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Reviving the Legacy: Ancient Egyptian Civilization in Modern Arabic Poetry

Mirası Yeniden Canlandırmak: Modern Arap Şiirinde Eski Mısır Uygarlığı

Esat Ayyıldız^{*}

Abstract

This article examines the enduring influence of Ancient Egyptian civilization in contemporary Arabic poetry, focusing on the ways poets incorporate elements of Egypt's ancient past into their literary works to preserve its memory for future generations. The subject, scope, and importance of this study lie in the exploration of the engagement with Ancient Egypt in various aspects, such as celebrating architectural marvels and acknowledging the wisdom and achievements of the civilization that once thrived along the Nile. The purpose of this research is to underscore the significance of the past in shaping present-day literary and cultural expressions, as well as the role of art in the construction of collective identity. The methodological framework involves a close analysis of selected poetic works, paying particular attention to the interplay between different cultural and historical influences, and demonstrating the vitality and adaptability of the Arab poetic tradition. In addition, this study highlights the implications of Ancient Egyptian civilization in contemporary Arabic poetry beyond the realm of literature, emphasizing the necessity of reevaluating the relationship between past and present and fostering a sense of continuity and connection with a shared history.

Keywords: Arabic Language and Literature, Modern Arabic Literature, Ancient Egypt, Ancient Egyptian Heritage, Contemporary Arabic Poetry

Öz

Bu makale, Antik Mısır uygarlığının çağdaş Arap şiirinde süregelen etkisini inceleyerek şairlerin Mısır'ın antik geçmişinden unsurları nasıl edebî eserlerine entegre ettiklerine ve bu mirası gelecek nesiller için nasıl koruduklarına odaklanmaktadır. Çalışmanın konusu, kapsamı ve önemi, Antik Mısır ile ilgili etkileşimin farklı yönlerinin incelenmesine dayanmaktadır ve bu bağlamda mimari başarıların takdir edilmesi ve geçmişte Nil boyunca gelişen bu uygarlığın bilgelik ve muvaffakiyetlerinin taltif edilmesi gibi konuları ele almaktadır. Araştırmanın amacı, mazinin günümüzün edebî ve kültürel ifadelerini şekillendirmedeki önemini vurgulamak ve kolektif kimlik inşasında sanatın rolünü ortaya çıkarmaktır. Metodolojik çerçeve, seçilmiş şiir eserlerinin detaylı analizini içerirken farklı kültürel ve tarihsel etkileşimler arasındaki ilişkiye özellikle dikkat çekerek Arap şiir geleneğinin dinamizmini ve uyum yeteneğini gözler önüne sermektedir. Bunun yanı sıra mezkûr çalışma, Antik Mısır uygarlığının çağdaş Arap şiirindeki etkisinin edebiyat alanının ötesine geçtiğini vurgulamaktadır ve geçmişle şimdiki zaman arasındaki ilişkinin yeniden değerlendirilmesinin önemini ve müşterek bir tarih aracılığıyla devamlılık ve bağlılık duygusunun geliştirildiğini ön plana çıkarmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arap Dili ve Edebiyatı, Modern Arap Edebiyatı, Antik Mısır, Antik Mısır Mirası, Çağdaş Arap Şiiri

* **Corresponding Author:** Esat Ayyıldız (Assoc. Dr.), Kafkas University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Eastern Languages and Literatures, Kars, Türkiye. E-mail: esatayyildiz@hotmail.com ORCID: 0000-0001-8067-7780

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Introduction

The study of the intersections between ancient Egyptian civilization and contemporary Arabic poetry presents a fascinating avenue for examining the ways in which modern Arab poets draw inspiration from and engage with the rich and enduring cultural heritage of Egypt. The introduction of this academic paper will provide an overview of the historical context and key themes, as well as outline the significance and objectives of the research. In the introduction, it is pertinent to succinctly highlight the scope of the literature review conducted for this research. The examination of available scholarly works reveals a noticeable lacuna in studies exploring the representation of ancient Egyptian culture within contemporary Arabic poetry. In this scholarly domain, Aḥmad Aḥmad Badawī's seminal work, *al-Āthār al-Miṣrīyya fī al-adab al-'Arabī*, emerges as an indispensable resource.¹ This study draws primarily on the poetry collections of modern Arab poets. Key amongst these sources are the *Dīwān* of Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī² and *al-Shawqīyyāt*, a compilation of poetry attributed to Aḥmad Shawqī. Both of these literary works have greatly informed the present research.³ Furthermore, there is a body of modern scholarship that, while not explicitly oriented towards the legacy of ancient Egypt, offers intriguing insights on this subject in the context of various aspects of contemporary Arabic literature. Noteworthy examples include Rahmi Er's book, *Çağdaş Arap Edebiyatı Seçkisi*,⁴ and Kemal Tuzcu's article, *Mısırlı Neo-Klâsik Şairler*.⁵ These sources offer valuable perspectives, enriching the intricate weave of understanding concerning the influence of ancient Egypt on contemporary Arabic poetry. In the field of literary studies, the impact of the ancient Egyptian civilization on modern Arabic poetry remains relatively unexplored, particularly by Western researchers. Despite the rich academic engagement with the ancient Egyptian civilization, there seems to be a notable dearth of in-depth analyses focusing on its enduring influence on contemporary Arabic poetry. Western scholars, many of whom have devoted considerable effort to understanding the intricacies of ancient Egypt and its culture, would be well served by extending their investigations to consider this significant, continuous legacy. The exploration of the ancient Egyptian civilization's manifestation in modern Arabic poetry not only enriches our understanding of the historical and cultural continuum but also

1 Aḥmad Aḥmad Badawī, *al-Āthār al-Miṣrīyya fī al-adab al-'Arabī* (Windsor: Hindawi, 2021), 7.

2 Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī, *Dīwān Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī* (Windsor: Hindawi, 2014), 123-124.

