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Between Diana and Isis: Egypt's "Renaissance" and the Neo- Pharaonic Style (1920s-1930s)

Nadia Radwan

- 1 The rise of modern art at the turn of the twentieth-century in Egypt reveals the complex dynamic of multiple cross-cultural interactions in tandem with the formulation of the *nahda* renaissance project. In this paper, it will be argued that the neo-pharaonic production of a generation of Egyptian artists referred to as the "pioneers," illustrates the result of an intricate synthesis of reinventing historical past while claiming a universal culture through the continuous interplay between modernity and the national discourse. More importantly perhaps, it will show how these interactions led to the construct of new visual identities.
- 2 The founding by Prince Yusuf Kamal of the School of Fine Arts in Cairo in May 1908, headed by the French sculptor Guillaume Laplagne, marked the transfer of new forms of cultural knowledge in the Egyptian artistic realm. The "civilizational" project underlying the creation of this institution implied the practice of Western techniques and genres, such as easel oil painting, landscapes, and nudes, which progressively became a necessity for engaging with modernity.
- 3 These practices indicated profound change in artistic work but also in the way the public responded to the artworks and related to these objects. Intertwined with the emergence of nationalist movements, the circulations of artists and images between Egypt, the Middle East, and Europe emphasized the necessity to gradually rethink artistic approaches according to these exchanges. In this context, the "pioneers" (*al-ruwwad*) were the first Egyptians to be trained in the Western tradition. Most of them received grants to pursue their studies in Europe, especially in Paris, Rome, and Florence. Thus, the knowledge of the "fine arts" (*al-funun al-gamila*), as defined by the West, progressively became a prerequisite for practicing art in Egypt. The pioneers were faced with the challenge of engaging with new genres and techniques, while being

expected to develop a "national style"¹ that would comply with the *nahda* project of a cultural awakening or renaissance.²

- 4 One of the responses to this challenge was the invention of a neo-pharaonic style. The past, regenerated, appeared as an iconographic source at the crossroads of "authenticity" and "renewal" and the lexical field of Ancient Egypt provided the pioneers with a multitude of inspirations. However, this approach cannot be reduced to the simple interpretation of the past revisited through Western models as it brings to the fore the newness of their art, that announced Egyptian modernism.

The Pharaohs in the Parliament

- 5 During the 1920s, the imaginary linkage with the past was nourished, to a large extent, by recent archeological findings. One of the most striking was certainly the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen, excavated in 1922 by British egyptologist Howard Carter, whose impact on the public was unprecedented.³ From then on, the figures of Akhenaton, Ramses, and Tutankhamen became the heroes of writings by authors such as Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi, Ahmad Shawqi, and Khalil Mutran, and they were exalted particularly in the songs of Sayed Darwish. Moreover, the official opening of the tomb coincided with the inauguration of the first freely elected Parliament, and the link between Ancient Egypt and contemporary politics was thus explicitly established.
- 6 The idea of this correlation was reflected through a large decorative painting designed for the building of the Egyptian Parliament in Cairo (**fig. 1 and 2**).⁴ On the occasion of the inauguration of the Parliament building in 1923, the Alexandrian painter and diplomat Mohamed Naghi⁵ (1888–1956) was asked by the government to execute a large painting to adorn the Chamber of the *Maglis al-Shuyukh* (the "Senate," presently known as *Maglis al-Shura*). The commission of this work was highly symbolic, as it was intended to celebrate the end of the British protectorate and the promulgation of a new constitution.
- 7 Naghi's large decorative painting, entitled *Egypt's Renaissance* or *The Cortege of Isis*,⁶ represents Isis, the goddess of fertility and maternity, as a symbol of Egypt's coming (re)birth. She leads a triumphal cortege, standing on a chariot drawn by two water buffaloes and escorted by a crowd of individuals belonging to ancient and contemporary Egypt. Isis is depicted as the herald of a renewal in which the past becomes a metaphor for the present. The crowd follows the chariot, chanting and dancing while offering goods to the goddess, including fruits from the harvest and crafted objects such as a statuette of the goddess Hathor, the divinity of fertility. In this escort, two musicians playing traditional instruments from Upper Egypt (the *nayy* and the *rababa*) are followed by a sheikh, evoking religious life. It is noteworthy that if Islam is represented in this work as part of Egypt's heritage, Naghi's cultural renaissance is above all depicted in reference to Ancient Egypt. On the extreme left of the painting, Naghi represented himself in the crowd as a contributor to the cultural rebirth of his country.
- 8 Mohamed Naghi believed in the necessity of creating an official historicist art, a new epic genre that would illustrate the glories of Egypt's past. His endeavor was echoed in a contemporary movement led by Egyptian intellectuals, who claimed the rewriting of "a national history."⁷ Through the publication of historical works, intellectuals such as

Muhammad Husayn Haykal reevaluated the historiography of their country, in response to the domination of the field by European scholars since the nineteenth century. This movement also extended to the biographical reappraisal of certain political leaders, including Muhammad Ali.⁸ Naghi argued for a similar historicist renewal through the visual arts. As a firm believer in the social and educative role of the arts, he called upon the State, in his numerous articles and notes,⁹ to entrust Egyptian artists with the decoration of public buildings and the execution of monuments. He thus opened the way for a new genre of national historicist decorative works.¹⁰

