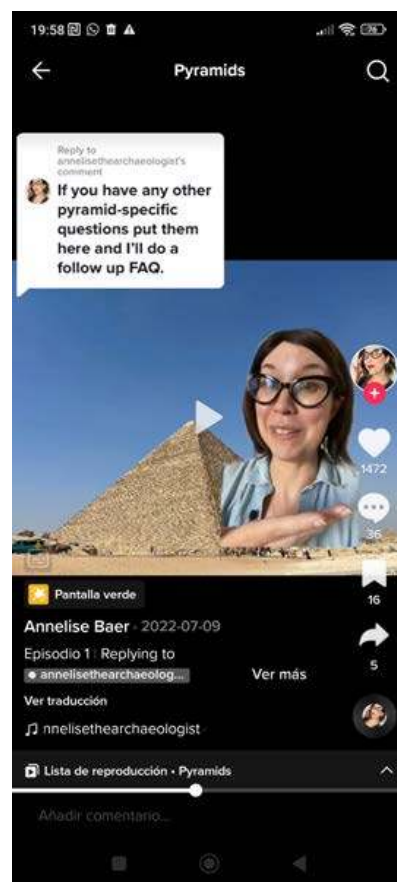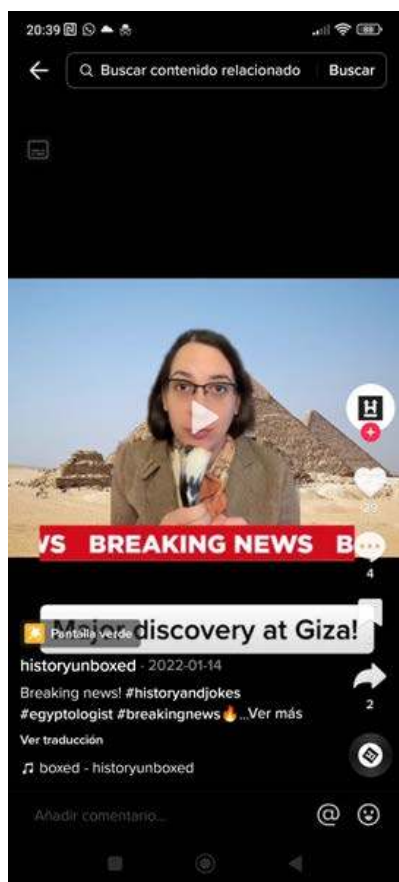
Figures 11 and 12. Examples of the 'newscaster' approach to Egyptology-themed contents on TikTok.

members of this set of influencers. Videos within this trend provide updates and reports on new findings related to excavations and overall research on Egyptology. Usually, users-producers make use of the green-screen effect and voice over (or text-to-speech) to present themselves as 'reporters of the past-present' in short pieces that imitate the formats of conventional news coverage (Figures 11 and 12). A sub-group of these pieces consists of those that are produced according to slightly standarised homecasting formulas, while others are recorded *in situ*, with the influencer actually replicating the role of the reporter on a live TV show. The virality and relevance of these contents implies the existence of communities of interest that recognise a degree of authority and trustworthiness in these individual users, regardless of their professional credentials.

Another way in which the personalisation or micro-celebrification of the Egyptology-themed content works is by debunking historical 'facts' on the topic (which have no veracity at all). As one might expect, any wandering through the Egyptology hashtag on TikTok leads the researcher to confront bizarre interpretations about, for example, the construction of the Egyptian pyramids or the supposedly mysterious messages encrypted on their walls. Other such misinformation may include the ominous revelations attached to new discoveries about Egyptian deities, or even suggestions about the obscure machinations of the Vatican to downplay the African origins of ancient Egypt. Given the fact that these conspiratorial theories circulate on the platform, some users embark on the task of neutralising the viral

possibilities of these 'biased' contents. To achieve this, they employ several tactics, such as making use of the stitching (i.e., integrating the videos of other users into one's own) and reply affordances of the platform, answering the questions posed by other users, and openly stating their own need to research further before formulating an informed reaction to a controversial piece of information or theory. Additionally, in a move that aims not so much to correct as to expand knowledge on the topic, some users engage in a decidedly feminist account of the culture of ancient Egypt, covering aspects such as power, daily life, personal devotion, and the arts. In this sense, micro-celebrities perform a regulatory function in processes of informal, networked, and mediated knowledge sharing.

Lastly, the informative and pedagogical role of influencers seems to be reinforced by the affecting factors which I referenced in the previous section. In their discussion of the science memes on TikTok, Zeng, Schäfer and Allgaier have already defined the affective dimensions that contributed to the construction of 'relatable and phatic messages' (2021: 3320). It is a similar emphasis on storytelling, emotion, and connectedness that characterises this group of users and creators of Egyptology-related content, as much for the mood and tone of the discussion that their videos facilitate. The kind of engagement resulting from these processes points to TikTok as a platform in which a variety of popular or vernacular Egyptology is being modelled in ways that exceed the sphere of academic research, and in accordance with diverse formal and affective templates: temporarily fixed, always in the making.