3 Aḥmad Shawqī, *al-Shawqīyyāt* (Windsor: Hindawi, 2020), 849-850.

4 Rahmi Er, *Çağdaş Arap Edebiyatı Seçkisi* (Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, 2012), 28-29.

5 Kemal Tuzcu, "Mısırlı Neo-Klâsik Şairler," *Nüşa: Şarkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2, no. 5 (2002): 112-113.

provides insights into the evolving dynamics of Arabic literary traditions. It uncovers the ways in which modern Arabic poets engage with, reinterpret, and perpetuate this rich heritage, thereby creating a dialogic relationship between the past and the present. In light of this, it is of utmost importance that Western researchers turn their attention to this comparatively neglected area of study to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the interconnectedness of cultures, histories, and literature.

Egypt, often referred to as the cradle of civilization, has a long and illustrious history that spans millennia. Its ancient civilization, characterized by remarkable achievements in art, architecture, science, and literature, has had a profound impact on the development of human societies and continues to inspire artists and writers today. The enduring appeal of ancient Egypt lies not only in its monumental accomplishments, but also in the myths, legends, and stories that have emerged from its past, providing a rich tapestry of cultural material for contemporary poets to engage with and reinterpret. Contemporary Arabic poetry reflects a dynamic interaction with this ancient heritage, as poets seek to bridge the gap between past and present, to revive the legacy of ancient Egypt, and to infuse it with new meaning and relevance for modern audiences. This paper will examine the various ways in which these poets engage with the themes, symbols, and narratives of ancient Egypt, as well as the socio-political implications of their work in the context of the modern Arab world.

Central to this analysis will be an exploration of the role of memory, nostalgia, identity, and nationalism in contemporary Arabic poetry. The paper will examine how poets invoke the ancient Egyptian past as a means of reinforcing national pride, cultural identity, and historical continuity, and as a vehicle for critiquing the challenges faced by modern Egyptian society. The interplay between the glorification of ancient achievements and the lamentation of present struggles serves to create a complex and multilayered narrative that seeks to inspire hope and resilience in the face of adversity.⁶ Moreover, the paper will delve into the stylistic and structural aspects of contemporary Arab poetry, exploring the ways in which poets employ imagery, symbolism, and language to evoke the essence of ancient Egypt and connect it to modern experiences and sensibilities. In undertaking this research, the paper aims to contribute to a broader understanding of the ways in which contemporary Arabic poetry engages with and reimagines the legacy of ancient Egypt, and to illuminate the complex relationship between history, memory, and identity in the modern Arab world. By shedding light on the creative processes and socio-political

6 See William Granara, "Nostalgia, Arab Nationalism, and the Andalusian Chronotope in the Evolution of the Modern Arabic Novel", *Journal of Arabic Literature* 36, no. 1 (2005), 57-73.

contexts that shape this poetic tradition, the paper seeks to offer new insights into the ongoing dialogue between past and present, and the enduring power of ancient civilizations to inspire and inform contemporary artistic expression.

1. Celebrating Ancient Egyptian Heritage in Contemporary Arabic Poetry

When examining ancient Egyptian civilization, it becomes apparent that we are dealing with the product of a mindset that is markedly different from our own. This raises several questions: To what extent can this difference be attributed to the civilization's antiquity? Is there something unique about the so-called "primitive mentality"? Does it represent an even more divergent attitude when compared to the present-day Eastern religions and philosophies? There is no straightforward method to gauge the degree of difference in such matters. Eastern religions and philosophies generally have more extensive literature and a more coherent presentation style compared to ancient Egyptian religion. The latter largely relied on pictorial symbols to convey its message and evolved in a world where, in the absence of significant adversaries, no one felt the need to develop a more persuasive and comprehensive means of communication. Persuasion was not a necessity. Nonetheless, this distinction is more a matter of presentation than content. The primary difference lies in historical context. Eastern religions and philosophies have survived and adapted, securing their place in the modern world. Consequently, individuals from different backgrounds can access them more directly, learning from apologists who have emerged from within these traditions. With diligence and time, we can learn their language, live among their people, absorb their culture, and immerse ourselves to the point where we can replicate their thought processes within our own minds. This adaptability is reciprocal; in fact, the Eastern world has shown a greater inclination to engage with the Western mindset than the reverse.⁷ In the context of contemporary Arabic poetry celebrating ancient Egyptian heritage, understanding these distinctions and historical contexts becomes vital for a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter.

Egyptian antiquities have long captivated scholars and enthusiasts alike, spanning from ancient to contemporary times. Esteemed intellectuals, including al-Jāhiz (d. 255/869) and others, have asserted that there are thirty wonders in the world; ten are

7 Barry J. Kemp, *El Antiguo Egipto: Anatomía de una Civilización*, trans. Mónica Tusell (Barcelona: Crítica, 1996), 8; Nicolás Grimal, *Historia del Antiguo Egipto*, trans. Blanca García Fernández-Albalat and Pedro López Barja de Quiroga (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 1996), 21-24; Susanne Bickel and Hans-Hubertus Münch, "Götter - Herrscher - Amtsinhaber. Beispiele zu Genealogie als Denkform im Alten Ägypten," *Genealogie und Migrationsmythen im antiken Mittelmeerraum und auf der Arabischen Halbinsel*, ed. Almut-Barbara Renger and Isabel Toral-Niehoff (Berlin: Edition Topoi, 2014), 157-176.

scattered across various countries, while the remaining twenty are situated in Egypt. Among these are the two pyramids, the tallest and most remarkable structures on Earth. Observers might perceive them as two artificially positioned mountains. As a result, some who have witnessed these structures express a profound sense of awe, considering the pyramids to be an exception in the passage of time. Another notable wonder is the Sphinx, often referred to as Abū al-Hawl. It is believed to serve as a talisman, safeguarding Giza from the encroachment of sand. Additional significant sites include the temples of Samhud and Akhmim, which contain depictions of the kings who governed Egypt. Constructed of marble, these temples feature stones measuring five cubits in length and two cubits in thickness. The temples consist of seven corridors, each named after one of the seven planets, with walls embellished by inscriptions related to chemistry, alchemy, talismans, and medicine.⁸

In recent times, Egyptian Arab poets, despite not having a common religious or linguistic background with the ancient Egyptians, have recognized and incorporated the values of the fascinating ancient civilization, the remnants of which they inhabit, into their poetry. Listing all Arab poets who refer to the Ancient Egyptian civilization in their literary works is a difficult endeavor. However, some poets have managed to excel in this area compared to their contemporaries. It is essential not to assume that the literary approach of each poet exploring the Ancient Egyptian heritage in their work is solely based on that heritage. For instance, ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād (1889-1964), a notable poet, appears to take pride in viewing himself as an heir to both the pharaohs and Muslim conquerors in his poetry. His appreciation of Egypt’s ancient past does not conflict with his exposure to and influence from prominent figures in English literature. While al-‘Aqqād’s contemporaries primarily focused on the French language and culture, he was influenced by English literary works. When discussing philosophical issues and advocating moral principles, he adopted a traditional stance on poetry.⁹ Ultimately, this shows that modern Arab poets, even those influenced by Western culture and literature, can still value and incorporate the ancient Egyptian heritage into their creative work.