- 9 While Naghi's neo-pharaonic *Egypt's Renaissance* refers to a certain extent to the frescoes and reliefs of the Theban valley, his composition strongly echoes that of certain mythological paintings of the European Renaissance. The painter, who was trained in France and studied under Claude Monet in Giverny,¹¹ was a fervent admirer of the decorative programs of Versailles and Fontainebleau.¹² This affinity is reflected in Naghi's *Renaissance*, which recalls certain representations of the triumphal cortege of Diana. Indeed, the composition of Isis on her chariot led by two water buffaloes bears a resemblance to the typology of Diana led by two sacred cows. It is possible that when he executed his painting for the Parliament, Naghi had in mind the famous *Triumph of Diana* painted by Ambrosius Bosschaert during the first quarter of the seventeenth century, which he might have seen at Fontainebleau. Through his transposition of the figure of Diana to Isis, Naghi could lay claim to both the heritage of Ancient Egypt and a filiation with the grand tradition of the European Renaissance. By merging these two distinct heritages in the new genre of Egyptian historicist painting, Naghi's *Renaissance* reflects the multilayered cultural filiations of the *nahda* project. Thus, although this painting may appear at first glance to be a nationalist work commissioned by the state, it underscores the importance of Naghi's travels between Egypt and France. In this sense, the message of his *Renaissance* goes beyond a nationalist ideology and can be understood as a claim to inscribe his production in an artistic tradition belonging to a universal culture.
- 10 Naghi's claim to the European Renaissance is clearly stated in one of his most ambitious works: *The School of Alexandria*. In 1939, while he was at the head of the Museum of Egyptian Modern Art in Cairo, the painter started to work on his masterpiece, which required more than ten years to complete. Finally, towards the end of his life, in 1952, he finished this monumental painting in his villa-studio located close to the Giza pyramids.¹³ The title of this work evidently relates to Raphael's famous fresco *The School of Athens*, commissioned by Pope Julius II at the beginning of the sixteenth century to decorate the *Stanza della Segnatura* in the Vatican.
- 11 Naghi paid tribute to the master of the Cinquecento by representing a synthesis of the philosophical and theological thought of Ancient Greece through contemporary Egyptian figures. He thus transposed the original idea of Raphael to the other side of the Mediterranean: Alexandria. *The School of Alexandria* therefore enabled Naghi to relocate the center of Western thought and theology to the southern Mediterranean and, *a fortiori*, Egypt.¹⁴ Just like the translation of Diana into Isis in *Egypt's Renaissance*, the relocation of knowledge and philosophy from Athens to Alexandria implies the idea of a tribute as much as that of a claim. Indeed, while paying homage to the masters of the Renaissance, Naghi acknowledged them as part of his own heritage and

consequently operated a geographical shift by inscribing Egyptian art within the continuity of this same artistic tradition.

Figure 1: Interior of the Chamber of the *Maglis al-Shuyukh*, Egyptian Parliament, Cairo, with *La Renaissance de l'Égypte ou Le Cortège d'Isis* by Mohamed Naghi, 1922.



Source: Photographed by the author, 2011.

Figure 2: Mohamed Naghi, *La Renaissance de l'Égypte ou Le Cortège d'Isis*, Chamber of the *Maglis al-Shuyukh*, Egyptian Parliament, Cairo.



Source: Photographed by the author, 2011.

An Art Deco Awakening

- 12 A few years after Naghi executed the painting for the Egyptian Parliament, a major public monument sculpted by artist Mahmoud Moukhtar (1891–1934) was unveiled in Cairo. Moukhtar was among the first students of the School of Fine Arts in Cairo and

studied under the French sculptor Guillaume Laplagne before being sent to France in 1912 with a grant to study at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris.¹⁵

- 13 Entitled *Egypt's Awakening* (*Nahdat Misr* or in French *Le Réveil de l'Égypte*), Moukhtar's monument was financed by a national subscription launched by members of the Wafd Party.¹⁶ It was officially inaugurated on May 20, 1928, on Bab al-Hadid Square in front of Cairo Railway Station (**fig. 3 and 4**).¹⁷ The ceremony took place with great pomp under the auspices of King Fuad in the presence of all the ministers, dignitaries of al-Azhar, and representatives of the Coptic Church, as well as consuls, officers, and members of Parliament and the Senate. After the inauguration, the press instantly qualified Moukhtar as "the first Egyptian sculptor since the Pharaohs."¹⁸ This immediate consecration sparked the idea of the Egyptian genius underlying the nationalist discourse. Moukhtar was indeed the first Egyptian artist to sculpt a monument for a public space, which had up to then been dominated by European artists, and in particular French sculptors.¹⁹ The press, mostly the Wafdist journals, largely relayed the official celebration of *Egypt's Awakening*, simultaneously announcing an "artistic awakening" (*nahda fanniya*).

Figure 3: Mahmoud Moukhtar supervising the achievement of *Le Réveil de l'Égypte*, c. 1928.



Source: Courtesy of Eimad Abu Ghazi.

Figure 4: *Le Réveil de l'Égypte* on Bab al-Hadid Square in front of Cairo Central Railway Station, Lehnert & Landrock, c. 1929.



Source: Author's private collection.

- 14 Among the intellectuals who covered the event, the renowned writer and critic Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad (1889–1965), biographer of the wafdist leader Saad Zaghloul,²⁰ wrote an article in his column *Sa'at bayn al-kutub* (Time with Books) published in the daily newspaper *al-Balagh al-Usbui*.²¹ According to al-Aqqad, the monument reflected the “awakening of the nation” (*nahdat al-umma*) and, thanks to Moukhtar, its message was made visible for the first time in public space and henceforth accessible to all Egyptians.²² In the eyes of nationalist intellectuals such as al-Aqqad, the monument represented a new visual milestone of the artistic *nahda* on several levels. Firstly, Moukhtar revived ancient tradition through his choice of material, sculpting pink granite blocks extracted from the ancient quarries of Aswan.²³ Secondly, he depicted the nation through a double allegory, Ancient Egypt and the rural world, represented respectively by a sphinx and an Egyptian peasant (*fellaha*). These two themes, which would constitute the leitmotifs of modern Egyptian art and literature during the 1930s, were translated visually for the first time in public space.
- 15 If Moukhtar's sphinx retains the pride and noblesse of his age-old ancestor lying in front of the Giza pyramids, it distinguishes itself by the breath of life that animates it. In a slow and powerful movement, Moukhtar's sphinx stands up on his forepaws, literally evoking the action of awakening (*nahid*). The idealized figure of the Egyptian *fellaha* stands proudly beside the sphinx. Her elegant drapery and headdress ornamented with a scarab, symbol of resurrection, bestow upon her the allure of a queen or goddess. She places one hand maternally on the headdress of the sphinx, while she unveils her face with the other, as to signify the end of a period of blindness.