Preliminary Conclusions

> Epilogue: finally, the researcher seriously injured his right hand and finished his article with difficulty. Perhaps the secrets of the ancients should have been transmitted orally instead of being made public through writing. But is there a place in the scientific community for telling? (Pétonnet 1982).

My observations of, and around, the Egyptology hashtag on TikTok have led me to outline some tentative trends that aim to account for the workings of a networked, online vernacular knowledge and creativity on matters related to ancient Egypt. Accordingly, the memefication of Egyptology on the platform has been explained in these pages with regards to four possible centres of interest or emerging forms, which, as I posited above, sometimes act in combination.

First, I perceived a constant overlapping of the tourism imaginary with Egyptology-tagged contents on the platform. The reiteration of the touristic imagery, the emphasis on spectacular views, and a neoliberal sense of 'experience', hint at the commodification of the discipline with the aim of increasing the cultural capital attached to the Egyptian historical heritage. Seen from this perspective, Egyptology is falsified and mainly used as a legitimising force, with its scientific pedigree reduced merely to the provision of simplified and 'consumable' descriptions and catch-phrases. The audiovisual affordances of TikTok seem to fit easily in the circulation of this promotional-experiential tourism continuum.

Secondly, I have noted the use of Egyptology-tagged contents to stage and spread a type of informal archaeology. This is another way through which the vernacular operates on TikTok: explanatory pieces on ancient Egyptian artifacts and 'curated' visits to museums illustrate an obsession with the traces of ancient Egyptian material culture. Thirdly, many of these videos

employ an affective approach that is likewise noticeable in an array of contents based on impersonation, self-expression, and the representation of identities. The Egyptology hashtag acts here as the gateway to performative displays and affiliations on the part of users. The result of these strategies is the circulation of a *bond*: the fascination for the ancient Egyptian world in the form of a passion, a vocation. The educational possibilities attached to these spontaneous performances of users on TikTok seem especially fruitful for future research and practice.

Lastly, I tried to clarify the role of a pool of so-called influencers of Egyptology-themed videos in connection with the informative-pedagogical processes peculiar to TikTok. As I have argued in previous sections, the micro-celebrification strategies of influencers seem to contribute to regulating the circulation of knowledge in an environment easily threatened by misleading historical 'facts' and a mediated collective memory that often draws on deeply ingrained cultural stereotypes. In this vein, the challenge for professional Egyptologists may well be whether (or not) to engage in platform knowledge sharing on the subject, as well as to evaluate the ways in which the affective impulse that informs many online interactions may trigger learning-related achievements.

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The Road to *El ojo de Nefertiti*: Representing Egyptian Mythology for Middle-grade Readers

Jesús Cañadas

Introduction

Since the start of my career in 2011 as a fiction writer I have written 12 novels. Some are supernatural thrillers intended for adult readers whereas others are middle-grade fiction stories for young readers. The first group includes, among others, *Los nombres muertos* (2013), *Pronto será de noche* (2015) and *Las tres muertes de Fermín Salvochea* (2017), while the second is mainly represented by the saga *Athenea y los elementos* (2018-2021), initiated by the book *El ojo de Nefertiti* and continued subsequently by *El corazón de Atlantis*, *La serpiente alada*, *La hermandad del ataúd* and *La venganza del alquimista.*

El ojo de Nefertiti was published in May 2018 by Spanish publisher Edebé as part of that season's middle-grade catalogue. It sold 20,000 copies during its first publication year and entered what in Spain is known as the school-circuit, that is, it was selected by the *Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional* (Spanish Ministry of Education) as part of the recommended readings for students between 12 and 16 years old.

Part of the novel's success was undoubtedly due to its subject matter. *El ojo de Nefertiti* is an adventure fantasy novel that is freely based on the discovery of the statue of Nefertiti in Amarna by German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt in 1912. The book mixes narratives borrowed from Egyptian history and mythology as well as from recent works of popular culture, mainly classical pulp stories. However, the story is not set in the ancient world, instead it deals with the interaction of various Egyptian characters at the beginning of the 20th century, while addressing topics like feminism, racism or colonialism.