Aḥmad Shawqī (1868-1932), a prominent poet, celebrates ancient Egyptian culture in his verse. With a profound love for his nation, Shawqī embodies this sentiment in his poetry. In his poem entitled “Nashīd Miṣr,” he extols and lauds Egypt. It is reasonable to surmise that, through this poem, Shawqī sought to transmit the magnificence of Egypt to subsequent generations. In fact, some suggest that this poem is primarily targeted at Egyptian children and has been

8 Badawī, *al-Āthār al-Miṣrīyya fī al-adab al-‘Arabī*, 7.

9 Jacob M. Landau, *Modern Arap Edebiyatı Tarihi: 20. Yüzyıl*, trans. Bedrettin Aytaç (Ankara: Gündoğan Yayınları, 1994), 29-30.

categorized as children's poetry. Nonetheless, contemporary scholars argue that, given children's attention span, the poem may be considered excessively lengthy for them. Furthermore, it is emphasized that the language is not easily comprehensible for children and that the poem comprises enigmatic expressions.¹⁰ In general, Shawqī venerates Egypt and Egyptian identity in this poem, and within its lines, one can encounter allusions to the resplendence of ancient Egyptian civilization. The poet contends that even cosmic events transpire for Egypt's benefit, asserting that this venerable homeland was the most valuable treasure for preceding generations. As in numerous poems referencing ancient Egypt, the poem mentions the pyramids and underscores their resilience against the ravages of time. Additionally, the poet posits that ancient Egyptians imparted the values of civilization to other societies and underscores the considerable esteem ancient Egyptians garnered throughout history.¹¹

Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī (1839-1904) held a profound fascination for the historical values of Ancient Egypt and the nation's natural splendor. His poem about the Egyptian pyramids is acknowledged as a pioneering work in contemporary Arabic poetry. This poem not only inspired al-Bārūdī's contemporaries but also encouraged subsequent poets to explore Egyptian history in their literary endeavors.¹² In this poem, al-Bārūdī accentuates the significance of Egypt's two pyramids, portraying their successful resilience against the ravages of time and expressing his amazement at this phenomenon. This focus is fundamentally rooted in ancient Arabic poetry, which often underscores the destructive nature of time and the inevitability of all living beings succumbing to it.¹³ Conversely, contemporary Egyptian poets appreciate engaging with the pyramids, which endure as a monument that has transcended the constraints of classical perspectives. al-Bārūdī contends that the legacy and narratives of Ancient Egypt will be commemorated until the end of the world. He justifiably proclaims that no edifice comparable to the pyramids could ever be erected. In this context, he alludes to the monumental constructions of previous epochs, asserting that the Tower of Babel or the renowned palaces of the illustrious Persian kings would be eclipsed by the pyramids. He even posits that the angels, who are believed in Islamic traditions to have imparted the knowledge of sorcery to humans, would also revere the magnificence of the pyramids. Furthermore,

10 Emine Merve Aytakin, "Aḥmed Şevkî'nin Dīvānu'l-Eṭfāl'inin Dil ve Tema Yönünden Tahlili," *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 63, no. 2 (2022): 1114-1115.

11 Shawqī, *al-Shawqiyyāt*, 849-850.

12 Tuzcu, "Mısırlı Neo-Klâsik Şairler," 112-113.

13 Aida Qasımova, *Ərəb Ədəbiyyatı: V-XIII Əsrlər* (Bakü: Qasımova A.Ş., 2019), 25-26.

al-Bārūdī accentuates the resplendence of the Sphinx alongside the pyramids.¹⁴

Mythology serves as an essential component of modern Western literature. In contrast, within the context of modern Arabic literature, it appears that Arab poets' engagement with mythology transpired at a comparatively later stage. It would be erroneous, however, to presume that the inclination to employ myths in contemporary Arabic poetry originated exclusively from post-World War II literary movements. In fact, the utilization of mythology manifests in diverse forms across the oeuvre of neoclassical poets and the creative output of their successors. As a case in point, Ahmad Shawqī, a neoclassical poet who predated the Romantic and Symbolist movements, incorporated the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis as a poetic symbol in an extensive poem presented at a conference in Geneva in 1894.¹⁵ The influence of mythological traditions on subsequent generations of Arab poets extends beyond Ancient Egyptian mythology, encompassing those of Ancient Greece and various Mesopotamian civilizations.¹⁶

Maḥmūd Darwīsh is among the poets who integrate elements of Ancient Egyptian mythology into their verse. In his oeuvre, he alludes to Anat, the goddess of war within this mythological tradition, soliciting her help in preserving the city of Jericho. Situated in Palestine, Jericho ranks among the world's most ancient inhabited settlements. Darwīsh's decision to symbolize Palestine via Jericho and to invoke a character from Egyptian mythology for assistance may be construed as an appeal for support directed towards Egypt on his nation's behalf. Sudanese poet Muḥammad al-Faytūrī (1936-2015) portrays prisoners arrayed before the god of death, Anubis, in his poem entitled "Anūbīs". Palestinian poet Muḥammad al-Qaysī (1945-2003), while listing the causes of his grief, ponders why he is obliged to withstand such difficulties even though his name is absent from the Book of the Dead, an influential text in Egyptian mythology. In one of his poems, Moroccan poet Muḥammad Maḥḍār articulates the battle against adversity using the figures of Aton and Sisyphus.¹⁷ As demonstrated by these instances, Ancient Egyptian mythology persists in inspiring contemporary Arab poets.