- 16 Through the gesture of unveiling, Moukhtar also paid tribute to the emancipation of Egyptian intellectual women who, besides being activists and supporting the national cause and struggle for independence, played an important role as patrons of the arts, in particular by supporting Moukhtar's career.²⁴ The sculptor's *fellaha* also hinted at a contemporary event: two prominent figures of Egyptian feminism, Huda Shaarawi and Sayza Nabarawi, had publicly removed their veils on the platform of the Cairo Central Railway Station. This major event that marked the history of Egyptian feminism occurred in May 1923, when Shaarawi and Nabarawi returned from the 9th Congress of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance in Rome, where they had represented Egypt.
- 17 Thus, the two simultaneous movements in Moukhtar's monument, of the sphinx standing up and of the peasant unveiling herself, evoke the phenomenon of transformation underlying the project of a national awakening. In that perspective, the reception of the monument was unanimous: the revival of an ancient tradition had occurred. In his article, Al-Aqqad emphasized the "authenticity" of the monument and its loyalty to ancient statuary.²⁵ Interestingly, the author recalled the first models Moukhtar had executed for the monument when he was in Paris (**fig. 5**). Although they betrayed the influence of French classicism and Art Deco, Al-Aqqad recounts that he severely criticized Moukhtar's models because, in his eyes, they were strongly inspired by Ptolemaic art.²⁶ Paradoxically, Al-Aqqad attributes what he considers a flaw to the foreign influence of a local dynasty, the Ptolemies. He does not, however, mention Moukhtar's academic training in Paris, whose influence is rather evident in *Egypt's Awakening*. Obviously, such a statement would not be consistent with the construction of a myth of the national sculptor as a direct inheritor of the genius of his ancestors.
- 18 Al-Aqqad then pursues his thought by stating that the actual monument breaks away from the Ptolemaic influence of the first models and that the final result remains faithful to the finest examples of ancient Egyptian statuary.²⁷ Nonetheless, the stylized vertical folds of the peasant's drapery as well as the geometric shapes of the sphinxes paws are reminiscent of French Art Deco. Moreover, the features of the sphinx recall certain Hellenic and French classical models, which Moukhtar had closely studied at the Louvre while he was in Paris. In that sense, despite its symbolic charge—the first public monument sculpted by an Egyptian artist, the recourse to a material belonging to an ancient tradition, the transmission of visual symbols of a new identity linked to Ancient Egypt and peasantry—*Egypt's Awakening* remains a total invention freely inspired by a multitude of subtly merged models, with novel results.
- 19 Just as Naghi's *Renaissance* was perceived as the revival of an ancient painting tradition that was actually closely linked to European Renaissance models, so was Moukhtar's *Awakening* received as the achievement of a return to authenticity, while his Parisian training was purposely overlooked. These two examples underscore the power of simplification of the political discourse on works of art that embody a far more complex thought about the diverse and layered references that define visual identities. The foreign element is therefore neglected by the political discourse, or at the most associated with the influence of a local foreign dynasty, in the interest of constructing authenticity.

Figure 5: Model for Mahmoud Moukhtar's monument of *Egypt's Awakening* executed in Paris c. 1920.



Source: Courtesy of Eimad Abu Ghazi.

From Rud al-Farag to Sèvres: The Revival of Traditional Arts

- 20 Another example contemporary to Moukhtar's *Awakening* that illustrates this point is the attempt by Egyptian intellectual Huda Shaarawi to revive ancient traditional crafts. Within the framework of establishing a charity project, the founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union and its organ, *L'Égyptienne*, established a school for teaching ceramics in the poor neighborhood of Rud al-Farag in the north of Cairo. Offering training in the art of ceramics, this school was free of charge and open to all inhabitants of the neighborhood, especially to young, unschooled girls.
- 21 The specific choice of ceramics, among all other crafts, was not anodyne. Indeed, the art of pottery had been practiced in Egypt for millennia and was consequently considered "authentic." Additionally, it was common to both Islamic and Coptic traditions and therefore reflected the idea of national unity conveyed by the nationalist discourse. The social endeavor of the project was to rekindle a traditional craft, and Shaarawi considered the School of Rud al-Farag as a means to accomplish this renewal. In that perspective, along with the birth of this new school, *L'Égyptienne* announced a "renaissance of ceramics in Egypt."²⁸
- 22 Huda Shaarawi's main goal was to elevate the status of "minor" arts to that of "major" arts in Egypt by presenting the objects of the School at the annual Salon in Cairo²⁹ founded by the Society of Fine Arts Lovers,³⁰ which had been reserved up to that point

for painting and sculpture. She also encouraged the elites to acquire these objects by appealing to their charitable intentions and nationalist sentiments. Huda Shaarawi succeeded in that she managed to have the ceramics of Rud al-Farag admitted to the Cairo Salon in 1924, and she called upon the elite to acquire these objects, which eventually became fashionable. The ceramics of Rud al-Farag were exhibited in the very prestigious Bon Marché department store in Cairo, and the acquisition by Queen Nazli of a large vase from the school during the 1929 Cairo Salon marked the success of this project.