The main purpose of the book was to create a story that would engage children with Egyptian culture while, at the same time, entertaining them with a magical fantasy plot: a story with the flavour of literary works like *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (Rick Riordan, 2005-1009), *Astérix et Cléopâtre* (Goscinny and Uderzo, 1965), *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingt jours* (Jules Verne, 1872), *Les aventures de Tintin* (Hergé, 1929-1976) or *The Anubis Gates* (Tim Powers, 1983), but also with the dynamics of many audiovisual productions linked to archaeology, adventure, humour, fantasy and the ancient world, such as *The Mummy* (Stephen Sommers, 1999), *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec* (Jacques Tardi, 1976), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981), *Young Sherlock Holmes* (Barry Levinson, 1985) or *Avatar: The Legend of Aang* (Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko, 2005-2008).

With these and other references to popular culture in mind, it was then a matter of building up characters and a story, selecting the historical moment, and displaying all these in a specific place or places. These decisions are the focus of the following pages, which offer a brief outline

of the creation process of *El ojo de Nefertiti,* combining my own ideas as a voracious consumer of popular culture with those of the scientific advice contributed by various specialists in different disciplines.

Finding Nefertiti

The first step towards what eventually became my novel *El ojo de Nefertiti* did not even involve Egypt, or Nefertiti, for that matter. Commonly the initial seed from which a novel grows is a 'what if' question: what if a boy went to school but it was a school for magicians? What if an orphaned millionaire decided to fight crime in a bat costume? For *El ojo de Nefertiti*, however, this initial question was not 'what if', it was 'how'.

This was the question that came instantly to my mind while I was visiting one of Berlin's most famous museums, the Pergamonmuseum. One of its main rooms contains the Pergamon Altar, a monumental construction from the 2nd century BC, brought to Berlin from the city of Pergamon in Asia Minor at the end of the 19th century (Figure 1). Due to the passage of time, the temple was mostly a wreckage at the time of its discovery, torn to thousands of pieces, but it was reconstructed by German explorers and archeologists to its current, magnificent state.

Standing in front of this wonder, several years ago, the first question that came into my mind was: 'How?' How did they manage to do this? In my head I pictured the archaeological site in modern Turkey, those many little pieces scattered all around the place, with not a single

Figure 1. The Pergamon Altar. Image source: Wikicommons © Raimond Spekking / CC BY-SA 4.0

Ikea handout of instructions for rebuilding the whole structure. But they did manage, the archaeologists did solve the puzzle. They unearthed the whole temple, catalogued every stone fragment, brought the segments of the structure to Berlin, and then pieced everything back together inside another building. A similar procedure was undertaken by UNESCO between 1964 and 1968 to save the temple of Abu Simbel and other Nubian monuments from the waters of the Nile, a rescue made necessary by the construction of the Aswan Dam.

At that moment I was sure that inside that 'how' question was a story waiting to be written, an adventure novel. I pictured a whole convoy full of temple fragments travelling through the desert, then crossing half of Europe in order to get to Berlin. I could easily imagine some antagonists who perhaps would try to seize the opportunity to get their hands on the temple, perhaps even just one particular piece of it. Who knows, maybe this particular piece was supposed to have magical powers or even a curse, or both?

So, our protagonists want to take the Pergamon Altar in pieces to Berlin, some adversaries want to steal them, and there is a great expanse of land ahead, full of possibilities, dangers and potential adventure. Half of the novel was already decided in my mind.

It was the other half that brought the whole idea down.

When the time came to start digging up information about the Pergamon Altar, I discovered that the reality was more tedious than my expectation, which is something that frequently happens to writers. The whole Pergamon affair had involved a lot of document stamping, some payments, and an avalanche of bureaucracy. Of course, I could simply have ignored that whole part and written what I had in mind. In the words of American writer Michael Chabon, 'I tried to respect History and Geography when they served my purposes as a novelist, and I ignored them, either happily or grudgingly, when they didn't' (Chabon 2000: 542). However, reality was quite different from the scenario I had pictured in my mind. If I really wanted to go on with the project, I needed to rethink the whole thing or veer its course by 180 degrees. The latter was actually what I did. If you stand in front of the Pergamonmuseum and turn 180 degrees, you will see what I mean. Right behind the Pergamonmuseum lies one of Berlin's most famous museums,
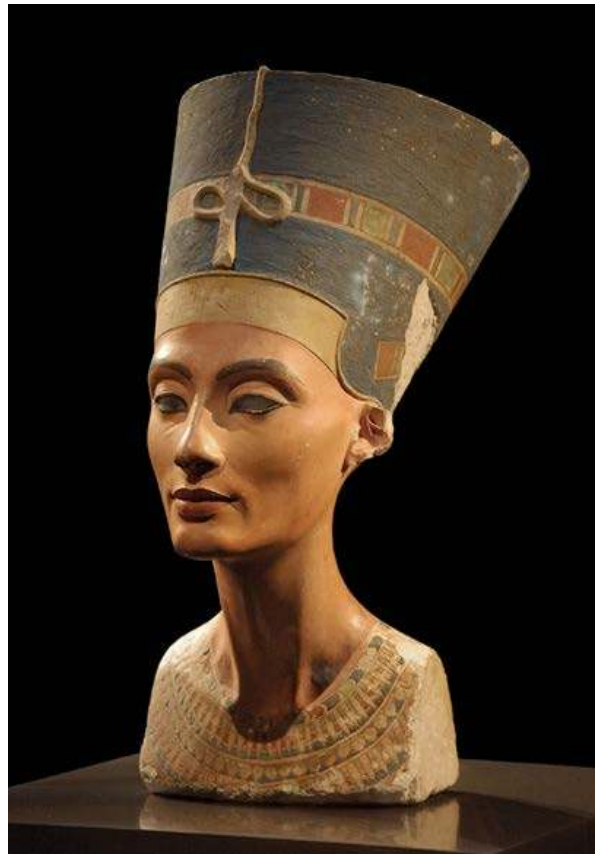