14 al-Bārūdī, *Dīwān Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī*, 123-124.

15 Zafer Ceylan, *Modern Arap Şiirinde Mito-Poetik İsyen* (Konya & İstanbul & Ankara: Çizgi Kitabevi Yayınları, 2019), 239-240.

16 Er, *Çağdaş Arap Edebiyatı Seçkisi*, 28-29.

17 İbrahim Usta, *Çağdaş Arap Şiirinde Mitolojik Unsurlar*, ed. Zafer Ceylan (Ankara: Fenomen Yayınları, 2021), 208-210.

2. An Exemplary Poem Celebrating Ancient Egyptian Heritage in Modern Context

Exploring the ways in which contemporary Arab poets engage with the legacy of Ancient Egyptian civilization can be effectively accomplished through the analysis of a specific poem. Within this context, the poem “Miṣr” [Egypt] by Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm (1871-1932) emerges as a noteworthy example. The poet has composed this poem from the vantage point of Egypt itself, offering a tribute to its illustrious history. The poem was recited during a ceremony at the Continental Hotel in honor of ‘Adlī Yakan Pasha (d. 1933), who terminated relations with the British, returned to Egypt, and subsequently resigned from his ministerial post. The poem was published on December 15, 1921, and can be regarded as a distinguished work within the oeuvre of poetry that addresses ancient Egypt. The qasida comprises a total of fifty-seven verses:¹⁸

1. ” وَقَفَ الْخَلْقُ يَنْظُرُونَ جَمِيعاً كَيْفَ أَبْنَيْ قَوَاعِدَ الْمَجْدِ وَخَدِي
2. وَبِنَاءِ الْأَهْرَامِ فِي سَالِفِ الدَّهْرِ كَقَوْنِي الْكَلَامَ عِنْدَ التَّحْدِي
3. أَنَا تاجُ الْعِلَاءِ فِي مَفْرَقِ الشَّرْقِ وَدُرَّائُهُ فَرَائِدُ عَقْدِي
4. أَيُّ شَيْءٍ فِي الْغَرْبِ قَدْ بَهَرَ النَّاسَ جَمَالاً وَلَمْ يَكُنْ مِنْهُ عِنْدِي
5. فَنَرَابِي تَبْرٌ وَنَهْرِي فُرَاتٌ وَسَمَائِي مَصْفُورَةٌ كَالْفِرْنِيدِ
6. أَيَّمَا سِرْتِ جَدُولٍ عِنْدَ كَرَمٍ عِنْدَ زَهْرِ مُدْتَرٍ عِنْدَ رَنْدِ
7. وَرَجَالِي لَوْ أَنْصَفُوهُمْ لَسَادُوا مِنْ كُهُولٍ مِلءِ الْعُيُونِ وَمُرْدِ
8. لَوْ أَصَابُوا لَهُمْ مَجَالاً لِأَبْدَوْ مُعْجَزَاتِ الدِّكَاءِ فِي كُلِّ قَصْدِ
9. إِنَّهُمْ كَالظُّبَا أَلْحَّ عَلَيْهَا صَدَا الدَّهْرِ مِنْ ثَوَاءِ وَغَمْدِ
10. فَإِذَا صَيِّقَلُ الْقَضَاءِ جَلَاهُ كُنُّ كَالْمَوْتِ مَا لَهُ مِنْ مَرَدٍ“

1. All creation stood watching, collectively, as I alone built the foundations of glory.
2. Those who built the Pyramids in the past left no need for me to speak on the matter of challenge.
3. I am the crown of greatness at the crossroads of the East, and its pearls are the unique gems of my necklace.
4. What in the West has enchanted people with a beauty that I do not possess?
5. My soil is gold, my river sweet, and my sky as bright as a sword.
6. Wherever you go, there is a stream beside the vineyard, beside the blossoming flowers, and beside the laurel.

18 Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm, *Dīwān Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn et al. (s.l.: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma lil’l-Kutub, 3th Edition, 1987), 403-408.

7. My men, comprised of eye-catching adults and young men, if given their due, shall become masters.
8. If they had the chance, they would display miracles of brilliance in every endeavor.
9. They are like the sharpness of a sword invaded by the rust of time due to being sheathed.
10. When the polish of fate clears it away, they are like death that cannot be repelled.”¹⁹

In this excerpt from Ḥāfīz Ibrāhīm’s poem “Miṣr”, the poet skillfully employs vivid imagery and metaphorical language to capture the splendor and legacy of ancient Egypt, while simultaneously addressing the contemporary challenges it faces. The opening lines accentuate Egypt’s historical significance, as the speaker claims to have singlehandedly laid the foundations of glory with the entire creation as a witness. This assertion of greatness is further bolstered by references to the Pyramids, which symbolize an enduring and mighty legacy that precludes any questioning of Egypt’s accomplishments. The poem underscores Egypt’s strategic position at the crossroads of the East, with the “pearls” and “unique gems” adorning its necklace representing the nation’s wealth and cultural importance. Subsequent lines evoke the natural beauty and resources of Egypt, highlighting its fertile soil, sweet river, and radiant sky. These images serve to emphasize the country’s inherent potential and allure.

The poem subsequently shifts its focus to the people of Egypt, portraying them as striking adults and young men who, given the chance, would ascend to mastery in their own right. The poet suggests that these individuals possess latent potential, capable of performing “miracles of brilliance” across various endeavors. However, the poem also recognizes the challenges they confront, likening the people to a sword, its sharpness obscured by the rust of time. This metaphor implies that the potential of the Egyptian people has been impeded by historical circumstances and the passage of time. Nonetheless, the poet remains hopeful, declaring that when the “polish of fate” clears the rust, the people will be an unstoppable force, akin to “death that cannot be repelled.”

Through a thorough analysis of the poem’s imagery and metaphors, it becomes clear that Ḥāfīz Ibrāhīm seeks to convey a dual narrative: one that extols the magnificence and grandeur of ancient Egypt, while simultaneously shedding light on the contemporary challenges faced by its people. Ultimately, the poem offers an optimistic perspective, proposing that with the right opportunities and the passage of time, the Egyptian people will actualize their full potential and reclaim their historical greatness.