- 23 The achievements of the workshops of Rud al-Farag led *L'Égyptienne* to proudly affirm that the craftsmen of the School were "pure Egyptians, who had not learned the art of pottery outside their country and therefore embodied the secrets of tradition."³¹ However, one must nuance these statements by specifying that these "pure Egyptians" were actually trained by the French decorator Alfred James Coulon, who was also the head of the Decoration Section of the School of Fine Arts in Cairo. Moreover, Huda Shaarawi financed the trip of some of the school's artisans to France so they could be trained at the best workshops of the Manufacture de Sèvres,³² where they were expected to learn enameling and glazing techniques. *L'Égyptienne* affirmed that "simple children of Egypt" had executed these objects,³³ although the elaborate ornamentation and the high quality of the enameling show the technical mastery of highly qualified craftsmen.
- 24 This project echoes the endeavors of Naghi and Moukhtar in the sense that Europe remained an integral part of the construction of Egyptian authenticity. The School of Rud al-Farag nevertheless paved the way for a thought on the renewal of traditional arts and crafts in Egypt. Sharaawi may be considered the initiator of a project of artisanal *nahda*, whose objective was to affirm a national identity through the valorization of traditional arts. This idea was to have a major influence in the 1940s and 1950s on a generation of Egyptian artists, architects, and pedagogues who firmly believed in the revival of traditional arts and crafts.³⁴

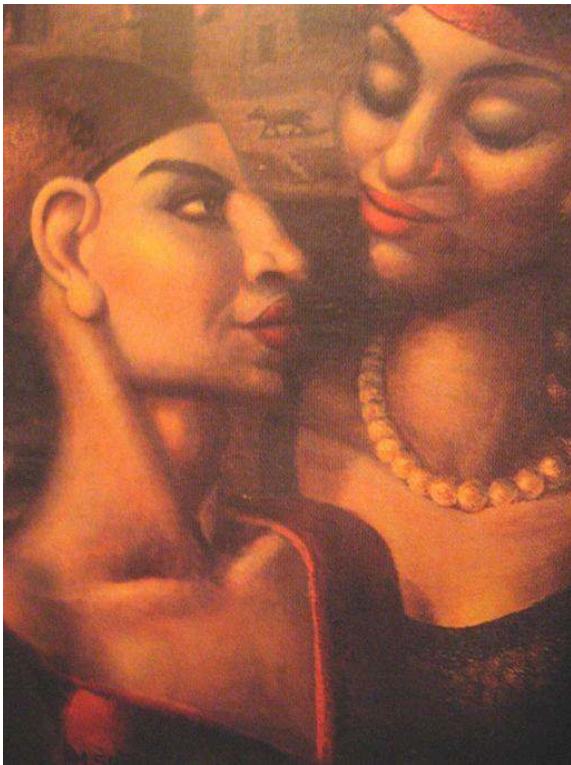
The Pilgrimage to Thebes, Florence, and Rome

- 25 Naghi and Moukhtar's pharaonist works produced during the 1920s fixed an iconography that would influence several generations of Egyptian artists. As of the 1930s, the visit to Egyptian archeological sites constituted an essential part of the artistic curriculum. The Theban valley became a place of pilgrimage for Egyptian painters and sculptors, functioning as a giant open-air studio where they could draw on a multitude of inspirations. The artists often resided in the old village of Gurna, located on the west bank of Luxor close to the Colossi of Memnon and the Tombs of the Nobles. Interestingly, these tombs constituted a major source of inspiration for the artists. Probably more than the mythological "official" frescoes of the Valley of the Kings and Queens, the Tombs of the Nobles, dedicated to craftsmen, scribes, architects, and farmers, revealed the human aspects of the Pharaohs by depicting their daily life and activities.
- 26 It should be noted that the study of Ancient Egypt was excluded from the curriculum of the School of Fine Arts in Cairo for the first thirty years of its existence. The first generation of professors, who were mainly French and Italian,³⁵ favored of the study of Greco-Roman statuary, of which they imported castings from the collection of the

Louvre.³⁶ It was only in 1937, when Mohamed Naghi was to become the first Egyptian director of the School of Fine Arts in Cairo, that ancient Egyptian art was introduced to the program. Naghi later founded the Luxor Atelier in 1941, a residency for artists located in the village of Gourna to promote the study of ancient Egyptian art.³⁷

- 27 Although the pilgrimage to Upper Egypt constituted a major experience for Egyptian artists, it was usually completed by an extended stay in Europe, mainly through governmental grants. The Alexandrian painter and judge Mahmoud Saïd (1897–1964)³⁸ traveled extensively to Aswan and Luxor, where he closely studied the ancient reliefs and frescoes. However, he also resided in Italy, Rome, and Florence, where he discovered the Italian Primitives, whom he grandly admired. Interestingly enough, the reevaluation of the Primitives in Europe, initiated in particular by an important exhibition held in Paris in 1904,³⁹ also proceeded from the construction of national identities. Their rediscovery was similarly motivated by a return to the naïve and genius simplicity of the masters of the past. In this sense, Saïd's fascination by the anonymous authors of the frescoes of the Tombs of the Nobles as well as for the Italian Primitives is not surprising.
- 28 In 1932, Saïd painted *L'Invitation au Voyage*, maybe in reference to the famous eponym poem of Charles Baudelaire that evokes the Orient by these verses: "Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, luxe, calme et volupté" (**fig. 6**). In a double portrait, Saïd fixed the furtive instant of an enigmatic and sensual exchange between two individuals. The facial features of the two mysterious protagonists of the scene, their eyes shadowed in kohl, clearly recall the Amarnian style developed during the reign of Akhenaton.⁴⁰ Saïd, like a number of his contemporaries, was fascinated by the reformism of the pharaoh. Akhenaton embodied a rupture with the preceding dynasties on several levels: firstly, political, with the establishment of the new capital of Akhetaton; then theological, with the instauration of the cult of a unique god, Aton; and, more importantly, artistic, with the birth of a distinct "Amarnian style." Many artists of the generation of the pioneers therefore drew a link between the artistic renewal of al-Amarna and the contemporary artistic awakening they were attempting to accomplish.

