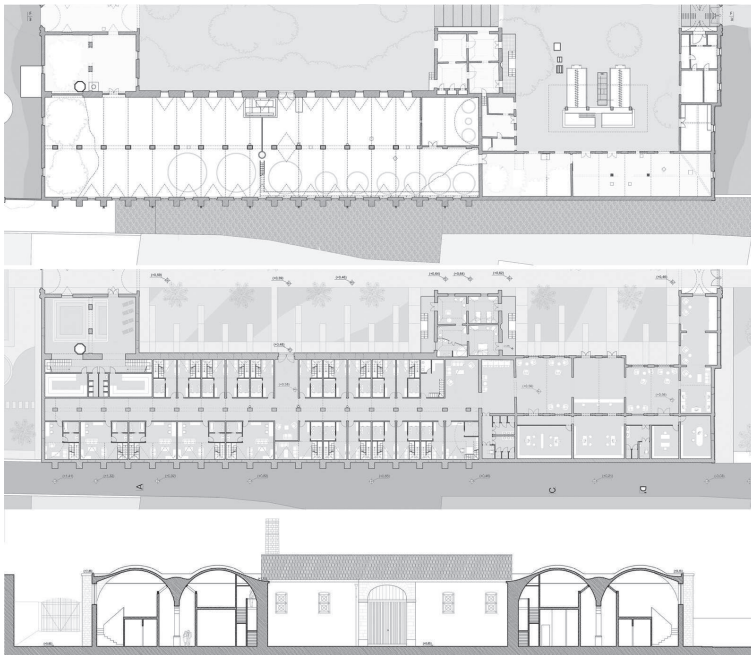




Figures 26, 27 - Reuse of great galleries (before and after)



Figures 28, 29 - The fragmentation of great rooms: sacrifice or standard practice?



## TABOOS IN ANCIENT EGYPT

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### Abstract

Cultural Heritage can be one of the most important identity basics that can lead to the development of new types of tourism, which can re-launch the inland areas, through the re-discovery of their authenticity and identity. This will increase the economic and social benefits for the country and certain localities.

Tourists today are seeking for adventure, being a part of the daily life activities and aware of the cultural heritage of the places they visit, gathering between leisure and knowledge, while respecting the social and cultural equality of the population.

Today's tourists are anxious to know more about our cultural heritage, ancient Egyptian civilization and people who lived at this period, discovering their traditions, attitudes and social life. Egyptology should not be just a study of tombs, temples and pyramids, but a study of the people and civilization that achieved all these imposing constructions.

The Mediterranean area is experiencing this change and new interests, through the Integrated Relational Tourism (IRT), seeking for overcoming the traditional concept of tourist demand and decrease the merciless economic competition. This will need a network of activities and services to realize a satisfactory relationship with the local inhabitants and the areas visited. Guides will have an effective role in this network to realize (IRT), being an actual contact between their own cultural heritage and tourists.

This paper will discuss one of the cultural heritage topics of ancient Egyptian civilization, taboos in Ancient Egypt, which affected all aspects of life in ancient Egypt.

Taboo is a strong social prohibition or ban, relating to any area of human activity or social custom declared as sacred and forbidden. Breaking of taboo is usually considered objectionable by society. No taboo is known to be universal, but some occur in the majority of societies. Taboos may reveal the historical and cultural heritage of societies and civilizations when other records are not available.

Taboos were in effect the means by which the social and metaphysical framework was preserved and reinforced. What was the origin of the word taboo. Did the ancient Egyptians have their own taboos. What are the classifications of these taboos. This paper will try to answer and discuss all these issues.

The origin of the term taboo seems to have been derived from the ancient Egyptian language; the word used by the ancient Egyptians to refer to the concept of taboo was "bwt". Pierre Montet's analysis of cult-topographical lists of the Late Period (747-332 BC), reached the conclusion that the proper rendering of the word bwt was taboo. The proposed translation seems to have met with general acceptance, especially from Egyptologists.

The ancient Egyptians believed that taboos were instilled by gods in particular objects, actions, buildings and even individuals. Only the creator-god himself, or the king could alter these taboos.

Taboos could affect spiritual and physical entities of people, as it was ranging from bodily orifices, copulation to national borders. Other forms of taboos were concerned with the avoidance of such activities, as the consumption of certain food stuffs, including pigs, kinds of fish and honey. Walking upside down and the epagomenal days at the end of each year were also taboos.