The poem proceeds as follows:

19 Ḥāfīz Ibrāhīm, *Dīwān Ḥāfīz Ibrāhīm*, 403-408.

11. "أَنَا إِنْ قَدَّرَ الْإِلَهُ مَمَاتِي لَا تَرَى الشَّرْقَ يَرْفَعُ الرَّأْسَ بَعْدِي
 12. مَا رَمَانِي رَامٍ وَرَاحَ سَلِيمٍ مِنْ قَدِيمٍ عِنَايَةُ اللَّهِ جُنْدِي
 13. كَمْ بَعَثَ دَوْلَةً عَلَيَّ وَجَارَتْ ثُمَّ زَالَتْ وَتَلَّكَ عُقْبَى النَّعْدِي
 14. إِنِّي حُرَّةٌ كَسَرْتُ قَيْودِي رَغَمَ رُقْبَى الْعِدَا وَقَطَعْتُ قَيْدِي
 15. وَتَمَأْتَلْتُ لِلشِّفَاءِ وَقَدْ دَنَيْتُ حَيَاتِي وَهَيَّا الْقَوْمَ لَحْدِي"

“11. If God decreed my demise, you would not see the East raise its head again after me.

12. No one ever attacked me and left me unscathed; God’s care has been my support since ancient times.

13. How many empires rebelled and oppressed me and then vanished? Such is the fate of aggression.

14. I am free, breaking my chains and shattering my shackles despite the enemies’ yoke.

15. While I was nearing my death and people had prepared my grave, I, on the other hand, recovered.”²⁰

In this excerpt of the poem, the poet continues to employ evocative imagery and metaphorical language to emphasize the resilience and indomitable spirit of Egypt in the face of adversity. The excerpt begins with a declaration that if God were to decree Egypt’s demise, the East would not be able to raise its head again, implying the immense significance of Egypt in the region. The poet asserts that no one has ever attacked Egypt and left it unscathed, attributing this protection to divine providence that has been present since ancient times. This assertion speaks to the enduring strength and resilience of Egypt in the face of various threats and challenges throughout history.

The mention of empires that rebelled and oppressed Egypt only to vanish emphasizes the transient nature of aggression and the ultimate triumph of Egypt over its enemies. This serves as a reminder that Egypt has faced numerous adversaries, yet it continues to persist and maintain its cultural and historical significance. The poem then shifts to a portrayal of Egypt as a figure breaking free from its chains and shackles, despite the enemies’ attempts to subdue it. This metaphor represents the indomitable spirit and determination of the nation to overcome adversity and reclaim its sovereignty and freedom. Lastly, the poet describes a scene where Egypt is nearing its death, and people have prepared its grave, but instead of succumbing, Egypt recovers. This powerful image conveys the idea of rebirth and regeneration, as well as the nation’s incredible resilience and ability to bounce back from even the direst circumstances.

20 Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm, *Dīwān Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm*, 403-408.

Through this analysis of the poem's imagery and metaphors, it is evident that the poet seeks to convey a message of hope and perseverance for Egypt, highlighting its rich historical legacy and the resilience of its people in the face of adversity. By doing so, the poet encourages the reader to recognize and appreciate the remarkable strength and endurance of the nation, as well as the potential for its continued growth and success in the future.

The poem proceeds as follows:

- ”16. قُلْ لِمَنْ أَنْكُرُوا مَفَاخِرَ قَوْمِي مِثْلَ مَا أَنْكُرُوا مَآثِرَ وُلْدِي
 17. هَلْ وَقَفْتُمْ بِقِمَّةِ الْهَرَمِ الْأَكْبَرِ يَوْمًا فَرَيْتُمْ بَعْضَ جُهْدِي
 18. هَلْ رَأَيْتُمْ تِلْكَ النُّقُوشَ اللَّوَاتِي أَعْجَزَتْ طَوْقَ صَنْعَةِ الْمُتَحَدِّي
 19. حَالِ لَوْنِ النَّهَارِ مِنْ قَدَمِ الْعَهْدِ وَمَا مَسَّ لَوْنَهَا طَوْلَ عَهْدِ
 20. هَلْ فَهَّمْتُمْ أَسْرَارَ مَا كَانَ عِنْدِي مِنْ غُلُومٍ مَخْبُوءَةٍ طَيِّبِي بَرْدِي
 21. ذَلِكَ فَسُنُّ التَّحْنِيطِ قَدْ غَلَبَ الدَّهْرَ وَأَبْلَى الْإِلَى وَأَعْجَزَ نِدِّي
 22. قَدْ عَقَدْتُ الْعُهُودَ مِنْ عَهْدِ فِرْعَوْنَ فِي مِصْرَ كَانَ أَوَّلُ عَقْدِ“

“16. Tell those who deny my people's greatness, just as they deny the achievements of my offspring:

17. Have you ever stood atop the Great Pyramid and seen a part of my effort?

18. Have you seen those inscriptions that defied the skill of the challenger?

19. The hue of the day shifted due to the age's antiquity, yet the passage of time could not affect their colors.

20. Have you comprehended the secrets of the concealed knowledge within the scrolls that are in my possession?

21. That is the art of embalming, which has defeated time, worn out calamities, and baffled my rivals.

22. I made treaties since the time of Pharaoh; in Egypt was the first agreement.”²¹

In this portion of the poem, the poet skillfully employs evocative imagery and metaphorical language to underscore the magnificence of Egypt's past and the importance of its achievements. Confronting those who question Egypt's greatness and the accomplishments of its people, the poet employs a series of rhetorical questions and statements to contest and discredit such viewpoints. The poet challenges skeptics to experience the Great Pyramid firsthand, emphasizing the awe-inspiring nature of these ancient monuments and the remarkable feats of engineering and architecture they exemplify. The mention of inscriptions, which

21 Hāfīz Ibrāhīm, *Dīwān Hāfīz Ibrāhīm*, 403-408.

have withstood the test of time, highlights the sophistication of Egypt's ancient civilization and the lasting influence of its art and culture. Time is a recurring theme in this passage, with the poet asserting that, despite the antiquity of Egypt's history, its vibrancy and achievements remain undiminished. This idea of endurance in the face of time's passage is further illustrated by the reference to scrolls containing hidden knowledge, which symbolize the richness and scope of Egypt's intellectual and cultural legacy.