Figure 2. The statue of Nefertiti.
Source: Wikicommons © Philip Pikart / CC BY-SA 3.0

the Ägyptisches Museum, containing one of mankind's most famous works of art, the bust of Queen Nefertiti (Figure 2).

That was my 'what if' question: what if this whole adventure scenario should not involve the Pergamon Altar at all? What if I could bend history to adapt to my story but change the subject of that story to retell the tale of the discovery and retrieval of Nefertiti's bust? The answer to that question became my adventure fantasy novel *El ojo de Nefertiti*. But there was an obstacle in the road: I knew nothing about Nefertiti, or ancient Egypt, for that matter.

Bringing Nefertiti and Egyptian Mythology to Middle-grade Readers

When I started reading about the discovery of the Nefertiti bust, I knew that I had just hit the jackpot. The whole affair had a huge adventure-like flavour. Professor Ludwig Borchardt, the German archaeologist who found the bust first on the 6th December 1912, concealed its true significance and quality from the Egyptian government. After much fiddling with the safekeeping of the piece, the archaeologist obtained permission to send it to Berlin, where it arrived after a quite uneasy boat trip.[1] Leaving colonialist and imperialist notions aside, for I was intending to write a book for children, the whole situation had an immense potential for an adventure novel.

However, in my initial scenario I required some enemies who wanted to steal one particular piece that had either magical powers or embodied a curse, or maybe even both. Since I was writing a middle-grade adventure fiction book, I might have added silly-funny adversaries similar to the Fratelli Brothers in *The Goonies* (Richard Donner, 1985) or the Nazi soldiers in *Raiders of the Lost Arc* (Steven Spielberg, 1981). Concerning curses, mysteries and magic, they are usually related to Egyptian discoveries in pop culture, thanks to films like *The Mummy* (Karl Freund, 1932), novels like *The Anubis Gates* (Tim Powers, 1983), or *La reina del valle del desierto* (María Milagros Álvarez Sosa and Irene Morfini, 2012), as well as the legend surrounding the actual discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun. Therefore, why couldn't the sculpture of Nefertiti also have that magical function?

I did not need then to do a lot more research to find the mystery about Nefertiti, and mysteries are fuel to a writer's imagination. In my fiction, I was going to give the Nefertiti bust two eyes, and one of them was to be a mysterious gem of unknown magical and mythological powers. That was what the antagonists were after, and that was what our protagonists would try to keep from being stolen.

But what mythological powers could the gem have? Here was where I needed help. I therefore got in contact with two experts regarding two very relevant matters for my novel, and they were Dr Barry Kemp from Cambridge University and Dr Abraham I. Fernández Pichel from the University of Lisbon. I exchanged several emails with Dr Barry Kemp, who provided me with numerous photographs and maps of old Cairo, Port Saïd, the Amarna archaeological site, and many more locations. Furthermore, from Dr Kemp I learned everything about the discovery of Amarna by German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt, the whole tale of the retrieval and smuggling of the statue of Nefertiti, and the tensions between the German and

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[1] For the vicissitudes of the discovery and subsequent institutional arrangements for the custody of the object, see Krauss 1987; Jung 2012.

Egyptian government over the statue. As for Dr Fernández Pichel, his advice focused mainly on various aspects of ancient Egyptian religion, which gave me a better understanding of the particularities of its pantheon and divinities. At the same time, he offered me interesting references to ancient Egypt as it appears in popular culture. This was useful mainly in the characterisation of the adversaries in the novel, very much linked to Egypt as a place of evil and mystery in the contemporary mentality.