Among the very accepted taboos in ancient Egypt, the access to such ceremonial and ritualistic buildings, as tombs, temples and palaces, in the sense that individuals were prohibited unless they adhered to certain rules of purity, being circumcised and abstinence from sexual activity. So, we can conclude that taboo in ancient Egypt was a combination of religious, ritual prohibition and social avoidances that affected all their aspects of life.

**Key words:** Taboos, fish, circumcision, pigs, menstruation.

### INTRODUCTION

Taboo is a strong prohibition, relating to any human activity or social custom declared as sacred or forbidden. A taboo might be general or particular, permanent or temporary, physical or spiritual. Breaking a taboo is usually considered objectionable by society. The penalty for the violation of a taboo is either religious or civil. The idea of a universal taboo is questionable, as no taboo is known to be universal, but some occur in the majority of societies. Taboos may reveal the historical and cultural heritage of societies and civilizations when other records are not available.

Taboo is thought to be one of the few Polynesian words that incorporated into European Language and thought. It was a word brought back and introduced into the English language by Captain James Cook in 1777 (Frandsen 2001, 345).

The study of taboos by anthropologists has led to deeper understanding of the development of different societies. "Frazer" has pointed out that a taboo is only one of a number of systems, settled by kings or priests to build up the complex fabric of society (Frazer 1911, 8). "Mary Douglas" presented her views of the concepts of pollution and taboo, saying that "Taboos are means of protecting people and societies from anomalies and marginal states and it is dangerous to be outside the boundaries that create and uphold moral and social order" (Douglas 1966, 33).

Taboos are used as a means of establishing and maintaining social strata. The political power of a person is delimited by the taboos he could impose (Steiner 1956, 39; Frandsen 2001, 345).

Taboos in Egypt were in effect the means by which the social and metaphysical framework was preserved and reinforced. What was the origin of the word taboo? Did the Egyptians have their own taboos? Who instilled these taboos? What are the classifications of these taboos, and why they were considered so? This paper will try to answer and discuss all these issues.

### THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This paper aimed to be an analytic study of taboos in ancient Egypt, which affected all aspects of the Egyptians' life. This contribution discussed also the relevant terminology and sources of taboos in Egypt, the origin of the word taboo, the different classifications of taboos and the real reasons of regarding these taboos in ancient Egypt.

### DISCUSSION

The origin of the term taboo seems to have been derived from the Egyptian language; the word used to refer to the concept of taboo was "bwt", qK<sup>!</sup>p

qK<sup>!</sup>p q<sup>!</sup>p qK<sup>!</sup>p qK<sup>!</sup>p

Pierre Montet’s analysis of cult-topographical lists of the Late period, suggested that the proper rendering of the word “bwt” was taboo. Although the word taboo is still used in a loose sense, the proposed translation seems to have met with general acceptance (Montet 1950, 85; Frandsen 1986, 135).

**Terminology**

The word bwt was commonly translated as taboo in different texts, almost during all periods of ancient Egypt. Unfortunately the term was sometimes badly translated.

The word “bwt” is singular and the plural is q K 𓆎 q K 11K 𓆎 6

“bwtyw” or “bwyw”. The most common determinative of the word “bwt” is the fish, as it was generally referring to dirt, impurity, bad things and evil actions in Egyptian language and thoughts. The word “bwt” had occasionally two determinatives, the fish or the bird of wretch things or behaviors (Montet 1950, 86-88).

The word “bwt” was first appeared in the mastaba of the vizier Ankhmahore at Saqqara (6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty). The term was referring to abomination, having the same kind of fish as a determinative (Montet 1950, 89; Shaw And Nicholson 1997, 281).

**The Concept of Taboo**

Taboos were in effect the means by which the social, physical and spiritual framework was preserved and reinforced. In Egypt, the world was created according to and by means of “maat”, which was an Egyptian term, means “world order”, “truth”, “justice” and “cosmic balance”. Hence “maat” was a complex and interdependent sense of ethics that maintained the universal order in Egypt (Okinga 2001, 484).

To live in accordance with maat, was also fundamental to everlasting existence (Baines, 1990, 5). The goal of every Egyptian was to find a place within that ordered universe, both in life and the next (Kadish 1979, 203-205). Bwt was regarded to be the opposite of maat. Violating a “bwt” would threaten the destiny of an individual. The Instructions of Ptahhotep (6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) vowed: “There is a punishment for him who passes over its maat’s laws.” The Instructions of Merikare (10<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) stated: “Do maat so that you may endure upon earth.” (Frandsen 2001, 346). “Kadish” mentioned that “Evil-doers are as dangerous as one can imagine.” (Kadish 1979, 206).