The poet accentuates Egypt's resourcefulness by discussing the art of embalming, characterizing it as a technique that has "defeated time, worn out calamities, and baffled rivals". This reference to the preservation of the dead not only showcases the ancient Egyptians' mastery of a complex and distinctive skill but also serves as a metaphor for the tenacity and persistence of Egypt's cultural heritage. This section of the poem concludes by emphasizing the historical significance of Egypt as a center for diplomacy and treaties, dating back to the time of the Pharaohs. This allusion positions Egypt as an influential actor in international relations and highlights its role in shaping the trajectory of human history. The analysis of the poem's imagery and metaphors makes it evident that the poet's intention is to celebrate the enduring legacy of Egypt's past achievements while challenging those who would dismiss the nation's greatness. By invoking the splendor and resilience of Egypt's history, the poet aims to foster a sense of pride and optimism for the future, drawing upon the fortitude of its people and their shared cultural heritage.

The poem proceeds as follows:

23. "إِنَّ مَجْدِي فِي الْأَوْلِيَّاتِ عَرِيقٌ مِّنْ لَهُ مِثْلُ أَوْلِيَّاتِي وَمَجْدِي
 24. أَنَا أُمُّ التَّشْرِيعِ قَدْ أَخَذَ الرُّوْمَ مَانُ عَنِّي الْأُصُولَ فِي كُلِّ حَدٍ
 25. وَرَصَدْتُ النُّجُومَ مُنْذُ أَضَاءَتْ فِي سَمَاءِ الدُّجَى فَأَحْكَمْتُ رَصْدِي
 26. وَشَدَا بِنْتَنُورٍ فَوْقَ رُبُوعِي قَبْلَ عَهْدِ الْيُونَانِ أَوْ عَهْدِ نَجْدِ
 27. وَقَدِيمًا بَنَى الْأَسَاطِيلَ قَوْمِي فَفَرَّقَنَ الْبِحَارَ يَحْمِلْنَ بُنْدِي
 28. قَبْلَ أَسْطُولِ بِلْسُنِ كَانَ أَسْطُو لِي سَرِيًّا وَطَالِعِي غَيْرَ تَكْدِ
 29. فَسَلُّوا الْبِحَرَ عَنْ بَلَاءِ سَفِينِي وَسَلُّوا الْبِرَّ عَنْ مَوَاقِعِ جُرْدِي
 30. أَتْرَانِي وَقَدْ طَوَيْتُ حَيَاتِي فِي مِرَاسٍ لَمْ أَبْلُغِ الْيَوْمَ رُشْدِي
 31. أَيُّ شَعْبٍ أَحَقُّ مِنِّي بِعَيْشٍ وَارِفِ الطَّلِّ أَحْضَرَ اللَّوْنِ رَغْدِ

32. أَمِنَ الْعَدْلِ أَنَّهُمْ يَرُدُّونَ الْإِ مَاءَ صَفْوَاً وَأَنْ يُكَدَّرَ وَرِدِّي

33. أَمِنَ الْحَقِّ أَنَّهُمْ يُطْلِفُونَ الْإِ أَسَدَ مِنْهُمْ وَأَنْ تُفَيِّدَ أُسْدِي

34. نِصْفُ قَرْنٍ إِلَّا قَلِيلاً أَعَانِي مَا يُعَانِي هَوَانُهُ كُلُّ عَبْدٍ“

“23. My glory in ancient times is deeply rooted, who has the likes of my origins and my glory?

24. I am the mother of legislation; the Romans took from me the principles in every matter.

25. I observed the stars since they shone in the sky of darkness and mastered my observations.

26. Before the Greek or Najd period, Banta’ūr sang poetry over my neighborhoods.

27. Long ago, my people built fleets that sailed the seas, carrying my banner.

28. Before Nelson’s fleet, my fleet was already in existence. My luck had never encountered any adversity.

29. Ask the sea about what my ships have done! Ask the land about my horses’ battles!

30. Having left [various stages of] my life behind, I wonder if you have seen me in a struggle today where I have not yet reached my maturity?

31. Which people are more deserving of living than I, with a pleasant shade and verdant greenery?

32. Is it just that they enjoy pure water, while my share is tainted?

33. Is it fair that they release lions among themselves, while my lions are restrained?

34. For nearly half a century, I have suffered a humiliation endured by all slaves.”²²

In this part of the poem, the poet masterfully employs vibrant imagery and metaphorical language to underscore not only the grandeur of Egypt’s historical accomplishments, but also to illuminate the present-day trials it grapples with. The language and imagery selected by the poet not only elevate Egypt’s status but also underscore the significance of recognizing and appreciating its historical greatness. The poet commences by asserting the deeply rooted splendor of Egypt’s ancient past, posing the question of whether any other civilization can rival its origins and magnificence. Egypt’s historical influence is further accentuated through the reference to its role as the “mother of legislation”, with the poet implying that the Romans derived legal principles from Egyptian civilization.

As the poem unfolds, it delineates Egypt’s intellectual and cultural accomplishments, such as its early mastery of astronomy and the prominence of its poets predating the emergence of Greek and Arab literary traditions. This emphasis on Egypt’s historical achievements serves to instill a sense of pride and reaffirm the value of its rich cultural legacy. The poet proceeds to highlight Egypt’s naval prowess, observing that its people constructed fleets that sailed the seas long before Admiral Nelson’s era. The mention of Egypt’s ships and battles further accentuates the nation’s historical significance and the breadth of its influence.

22 Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm, *Dīwān Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm*, 403-408.