Concerning the information provided by these Egyptologists, getting the facts straight is vital for writers, not because we respect these facts, but because we need to know them in order to fiddle with them in a believable way. If we don't know the foundations of reality it becomes impossible to bend them in order to build fantasy. That is why 'suspension of disbelief´ is such a difficult goal to achieve: we need to make the unbelievable … conceivable. One of the ways of achieving this is by having an anchor in reality. This means, for example, using real characters from history, as well as a believable time frame. Following Michael Chabon's advice previously quoted, I would respect history as long as it didn't conflict with my purpose as a novelist. In my book, the Nefertiti bust was to be found in the ruins of Amarna in 1912, just as it happened in reality. Also, after checking his brief biography on the website of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,[2] I decided that Ludwig Borchardt, the German archaeologist, had to be a relevant character in my novel, but not the only one or even the main one. In this case, since I meant to write a story for middle-grade readers, I needed young protagonists. If I had made Ludwig Borchardt my protagonist, I might have written an Indiana Jones-type of story. That was what I wanted in many respects, but not with a middle-aged white man experiencing incredible magical adventures. Therefore, I respected both the role of Borchardt in the discovery of the Nefertiti bust and also the time and place his discovery took place, but did not use him as the main figure. In *El ojo de Nefertiti*, that part would be played by his granddaughter.

Athenea, or her short name 'Thea' (Figure 3), is a temperamental German girl who wants to be a famous explorer and archaeologist like her granddad or Alexander von Humboldt. She is ten years old, stubborn, adventurous, and fiery. She is also afraid of spiders, a phobia similar to Indiana Jones's fear of snakes seen in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981). Athenea has a very special relationship with her grandfather, Ludwig Borchardt, as shown by a key event in the novel that will trigger the subsequent proceedings: Thea resolves to travel to the other side of the world when she hears about her grandfather's disappearance in Egypt in order to find him. But of course, Thea could not go alone.

Mehmet Mohammed-el-Mehdi Firat, or Mehdi for short (Figure 4), is Athenea's Turkish *partenaire.* He is the son of Frau Firat, Athenea's governess. To create Mehdi, I took a bit of Data from *The Goonies* (Richard Donner, 1984), a bit of Watson from *Young Sherlock Holmes* (Barry Levinson, 1985), and a bit of Markus Brody from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (Steven Spielberg, 1989). Mehdi's Turkish background is a nod to Germany's current society, where Turkish citizens constitute a significant segment of the population. Since Athenea was German, giving her a Turkish companion would represent an accurate portrait of the Germany in the world where my book's current readers live in the present, and, in addition, it would give me an ideal opportunity to deal indirectly with topics such as racism and integration.

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[2] https://blog.smb.museum/ludwig-borchardt-der-bauforscher-unter-den-aegyptologen/ (Accessed 03/04/2023).

Figure 3. Athenea von Hammerstein, as imagined by illustrator © Marina Vidal.

Figure 4. Mehmet Mohammed-el-Mehdi Firat, as imagined by illustrator © Marina Vidal

Mehdi is much more cerebral than Athenea. He wants to become an inventor and spends time daydreaming about all kinds of fantastical machines that he could develop with the right materials. Even though he is a bit of a coward Mehdi also has a heart of gold. He does not like travelling or experiencing adventures for that matter. Instead, he loves books. Needless to say, Athenea and Mehdi hate each other at first sight.

In a prologue which pays homage to the archetypical pulp stories with an Egyptian background, with hidden passages, tombs, traps, evil spirits imprisoned in subterranean chambers, supposed curses, we come to what is called the 'trigger': Ludwig Borchardt and his daughter Sophie (a fictional character made up to justify Athenea's existence) discover something apparently evil in Amarna in 1912. After this discovery, Borchardt and Sophie disappear and the plot, therefore, is 'triggered'. Athenea and Mehdi, who are in Berlin at that moment, hear about their disappearance and decide to stowaway on a journey to Egypt and they find out the story about the Eye of Nefertiti, the gem's curse and their own powers, while trying to save Ludwig Borchardt and Athenea's mother from Nefertiti's spirit.

Both in history and popular culture, Nefertiti is treated as a positive figure, in many cases as a victim of political intrigue or as a feminist icon.[3] However, my fiction was a magical middle-grade adventure story, so I needed an evil figure. Here I used a trick that I normally employ in my fiction, what I call 'the apparent monster'. At the beginning of *El ojo de Nefertiti*, the spirit of Nefertiti seems to be the villain, and during the novel we find out that it is possessing Athenea's mother's body. I gave it monster-like properties: it cannot go out during daytime, it is able to possess mortal living bodies, and it can control lesser animal forms such as scorpions. The first two of these explicitly characterise Nefertiti as a monster like Dracula and other vampires in popular culture. The third introduces the scorpions into the narrative, with a significance exploited in, for example, *The Scorpion King* (2002) by Chuck Russell, but clearly

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[3] See for instance A.I. Fernández Pichel, M. Orriols-Llonch, 'Sex, Gender and Sexualisation of Ancient Egypt in Contemporary Popular Culture' in this volume.

inspired by the presence of this animal in Egyptian mythology. However, at the end of the book our protagonists will discover that the only thing that Nefertiti wants is to recover her whole face, so she can traverse into the Duat, the Egyptian Underworld. Again, this is nearer to the kind of story I wanted to tell and has little to do with actual Egyptian mythology. It is merely a way of telling young readers that first impressions are not important, and that what matters is knowing the whole picture.