The Egyptians believed that taboos were instilled by the creator god or the king (represented the god on earth), to reestablish the original and primeval order of the world, the so-called “maat” (Shaw And Nicholson 1997, 281). Desecrate a taboo became harmful for the gods, dead and even the living. The deceased was careful to declare in his funerary inscriptions that he has had no contact with “bwt”. The Egyptian had to seize every opportunity to deny willingness to adhere to the forces of disorder; that is accomplished by refusing to behave in a disordered fashion (Douglas 1966, 35).

The “negative confession”, which was a list of sins that had not been committed by the deceased, and was intended to be recited before the gods in the “hall of judgment” to ensure a successful outcome of the deceased, recorded in the tenth sentence of its first confession (Strauhal 1992, 28).

[ < ! q K ! 𓆎 3 5<sup>4</sup>

*“I did not do any taboos instilled by the gods”*

1K s 𓆎 ? K ! 𓆎 P

*“I am a purified person” (Montet 1950, 114).*

Taboos could affect physical entities ranging from bodily orifices to national borders, so the concept of bwt gave rise to numerous prohibitions. One type of a taboo affected access to such sacred and ritualistic structures as tombs, temples and palaces.

This adhered to certain rules of purity, such as the abstinence from sexual activities and avoidance of particular types of food as pigs, fish or honey, depending mainly on the local cosmology. In fact, each province had its local god, emblem and specific taboos (Frandsen 1985, 151).

### **Foodstuff Taboos**

#### **A) Pigs**

Pigs were herded, raised and occasionally eaten, throughout Egypt from the Predynastic period and onwards, although they thought to be a taboo meat. The pig was the sacred animal of god Set, and therefore it was considered a taboo since Set was an "evil-god", the murderer of god Osiris, and the adversary of god Horus (Parsons 2005, 1). The domestic pig was already known as early as the Predynastic era; small clay models have been found in the graves of that period at Abydos and elsewhere in Egypt (Newberry 1928, 211).

There is some divided speculation concerning the pigs as a taboo diet in Egypt. "Salima Ikram" said that; "The Near Eastern and Egyptian pork may actually stem from considerations of health, rather than sentiment. Animals can become taboo if they have offensive habits or smells and transmit diseases (Ikram 2001, 47).

Herodotus; the Greek historian was the first one who mentioned the pig taboo in Egypt. According to him, the main reason for pig taboo was its impurity, uncleanness and association with god Set. He had reported that; "The Egyptians never touched pigs or ate them, since they were identified with Set. An Egyptian, who accidentally touched a pig, would have to plunge into the Nile for purification." He then added; "Swineherds were so shunned that, they had to live apart." (Ikram 2001, 48). Besides, those who kept pigs formed some kind of underclass, who could only marry the daughters of other swineherds (Shaw And Nicholson 1997, 33).

The paucity of pigs in the artistic records of the upper classes during both Old and Middle Kingdoms, and the lacking of swine in the extensive offering lists, religious and funerary texts, have served the idea that pigs were a taboo diet. This idea was supported by the repeated identification of pigs with the evil-god Set in the "Contending of Horus and Set", "Coffin Texts" and in chapter 112 and 125 of "Book of the Dead" (Ikram 2001, 47).

In the New Kingdom, pigs in Egyptian husbandry expanded considerably. Pig bones were discovered at the workmen's village at Deir el-Medina and at Tell el Amarna as "Barry Kemp" reported in the "Amarna Reports I" (Frandsen 1985, 155). Wealthy citizens began to maintain large numbers of pigs on their estates. The tombs of several notables in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty illustrated swine alongside other farmyard animals (Houlihan 2001, 47).

Ramses III's temple at Medinet Habu, has recorded pigs as offerings for a feast of god Nefertum. Amenhotep III gave the temple of god Ptah at Memphis, about 1000 pigs as offerings. The recorded texts in the temple of Seti I at Abydos, indicated that the temple had large herds of swine on its domain (Ikram 2001, 48).

#### **B) Fish**

Fish enjoyed a very special position in Egypt; sometimes sacred, sometimes scorned, eaten by some, prohibited to others. Skeletal remains, the literary records and artistic representations from tombs and temples are the main sources employed to trace the development of fish use and diet in Egypt. Fish appeared continuously in the artistic and literary records, in offerings, taxes and payments. The earliest evidence of a strong reliance on fish dated back to the Predynastic period (Brewer 2001, 532).

The Nile, the marshy Delta, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean coast are all rich in fish, so fish served as a substitute for the more costly meat for the poor people. Records excavated at Deir el-Medina, stated that fishermen were employed to provide some of the rations for the royal tomb-workers, and to provide food for lesser officials. Fish bones were discovered in great numbers around the workers tombs, who were participating in building the pyramids at Giza (Shaw And Nicholson 1997, 100).