Figure 6: Mahmoud Saïd, *L'Invitation au voyage*, oil on canvas, 1932.



Source: Private collection.

The “Changelessness” of the *Fellah*

- 29 The painter and decorator Ragheb Ayad (1892–1982), a contemporary of Mahmoud Saïd, was equally influenced by the arts of Ancient Egypt. Along with Mahmoud Moukhtar, Ayad was one of the first students to join the School of Fine Arts in Cairo in 1908, the year of its creation. He later received a scholarship in 1925 to study at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Rome, where he resided for four years.⁴¹
- 30 Throughout his career, Ayad created an original, folkloric style to depict scenes of rural and traditional daily life, such as the marketplace, labor in the fields, and the popular café. Ayad mastered the art of sketching and developed an expressive style characterized by vivid, textured strokes and powerful colors. He was inspired in particular by the compositions of the decorative bas-reliefs and paintings of Ancient Egyptian art. In that perspective, he revisited the ancient system of superposed narrative scenes, which sometimes led him to use horizontal formats, as is the case in *Work in the Fields* and *Caravan*(**fig. 7 and 8**).

Figure 7: Ragheb Ayad, *Work in the fields*.



Oil on panel, 154 × 58 cm, 1958.

Source: Cairo (Egypt), Museum of Modern Egyptian Art. Photographed by the author in 2011.

Figure 8: Ragheb Ayad, *Caravan*.

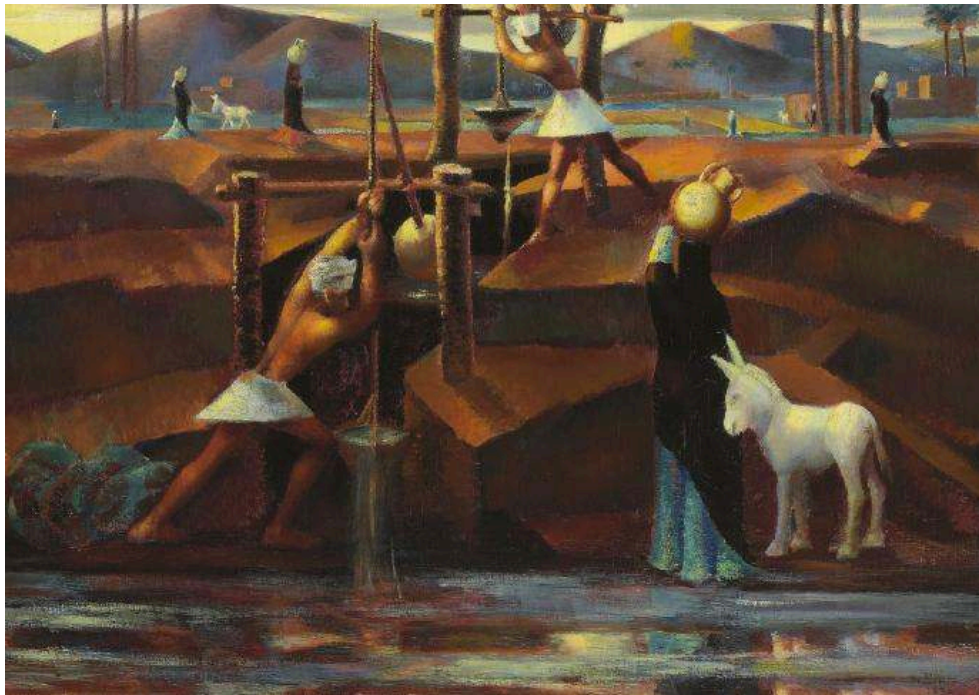
Oil on canvas, 70 × 77 cm, 1962.

Source: Cairo (Egypt), Museum of Modern Egyptian Art. Photographed by the author in 2011.

- 31 The iconography of Ancient Egypt and rurality are constantly intermingled in the works of the pioneers. This aspect can be related to a view of Egyptian peasantry that dominated the 1930s when certain landowners began to think about an agrarian reform.⁴² This idea led to an increasing consciousness about the condition of the Egyptian *fellah* and a social interest for his way of life. This *fellahist* movement, as one could call it, embodied the idea—which would be largely called into question in the 1960s, notably by Jacques Berque⁴³—that absolutely no change had occurred in the condition and way of life of the *fellah* since the Pharaohs.
- 32 This notion was clearly formulated by Henry Habib Ayrout in his major work *The Egyptian Peasant*, published in 1938.⁴⁴ In this sociological approach, Ayrout claims that one of the major characteristics of the Egyptian *fellah* is his immutability and impermeability to socio-political transformation, a notion that he defines as “changelessness.”⁴⁵ This idea was equally widespread among writers and intellectuals, as the theory of changelessness identified the Egyptian peasant as the direct heir to ancient traditions. The *fellah* therefore represented the keeper of a homogenous and authentic culture that had been impermeable to foreign cultural influences despite the successive occupations throughout the centuries; the Egyptian peasant thus appeared as the missing link in the chain with the glorious past. This idea is clearly illustrated in Tawfiq al-Hakim’s novel *Return of the Spirit* (*Awdat al-ruh*),⁴⁶ published in 1933. In his novel, the author places the peasant at the center of the narration as the guardian of an “Egyptian spirit” that will “return” because of the social solidarity of the 1919 revolution.⁴⁷