Lastly, to complete the *dramatis personae*, Borchardt is not the only real historical character I decided to include in the plot. Since I needed antagonists who wanted to steal the Eye of Nefertiti, I also used the names of two real explorers and egyptologists, Ferlini and Loret.[4] In the novel they become a comic and pathetic duo of silly and clumsy adversaries who try to steal the eye but fail over and over again, much like Hanna-Barbera's character Dick Dastardly.

Whoever they are, the characters are not the only important ingredients in the genesis of a story, locations also play a significant role. The scenarios in the novel where the adventures of Athenea and Mehdi would take place had to be reminiscent of the archetypical locations of any adventure pulp story as seen in *Alan Quatermain and the Lost City of Gold* (Gary Nelson, 1986) or the videogames *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis* (LucasArts, 1992) and *Laura Bow: The Dagger of Amon Ra* (Sierra On-Line, 1992): tombs, subterranean passages, secret labs, museums, ancient temples that rise from the sands. All these elements are mixed with real places like the market of Khan el-Khalili in Cairo or Port Saïd. Unfortunately, I was not able to visit these real places personally, so I had to rely on my imagination and my own experiences of travelling to other countries like Morocco or Turkey to make them believable.

Last but not least, I also decided to include a technique that I use in many of my novels, what I call 'pop-culture syncretism', i.e., a kind of pop-culture intertextuality. Using this I like to introduce references that connect my own fiction with other canonical works from the history of literature and popular tradition. This, in my opinion, reinforces the fantastical aspect of the story while at the same time broadening the world with a narrative technique called 'show-don't-tell', by which details are mentioned but not explained, leaving the interpretation to the reader's imagination. Therefore, in *El ojo de Nefertiti* there are many references that add up to this pop-culture syncretism: the characters mention an *avernal* that might be Dracula himself, Alan Quatermain is present in a dialogue, Nefertiti's spirit becomes an Islamic djinn, Mehdi's creations are steampunk machines similar to those which we see in *Les Aventures extraordinaires d'Adèle Blanc-Sec* (Jacques Tardi, 1976), and there are many more. Furthermore, Athenea and Mehdi will cross paths with a strong female character called Sandiego, a merciless smuggler who will help them. This character is loosely related to Carmen Sandiego, from the popular 1990s videogame adventure franchise *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?* (Brotherbund, 1985).

Finally, combining all these elements of historical background, mystical powers, magical objects, characters, locations and references, I was ready to develop the story of *El ojo de Nefertiti*.

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[4] Giuseppe Ferlini was an Italian physician and explorer of the 19th century. Victor Loret was a notorious French Egyptologist in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Story

It is no secret that, in literature, the story is much more than the sum of its parts. I already had characters, objects, locations and a time frame. These provide the basic elements of any narration and correspond to the traditional 'w-questions' used to set the parameters of any story: who, what, where and when. In short:

Who: Athenea von Hammerstein, granddaughter of German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt, and her companion Mehdi Firat.

What: The Eye of Nefertiti, a mysterious gem inside one of the eye sockets in the bust of Nefertiti. It is supposed to have great powers, but it might be cursed as well.

Where: Locations from Amarna (Egypt) to Berlin (Germany).

When: 1912.

Nevertheless, I was still missing the answer to one important question, perhaps the most important in literature. This is the one question that renders all the rest much greater than their mere sum: 'How?' How does all this happen?

I had already decided that the core of my novel would be a gem with magical powers based on Egyptian mythology, but, now that I had established the foundations, it was time to start fiddling with Egyptian history and mythology to create my own story, much as this was done in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (Rick Riordan, 2005-2009).

One of the first aspects I had to deal with was magic. We are all aware of the special role of magic in the popular culture inspired by ancient Egypt. Knowing this, I wanted to apply something different from the usual idea of curses and Egyptian magicians. My initial concept was to have a system of magic based on the four elements: fire, water, earth and wind. This kind of structure is quite basic but has also proved to be very effective among middle-grade readers. I established that there would be creatures called *avernales* who were able to control one or another of the elements. I also decided that my protagonists would find out during the course of the novel that they and their families were also secret *avernales* and thus able to master one of the elements. Athenea would be able to control earth, whereas Mehdi would discover that he could use the power of the wind to fly. My villains would also need to have some powers, otherwise they would not be sufficiently menacing. I decided that Ferlini would be a water *avernal*, and able to change his physical shape and aspect in line with this. Loret would also be able to control the wind but not to fly, his power would enable him to topple objects using a strong draught of air.