Nevertheless, the poem takes on a more somber tone as it reflects on the current challenges faced by Egypt. The poet wonders if others have witnessed Egypt in its present state, where it has not yet reached its full potential, and asserts that the Egyptian people are at least as deserving of a comfortable existence as any other nation. The imagery of tainted water and restrained lions symbolizes the difficulties and constraints endured by the Egyptian people, while the allusion to suffering humiliation for nearly half a century refers to the nation's subjugation and loss of sovereignty. Through a meticulous analysis of the poem's imagery and metaphors, it becomes evident that the poet aspires to both honor and celebrate Egypt's illustrious past, while concurrently acknowledging the challenges encountered by its people in the present. The poem serves as a rallying cry, inspiring the Egyptian people to acknowledge their historical greatness and persevere in overcoming the obstacles that impede the realization of their full potential.

The poem proceeds as follows:

35. نَظَرَ اللهُ لِي فَأَرْشَدَ أَبْنَاءَ بِي فَسَدُّوا إِلَيَّ الْعُلَا أَيَّ شَدِيدٍ
 36. إِنَّمَا الْحَقُّ قُوَّةٌ مِنْ قُوَى الدِّينِ يَأْتِي مَنْ أَمَّضَى مِنْ كُلِّ أَيْتِيضٍ هُنْدِي
 37. قَدْ وَعَدْتُ الْعُلَا بِكُلِّ أَبِيٍّ مِنْ رَجَالِي فَأَنْجِزُوا الْيَوْمَ وَعَدِي
 38. أَمَهْرُوهَا بِالرُّوحِ فَهِيَ عُرُوسٌ تَسْنَأُ الْمَهْرَ مِنْ عُرُوسٍ وَتَقْدِ
 39. وَرَدُّوا بِي مَنَاهِلَ الْعِزِّ حَتَّى يَخْطُبَ النَّجْمُ فِي الْمَجْرَةِ وَدِي
 40. وَارْفَعُوا دَوْلَتِي عَلَى الْعِلْمِ وَالْأَخْلَاقِ لَاقِ فَالْعِلْمُ وَحَدَهُ لَيْسَ يُجْدِي
 41. وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ فَالصَّبْرُ إِنْ فَدَى رَقِ قَوْمًا فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مَسَدٍ
 42. خُلِقَ الصَّبْرُ وَحَدَهُ نَصَرَ الْقَوْمَ وَأَغْنَى عَنِ اخْتِرَاعِ وَعَدِي
 43. شَهَدُوا حَوْمَةَ الْوَعَى بِنُفُوسِ صَابِرَاتٍ وَأَوْجِهٍ غَيْرِ رُبْدِ
 44. فَمَحَا الصَّبْرُ آيَةَ الْعِلْمِ فِي الْحَرْبِ وَأَنْحَى عَلَى الْقَوِي الْأَشَدِّ
 45. إِنَّ فِي الْعَرْبِ أَعْيُنًا رَاصِدَاتٍ كَحَلَّتْهَا الْأَطْمَاعُ فِيكُمْ بِسُهُدِ
 46. فَوَقَّهَا مَجَهْرٌ يُرِيهَا خَفَايَاكُمْ وَيَطْوِي شُعَاعَهُ كُلَّ بَعْدِ
 47. فَاتَّقَوْهَا بِجَنَّةٍ مِنْ وِنَامٍ غَيْرِ رَبِّ الْعُرَا وَسَعِي وَكَدِ
 48. وَاصْفَحُوا عَنْ هُنَاتِ مَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ رَبُّ هَافٍ هَافًا عَلَى غَيْرِ عَمْدِ

“35. God looked upon me and guided my children, who strove to reach the highest ranks.

36. Indeed, justice is a force from the powers of the Divine Judge, more enduring than any white Indian sword.
37. I promised to elevate the one among my people who stands up [against every injustice]. Today, fulfill my promise!
38. Offer your lives as dowry to it! It is a bride who does not accept a dowry of wealth and money.
39. Take me to the sources of honor, so that even the stars in the galaxy yearn for my love.
40. Raise my state on the foundation of knowledge and morality, for knowledge alone is not enough.
41. Advise patience to one another. If patience departs a society, there is no substitute.
42. Patience alone brought victory to the [English] people, leaving no need for invention and calculation.
43. They witnessed the battlefield with patient souls and faces that never frowned.
44. Patience erased the signs of knowledge, [such as guns], in war and defeated even the strongest [foes, like the Germans].
45. In the West, there are watchful eyes that do not sleep, tinged with kohl by greed for your [resources].
46. Above them, a telescope reveals your secrets and sees all from a great distance.
47. So protect yourselves with a shield of unworn harmony and strive with diligence and effort.
48. Overlook the shortcomings of those among you, as many may err without intention.”²³

In this section of the poem, the focus transitions to encouraging hope, fostering resilience against societal adversities, and advocating for solidarity amongst the Egyptian people. The poet provides guidance and inspiration, underscoring the significance of determination, knowledge, and collaboration in overcoming present-day challenges and reestablishing the country’s past splendor. The poet recognizes divine intervention in guiding Egypt’s children to strive for the highest ranks, implying that justice is a potent force, more long-lasting than any weapon. The poem encourages people to confront injustice, pledging to uplift those who do so and urging them to dedicate their lives to this noble pursuit. The poem proceeds to illuminate the importance of knowledge and morality, asserting that the foundation for progress and honor is established upon the synthesis of these two principles. It advises patience and mutual support, emphasizing that patience is a vital component for success, as exemplified by the case of the English people. The poet acknowledges external threats, depicting the vigilant eyes of the West and their unwavering pursuit of Egypt’s resources. To combat these perils, the poem advocates for unity and protection, urging people to create a shield of harmony and work tirelessly to surmount adversity.

Lastly, the poem champions empathy and understanding, imploring people to overlook each other’s shortcomings and acknowledging that mistakes can occur

23 Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm, *Dīwān Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm*, 403-408.

without malicious intent. This appeal for compassion and cooperation serves as a reminder of the crucial role of unity in realizing a brighter future for Egypt and its people. Through a thorough examination of this part of the poem, it becomes clear that the poet aspires to motivate the Egyptian people to persevere, collaborate, and depend on both knowledge and morality to surmount challenges and reclaim their nation's distinguished history.