- 33 This idealization of the *fellah* is reflected, to a large extent, in the rural imagery depicted in the works of the pioneers. In the majority of their rural landscapes from the 1930s the countryside appears as timeless and ideal. The feudal reality of the relationship between the Egyptian peasant and the landowner is nonexistent in such representations. Also, the extreme poverty of the *fellah* and his difficult living conditions are totally omitted. He is not represented as an individual but as an entity, which is inseparable from its territoriality. The rural world is depicted as the property of the *fellah*, who himself belongs to the land of his ancestors, the pharaohs.
- 34 As an example, in a painting entitled *Les Chadoufs* (*The Shadoofs*) finished in 1934, Mahmoud Saïd represented a scene where Egyptian peasants draw water from the Nile to irrigate their fields with an ancient device called a *shadoof* (fig. 9). The male peasants are dressed in loincloths in reference to ancient dress, while the female water carriers are veiled, thereby representing the contemporary rural world. The notion of changelessness is explicitly depicted, as past and present coexist in the same daily rural activity.

Figure 9: Mahmoud Saïd, *Les Chadoufs* (*The Shadoofs*).



Oil on panel, 89.5 × 116.7 cm, 1934.

Source: Doha (Qatar), Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art.

Figure 10: Ragheb Ayad, *Work and Pleasure*.



Oil on panel, 55 x 100 cm, 1970.

Source: Cairo (Egypt), Museum of Modern Egyptian Art. Photographed by the author, 2011.

- 35 Another characteristic of the representation of the *fellah* is the fact that his hard labor is shown positively, as a harmonious and innate activity. This idea is reflected in a later painting by Ragheb Ayad entitled *Work and Pleasure* (fig. 10). Like numerous contemporary paintings of that period, this work idealizes the hard labor of the peasant. The lack of any explicit visual expression of social engagement does not, however, signify that the pioneers were not concerned with the condition of the *fellah*. Rather, their rural imagery led to the construction of a stereotype that resulted more from the necessity of defining a new visual identity based on the link to Ancient Egypt than from a direct critique of society.
- 36 In conclusion, it has been argued that the pioneers' appropriation of the past required its reinvention. Ancient Egypt provided a framework within which they could explore new aesthetics as the result of continuous cross-cultural exchanges. The various approaches of Naghi, Moukhtar, Saïd, and Ayad attest to the fact that both ancient Egyptian art and Western tradition as a means of modernity complied with the requirements of the *nahda* project. Beyond the construction of cultural authenticity, the work of the pioneers demonstrated reflects their claim to adhere to a modern culture that could be Egyptian, national and universal at the same time. The 1930s marked the peak of the neo-pharaonic style in modern Egyptian art. At the beginning of the 1950s, under Gamal Abdel Nasser, references to Ancient Egypt gradually made way for others inspired by Islamic heritage, in particular for public buildings and monuments. It was a shift towards Islamic and, more specifically, Mameluke references. This dynasty, which personified military power, was in accordance with the politics of Nasser's regime. Moreover, the neo-Islamic trend, far from being limited geographically as was the theme of Ancient Egypt, conveyed a cultural identity that was in keeping with Nasser's Pan-Arab orientation. Nonetheless, references to Ancient Egypt never entirely disappeared from the vocabulary of Egyptian art. If artists such as Naghi and Moukhtar paved the way for the neo-pharaonic style of the 1920s, certain artists, including Ragheb Ayad, continued to be inspired by ancient Egyptian art until

the 1970s. Moreover, some of the more recent contemporary creations, especially in the context of the post-Mubarak Era, have proven that Ancient Egypt can still be revisited and remains a major iconographic source for contemporary Egyptian artists.⁴⁸

NOTES

1. After the creation of the School of Fine Arts in Cairo, an intense debate was initiated in the press about the ways to accomplish an Egyptian "artistic renewal." Guillaume LAPLAGNE, "L'art égyptien, ce qu'il fut, ce qu'il doit être," *Bulletin de l'Institut égyptien*, vol. 5, June 1912, p. 10–19; Ahmad ZAKI, "Le passé et l'avenir de l'art musulman en Égypte : mémoire sur la genèse et la floraison de l'art musulman et sur les moyens propres à le faire revivre," *L'Égypte contemporaine*, no. 13, January 1913, p. 1–32; Max HERZ, "Quelques observations sur la communication de S. E. Ahmad Zéki Pacha : le passé et l'avenir de l'art musulman en Égypte," *L'Égypte contemporaine*, no. 15, 1913, p. 387–402.
2. Although the use of the term *nahda* ("awakening" or "renaissance") is widespread historically and geographically throughout the Middle East, it is used here specifically to designate the project of an "awakening" formulated by Egyptian nationalist intellectuals during the 1920s and 1930s. Although the term refers to a general movement, encompassing socio-political, economic, and cultural reforms, we shall limit its use here to the cultural field.
3. On the cultural impact of archaeological discoveries in Egypt, see Eliot COLLA, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2007; Donald Malcolm REID, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles, CA; London: University of California Press, 2002.
4. The neoclassical Parliament building was designed by British architect Bernard Robinson Hebblethwaite. Mercedes VOLAIT, *Architectes et architectures de l'Égypte moderne 1830-1950: genèse et essor d'une expertise locale*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2005 (*Architectures modernes en Méditerranée*), p. 432.
5. The artists' names have been transcribed in accordance with their usual signatures.
6. Mohamed Naghi often titled his works in French. The original title of the Parliament painting is *La Renaissance de l'Égypte ou le Cortège d'Isis*.
7. On this subject, refer to Anthony GORMAN, *Historians State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt: Contesting the Nation*, London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2003.
8. Muhammad Husayn HAYKAL, *Hayat Muhammad 'Ali [The Life of Muhammad 'Ali]*, Cairo: matba'at Misr, 1935.
9. See, for example, Mohamed NAGHI, "La peinture et la sculpture contemporaines en Égypte," *L'Art vivant*, special issue "L'Art vivant en Égypte," January 15, 1929, p. 69–70. Mohamed NAGHI, "Le long de la cimaise : le Salon des Amis de l'Art," *L'Égypte Nouvelle*, March 29, 1924, p. 7–8.
10. In 1936, Naghi painted a series of five large panels to decorate the al-Mu'asa Hospital in Alexandria that was inaugurated the same year. This series proves Naghi's will to relocate the history of medicine in the Arab world by depicting scenes such as *Imhotep or Medicine in Ancient Egypt* and *Avicenna or Medicine in the Arab World*. In 1942, he and fellow painter Mahmoud Saïd were called upon to execute several historical decorative panels for the Museum of Egyptian Civilization (*Mathaf al-hadara al-misriyya*).