This left only one character to establish: Nefertiti herself.

I knew that the historical Nefertiti (Figure 5) was the royal wife of Pharaoh Akhenaten, also called Amenhotep IV, a ruler during the Egyptian 18th Dynasty, reigning *c.* 1353–1336 BC. I came across a theory which suggested that Nefertiti and Akhenaten had created some tension between themselves and the priests of Amon by taking all of their power and status in society

and therefore rendering the priests their enemies (Vercouter 1949: 91).[5] I used this theory to develop a plot scenario that involved a conspiracy among the priests of Amon to kill Nefertiti and disfigure her face in revenge for her role in disempowering them.

Using these elements my story now had a plot to follow. The Egyptian gods were ancient *avernales* who had immense elemental powers, attributes that would explain their status as divinities among their followers. One of these *avernales* was Amon. Though human, Nefertiti was herself an *avernal* who fought Amon in the temple of Luxor and defeated him, thus also subduing his priesthood in all of Egypt. Instead of absorbing his powers, Nefertiti decided to pour them inside a magical gem, a gem that would grant its possessor all the powers of an elemental god, an incredibly powerful *avernal*. She decided to hide this gem in a statue made to honour her by Thutmose, a royal sculptor from Amarna and supposedly Nefertiti's lover.

Figure 5. Nefertiti, as imagined by illustrator © Marina Vidal.

All was not well, however, for Nefertiti's fate had already been decided. The priests of Amon had contrived a plot to kill Nefertiti, and they succeeded. Not only did they kill her but also managed to remove her corpse's face completely. Their intention was clear: without a face, the god Osiris would not recognise Nefertiti when she stood before him in the Duat, where Osiris's judgement takes place, and so he would not allow her to enter his underworld kingdom. It was to be a most cruel punishment.

Although this detail is only faintly inspired by Egyptian mythology, it gave the gem of the Eye of Nefertiti the narrative significance I needed for the fictional story. The spirit of Nefertiti would have to complete her own face with the gem to get herself to the Duat. Once again, following Chabon's advice, I decided to follow my own way in the fiction, completing it with details from Egyptian mythology.

Furthermore, as Nefertiti's spirit was unable to enter the Osirian realm it had to remain on the earth as a djinn, a desert wind spirit, faceless and almost mad. The priests of Amon, in the meantime, were not able to find the gem in which Nefertiti had stored their god's powers. The statue made by Thutmose was never found. Time passed, kingdoms rose and fell, religions were founded and forgotten. Gods became legend: mythology developed. And then a German archaeologist found the ruins of Amarna and the statue of Nefertiti. A statue with the face of Nefertiti, so perfectly made that it was almost a mirror image of her real face.

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5   See also https://www.worldhistory.org/trans/es/1-10541/nefertiti/ (Accessed 03/04/2023).

From Mythology to Fiction: Conclusions

The conspiracy of the priests of Amon followed by the salvaging of Nefertiti's face is a perfect example of what I tried to achieve with *El ojo de Nefertiti*. As we know, the judgement of Osiris in Egyptian mythology had nothing to do with recognising faces, but, in the same vein, neither had Amon or Nefertiti anything to do with elemental powers. However, my idea was to achieve something similar to the approach taken by English author Tim Powers when he wrote *The Anubis Gates* (1983): I would take a bit of Egyptian mythology, twist it just enough to fit a fantasy story of my own and then locate it inside a narrative full of adventure, action and magical powers.

Everything revolved around that supposed Eye of Nefertiti: the antagonists, Ferlini and Loret, found out about Borchardt's excavation and wanted to steal the statue and sell it. Borchardt, knowing the story and powers of the Eye, wanted to bring it to Berlin and put it in a safe space where the Eye could not be used for evil doings. The spirit of Nefertiti, turned into a djinn and almost demented after millennia of roaming in the desert wind, wanted to recover her face and present it to Osiris so that the god of the dead would finally recognise her and allow her to enter the afterlife. Finally, Thea and Mehdi, after Borchardt's mysterious disappearance, wanted to travel to Egypt to find out what had happened to Thea's grandfather. Had the mischievous Ferlini and Loret kidnapped him in order to get the statue of Nefertiti? Had Nefertiti's spirit caught Borchard before he could escape Egypt with the statue? And where exactly was the statue?