The poem proceeds as follows:

49. "نَحْنُ نَجْتَازُ مَوْقِفًا تَعَثَّرُ الْأَ رَاءُ فِيهِ وَعَثْرَةُ الرَّأْيِ تُرْدِي
50. وَنُعِيرُ الْأَهْوَاءَ حَرْبًا عَوَانٍ مِنْ خِلَافٍ وَالْخُلْفُ كَالسَّلِّ يُغْدِي
51. وَنُثِيرُ الْفَوْضَى عَلَى جَانِبَيْهِ فَيُعِيدُ الْجَهْلُ فِيهَا وَيُيْدِي
52. وَيَظُنُّ الْعَوِيَّ أَنْ لَا نِظَامَ وَيَقُولُ الْقَوِيُّ قَدْ جَدَّ جِدِّي
53. فَفَقُّوا فِيهِ وَقَفَّةَ الْحَزْمِ وَارْمُوا جَانِبَيْهِ بَعْرَمَةَ الْمُسْتَعِدِّ
54. إِنَّا عِنْدَ فَجْرِ لَيْلٍ طَوِيلٍ قَدْ قَطَعْنَا بَيْنَ سُهْدٍ وَوَجْدٍ
55. عَمَرْتَنَا سُودَ الْأَهَاوِيلِ فِيهِ وَالْأَمَانِيُّ بَيْنَ جَزْرِ وَمَدِّ
56. وَتَجَلَّى ضِيَاؤُهُ بَعْدَ لَآيٍ وَهُوَ رَمَزٌ لِعَهْدِي الْمُسْتَرْدِّ
57. فَاسْتَبِينُوا قَصْدَ السَّبِيلِ وَجِدُّوا فَالْمَعَالِي مَخْطُوبَةٌ لِلْمُجِدِّ"

"49. We pass through a stage where opinions stumble and misjudgment leads astray.

50. We temporarily engage our desires in warfare amidst discord, while disagreement spreads like an infectious ailment.

51. We incite chaos on both sides of this [stage], while the ignorant repeat and provoke it.

52. The misguided believe there is no order, while the strong claim their strength has renewed.

53. Remain resolute in that position and cast the resolve of those who are ready on both flanks!

54. We are at the dawn of a long night that we have overcome with sleeplessness and passion.

55. The darkness of calamities has enveloped us, and our hopes [waver] between ebb and flow.

56. After hardships, its light emerged. It is a sign of the returning era of my age.

57. Establish a proper method and work hard! For greatness is betrothed to those who strive."²⁴

In this portion of the poem, the poet delves into the challenges faced by Egypt and its people during a tumultuous period in their history. Through evocative language and vivid imagery, the poet captures the essence of these difficulties and the path to overcoming them, emphasizing the importance of unity, determination, and hard work in surmounting adversity and achieving greatness. The portion commences by depicting a time marked by confusion and misjudgment, where discord prevails and

disagreement spreads like a contagious disease. The poet highlights the chaos and its perpetuation by the ignorant, illustrating the potential dangers of misguidance and its consequences for society. Amidst such challenges, the poem encourages resoluteness and unity. The poet calls upon those who are prepared to stand firm on both sides of the metaphorical stage, emphasizing the significance of collective strength and determination in confronting the obstacles that lie ahead.

The poet portrays the present moment as the dawn of a long night, which the people have managed to endure through sleeplessness and passion. This imagery suggests that despite the seemingly insurmountable challenges, the unwavering commitment and fervor of the people have enabled them to persevere. The poem further explores the theme of hope in the midst of adversity, acknowledging that the darkness of calamities has enveloped Egypt, with its hopes wavering between the ebb and flow of fortunes. Nevertheless, the emergence of light after these hardships signifies the impending return of Egypt's golden age. The poem concludes with a call to action, urging the people to establish a proper method and work diligently. The poet reiterates that greatness is reserved for those who strive, reinforcing the central message that resilience, hard work, and unity are the keys to overcoming adversity and reclaiming Egypt's former glory. Through a comprehensive analysis of this section of the poem, it becomes clear that the poet seeks to inspire the Egyptian people to remain steadfast, work together, and rely on their collective strength and determination to surmount the challenges they face and restore their nation's esteemed history.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of Ancient Egyptian civilization in contemporary Arabic poetry has demonstrated the enduring influence of this remarkable historical period on the collective consciousness of the Arab world. Poets, such as Aḥmad Shawqī, Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī, Ḥāfīz Ibrāhīm, and 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād, have successfully incorporated elements of Egypt's ancient past into their literary works, reflecting their deep reverence for the nation's cultural heritage and the desire to preserve its memory for future generations. Throughout the paper, we have examined various ways in which these poets have engaged with the legacy of Ancient Egypt, from celebrating the architectural marvels of the pyramids and the Sphinx to acknowledging the wisdom and achievements of the civilization that once flourished on the banks of the Nile. By doing so, they have not only enriched the contemporary Arabic poetic landscape but have also contributed to the ongoing dialogue between the past and the present, fostering a sense of continuity and connection with a shared history. Moreover, the analysis has revealed that these

poets, while drawing inspiration from Ancient Egyptian civilization, have also been influenced by diverse literary traditions, including those of Western origin. This interplay between different cultural and historical influences has given rise to a unique creative synthesis, which testifies to the vitality and adaptability of the Arab poetic tradition.

It is important to recognize that the study of Ancient Egyptian civilization in contemporary Arab poetry has implications beyond the realm of literature. By reviving the legacy of this ancient culture, poets have not only highlighted the richness of Egypt's historical heritage but have also provided an impetus for contemporary society to reevaluate its relationship with the past. In doing so, they have encouraged the rediscovery of ancient wisdom and values, which can offer valuable insights and guidance for addressing the challenges and complexities of the modern world. In summary, the examination of Ancient Egyptian civilization in contemporary Arab poetry has underscored the significance of the past in shaping present-day literary and cultural expressions. By integrating elements of this illustrious heritage into their works, these poets have played a vital role in preserving and perpetuating the memory of a civilization that continues to captivate and inspire the imagination of readers across generations. In this sense, their poetic endeavors not only celebrate the grandeur of Ancient Egypt but also serve as a testament to the enduring power of art as a vehicle for cultural transmission and the construction of collective identity.

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