11. In 1918, Naghi studied under Claude Monet in Giverny, where he painted a series of impressionist works. From then on, he claimed his filiation to the master and to the French impressionist movement.
12. Mohamed NAGHI, "La politique des Beaux-Arts en Égypte," *Les Cahiers de Chabramant*, 1988, special issue *Mohamed Naghi (1888-1956) : un impressionniste égyptien*, p. 37.
13. The villa was built in 1952 in the neighborhood of Hadaiq al-Ahram, close to the Giza pyramids, and was designed by Naghi's friend, the architect and critic of Greek origin Dimitri Diacomides. After Naghi's death, thanks to the efforts of his sister, the artist Effat Naghi, the Ministry of Culture transformed the villa into a museum inaugurated on July 13, 1968, under the auspices of the Minister of Culture Sarwat Okasha.
14. During Naghi's lifetime *The School of Alexandria* was exhibited at the Egyptian Pavilion of the Venice Biennale, in 1954. It was later acquired by the Municipality of Alexandria to adorn the chamber of meetings, where it remains today.
15. About Mukhtar, see Badr al-Din ABOU GHAZI and Gabriel BOCTOR, *Moukhtar ou le réveil de l'Égypte*, Cairo: H. Urwand et fils, 1949; Sam BARDAWIL, "Ni ici, ni là-bas : Mahmoud Moukhtar et Georges Sabbagh," *Qantara*, no. 87, April 2013, p. 34–37; Nadia RADWAN, "Les arts visuels de l'Égypte moderne, méthodes de recherche et sources : l'exemple de Mahmud Mukhtar (1891–1934)," *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, no.15, April 2011, p. 51–61.
16. Among the members of the Committee for the financing of *Egypt's Awakening* were: Wisa Wasif Bey, President of the Chambers of Deputies; Wassef Ghali Pacha, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Hafiz Afifi, Deputy; and Muhammad Mahmud Khalil, Senator and art collector.
17. In 1954, under Gamal Abdel Nasser, *Egypt's Awakening* was moved in front of Cairo University to be replaced by the colossal statue of Ramses II brought from Mit Rahina (Memphis). The latter was transferred in 2006 close to the Giza Pyramids, as decided by the ex-Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Zahi Hawass. *Egypt's Awakening* still stands today in front of Cairo University.
18. "Haflat izahat al-sitar 'an timthal Nahdat Misr" ["The Ceremony of Unveiling of the Statue of Egypt's Awakening"], unsigned, *al-Balagh al-Ushbu'i*, May 25, 1928, p. 16.
19. In the context of the modernization and extension of the cities of Cairo and Alexandria, Khedive Ismail called upon French sculptors, such as Charles Cordier and Alfred Jacquemart to create equestrian monuments in memory of the khedivial lineage. Nadia RADWAN, "Revolution to Revolution: Tracing Egyptian Public Art from Saad Zaghloul to January 25," *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, no. 14, Summer 2014, p. 82.
20. Abbas Mahmud AL-AQQAD, *Sa'd Zaghlul: sira wa tahiyya* [*Sa'd Zaghlul: Biography and Tribute*], Cairo: matba'at al-higazi, 1936.
21. Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad founded the journal *al-Balagh al-Ushbu'i* in 1923.
22. Abbas Mahmud AL-AQQAD, *op. cit.* (note 20), p. 13.
23. As of November 1922 the largest blocks, weighing several tons, were extracted from the ancient quarries, hollowed by the craftsmen of the Middle Kingdom, and brought to Cairo by the Nile.
24. Following the premature death of Mahmoud Moukhtar on March 28, 1934, at the age of 43, a group of Egyptian women intellectuals, including Huda Shaarawi and Sayza Nabarawi, founded the Society of the Friends of Moukhtar. The Society launched the annual Moukhtar Prize to encourage and support talented young sculptors. These women were also among the first to demand the return of Moukhtar's works from France to Egypt and propose the creation of a museum dedicated to the sculptor. This museum was finally designed by the Egyptian architect Ramses Wissa Wassef and inaugurated in 1962 in Gazira. Céza NABARAOUI, "Le Concours Moukhtar 1940," *L'Égyptienne*, March 1940, p. 3; Céza NABARAOUI, "Pour que l'œuvre de Moukhtar

revienne à l'Égypte," *L'Égyptienne*, June 1934, p. 2–7; Céza NABARAOUI, "La Semaine Moukhtar," *L'Égyptienne*, April 1935, p. 6.