There was only one way for Athenea and Mehdi to find the answer to all those questions: travel to Egypt and find grandpa Borchard, for he had the secret to the Eye of Nefertiti.
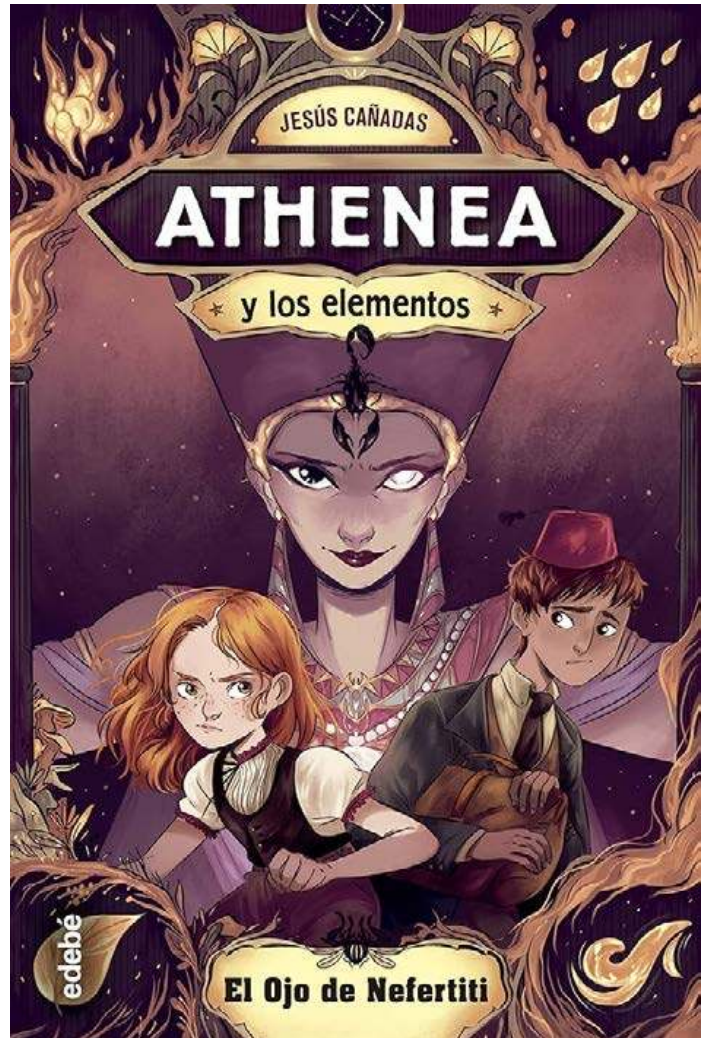
And thus, *El ojo de Nefertiti* was born.

Figure 6. Cover of 'El ojo de Nefertiti' by illustrator © Marina Vidal.

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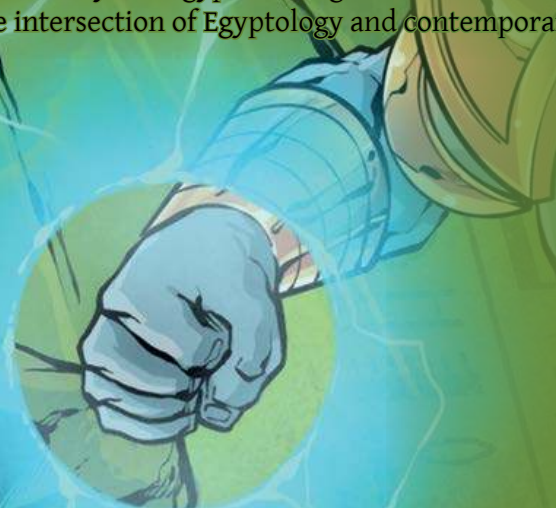
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The appearance of new media and its enormous diffusion in the last decades of the 20th century and up to the present has greatly increased and diversified the reception of Egyptian themes and motifs and Egyptian influence in various cultural spheres. So-called 'popular' or 'pop' culture (cinema, genre fiction, TV-series, comics, graffiti, computer and video games, rock and heavy music, radio serials, among others) often makes use of narratives and motifs drawn from the observation and study of ancient Egypt, updated and reinterpreted in various ways, and which is now the subject of study by scholars of Egyptology.

The present monograph seeks to provide new evidence of this interdisciplinarity between Egyptology and popular culture. It explores the conscious reinterpretation of the past in the work of contemporary authors, who shape an image of the Egyptian reality that in each case is determined by their own circumstances and contexts.

Abraham I. Fernández Pichel studied Egyptology at the Université Lyon II - Louis Lumière (France) and received his doctorate from the Universität Tübingen (Germany). Since 2020 he has worked as a researcher and associate professor (Egyptology) at the Center for History of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Lisbon (Portugal). His main fields of study are Egyptian religion and the hieroglyphic inscriptions of Graeco-Roman temples, as well as the intersection of Egyptology and contemporary popular culture.