25. The model for *Egypt's Awakening* was executed in Paris and was accepted by the Salon des artistes français in 1920.

26. "I told him [Mukhtar]: the model contains a historical mistake because its sphinx bears no resemblance whatsoever to the original one sculpted by the pharaohs. On the contrary, it is inspired by the Ptolemies. It is a mistake in our history of art to represent the Egyptian *nahda* by a work inspired by a foreign dynasty, while we possess our glorious and extraordinary statues." Abbas Mahmud AL-AQQAD, *op. cit.* (note 20), p. 13. Translated from Arabic by the author.

27. "If we now look at the sphinx that was unveiled last week, we should congratulate Moukhtar for representing it with Egyptian pharaonic features, as one can see in its lips, nose, cheeks, and eyes. We should congratulate him for not having sculpted it with Ptolemaic features as he had done it in his first models eight years before." Abbas Mahmud AL-AQQAD, *op. cit.* (note 20), p. 13. Translated from Arabic by the author.

28. Louis MARCEROU, "Une Renaissance de la céramique arabe en Égypte," *L'Égyptienne*, special issue, 1926, p. 48–50.

29. Jeanne MARQUES, "Quelques réflexions à propos du Salon 1928," *L'Égyptienne*, February 1928, p. 15.

30. The Society of Fine Art Lovers was founded in Cairo in 1926 by Prince Yusuf Kamal. Its vice-president was the politician and art collector Muhammad Mahmud Khalil.

31. Louis MARCEROU, *op. cit.* (note 28), p. 50.

32. Mohamed NAGHI, "Le long de la cimaise : le Salon des Amis de l'Art," *L'Égypte Nouvelle*, March 29, 1924, p. 7–8.

33. Jeanne MARQUES, "Quelques réflexions à propos du Salon 1928," *op. cit.* (note 29), p. 15.

34. Huda Shaarawi's project opened the way for the establishment, twenty years later, of the arts and crafts schools founded by the pedagogue Habib Gorgui (1892–1965) and by his son-in-law, the architect Ramses Wissa Wassef. On this subject, see Nadia RADWAN, "Les arts et l'artisanat," in Leïla EL-WAKIL (ed.), *Hassan Fathy dans son temps*, Gollion; Paris: Infolio, 2013, p. 104–123.

35. Among the first generation of professors at the School of Fine Arts in Cairo were the French sculptor Guillaume Laplagne, the Italian painter Paolo Forcella, the French architect Henri Piéron, and the French decorator James Alfred Coulon.

36. Guillaume LAPLAGNE, "Rapport sur l'École égyptienne des Beaux-Arts à son Altesse le prince Ahmed Pacha Fouad, président du Comité de l'Université égyptienne," manuscript, Cairo, February 8, 1911, Cairo (Egypt), Egyptian National Archives, Abdin documents: 0069-004463.

37. The tradition of the Luxor Atelier was perpetuated until recently in Egypt. Adam Henein (1929–), one of the most prominent contemporary Egyptian sculptors, founded the Aswan International Sculpture Symposium in 1996, an annual workshop and exhibition during which sculptors from around the world are invited to experiment and create outdoor works from the local granite.

38. Regarding the painter Mahmoud Saïd, see Gabriel BOCTOR, *Artistes contemporains d'Égypte : Mahmoud Saïd*, Cairo: Éditions Aladin, 1952; Henri EL-KAYEM, *Mahmoud Saïd*, Paris: Braun et Cie, 1951.

39. Georges LAFENESTRE, *Les Primitifs à Bruges et à Paris : 1900-1902-1904. Vieux maîtres de France et des Pays-Bas*, Paris: Georges Baranger, 1904.

40. It recalls in particular a painted plaster conserved in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology in Oxford that represents the two daughters of Akhenaton and Nefertiti, c. 1345–1335 BC.

41. After graduating from the decorative arts class of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Rome in 1928, Ayad returned to Egypt the following year and was the first to propose the idea of creating

an Egyptian Academy in Rome on the model of the other foreign academies established in the Italian capital. The Egyptian Academy in Rome was inaugurated in 1947, and Mohamed Naghi became its first director.

42. Mirrit Boutros GHALI, "Un programme de réforme agraire pour l'Égypte," *L'Égypte contemporaine*, no. 38, January–February 1947, p. 3–66.

43. Jacques Berque, *L'Égypte : impérialisme et révolution*, Paris: Gallimard, 1967 (Bibliothèque des sciences humaines), p. 52.

44. The work was first published in French under the title *Mœurs et coutumes des fellahs*, Paris: Payot, 1938.

45. "They [the Egyptian Peasants] have changed their masters, their religion, their language and their crops, but not their way of life. From the beginning of the Old Kingdom to the climax of the Ptolemaic period the Egyptian people preserved and maintained themselves. Possessed in turns by Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantine, Arabs, Turks, French, and English, they remained unchanged. Even today the fellahin play no part in the Egyptian renaissance or the movement of progress." Henri Habib AYROUT, *The Egyptian Peasant* (translated and introduced by John Alden Williams), Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005, p. 1.

46. The novel was first published in Arabic in 1933 (*Awdat al-ruh*, Cairo: maktabat Misr, 1933) and was translated into French a few years later under the title *L'Âme retrouvée : roman du réveil de l'Égypte* (adaptation française de Morik Brin), Paris: Fasquelle, 1937.

47. For an analysis of rurality in modern Egyptian literature, refer to Samah SELIM, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880–1985*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.

48. On neo-pharaonism in contemporary creations in post-2011 Egypt, see Nadia RADWAN, "Revolution to Revolution: Tracing Egyptian Public Art from Saad Zaghloul to January 25," *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, no. 14, summer 2014, p. 81–87.

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