The association of fish with certain gods and goddesses, and in mythology, was a real fact. To what extent the religious view of fish influenced their use remains complicated, but later temples texts indicated that, fish was a taboo diet. The existence of local prohibitions provided lists of taboos in different provinces in Egypt; these lists recorded six kinds of fish taboos (Danneskiold 1988, 18).

At Esna, the Nile perch (Lates), was a taboo diet as it was identified with goddess Neith, who at one point turned herself into a Nile perch to navigate to the primeval ocean Nun. At Mendes, the modern Tell el-Rubaa, (Lepidotus fish) was a taboo diet as it was associated with goddess Hat-Mehit; "the chief of fishes", that was worshipped in the form of a fish or, a woman wearing a fish emblem (Shaw And Nicholson 1997, 100). At Oxyrynchus, or the modern El-Bahnasa, (Mormyrus fish) was a taboo food, as it was thought that this fish came forth from the wounds of god Osiris (Montet 1950, 95).

The Tilapi; or (Chromis Fish), was a taboo diet, since it acted the role of a pilot for the boat of the sun-god Re, warning the approach of the snake "Apophis" during the voyage through the netherworld (Shaw And Nicholson 1997, 100).

The fish taboo might actually derive from the Egyptian belief, that the fish had consumed the penis of god Osiris. The Greek writer Plutarch said that; "When the body of god Osiris was cut into pieces by god Set, his phallus was eaten by three species of Nile fish; Lepidotus, Mormyrus and the Phagrus (Danneskiold 1988, 20).

Herodotus had reported that fish was a taboo food for priests in Egypt, while Diodorus, extended this ban to every one. However, the king, the priests and the blessed dead, were not allowed to eat fish, since it was occasionally identified with the evil-god Set, owing to its role in the myth of Osiris (Montet 1950, 94). The Victory Stela of the Kushite ruler, "Piy", mentioned that fish-eaters were prohibited to enter the royal palace, because of their uncleanness and impurity (Ikram 2001, 391).

#### C) Honey

The native Egyptian honeybee was probably exploited by the Egyptians as early as the Neolithic period. Honey was known to the Egyptians as "bit". By the first dynasty, one of the most common royal tutelary was "nsw-bity", "He of the Reed and Bee", thereby associating the monarch with the heraldic emblems of Upper and Lower Egypt (Sagrillo 2001, 172).

Honey was used as the principal sweetener in the Egyptian diet and a base for medical unguents, thus employing its natural anti-bacterial properties. It was utilized also in baked goods, to prime beer and wine, to create natural paints and as a component of some perfumes (Crane 1984, 34; Sagrillo 2001, 173).

Honey was suggested to be a taboo, since it was involved in Egyptian myths. According to one Egyptian myth, bees were the tears of the sun-god Re, while the Pyramid Texts recorded that goddess Nut could appear as a bee. Honey was also served as a sacred offering to the gods. The religious significance of the bee extended to an association with goddess Neith, whose temple at Sais was known as "per-bit", "the house of the bee" (Montet 1950, 105; Shaw And Nicholson 1997, 51).

### Taboos actions in Ancient Egypt

#### A) Walking upside down

Walking upside down was among the taboo actions in Egypt. It was mentioned in spell 173 of Coffin Texts (CT III, 47-59); "I will not go upside down for you." Realizing the main explanation for this taboo is still a matter of confusion. "Montet" mentioned that this kind of taboo may have been related to the crime of god Set in persuading god Osiris to stretch in his sarcophagus in such abnormal position (Montet 1950, 106). "Frandsen" stated that; walking upside down was constantly related to the taboo of fasces (Frandsen 1985, 151). While "Zandee" explained this association by saying that those who walk upside down in the netherworld became impure in the presence of the gods, and their digestive processes would be in danger of being reversed (Zandee 1960, 73).

"Kadish" concluded that the Egyptians feared to face eternity upside down lest; they might lose their heads or have been swallowed up by the beast that waited alongside the scales of justice in the "Hall of Judgment" (Kadish 1979, 203).

#### B) Eating Excrement and Drinking Urine

Eating excrement and drinking urine were among the taboos in Egypt. The deceased was very cautious to ensure his purity before the gods in the hereafter, so he had to deny violating any kind of taboos. The "Coffin Texts" served as a focal point that contained many references of eating excrement and drinking urine taboos. Spell 173 of "Coffin Texts", (CT III, 47-59), began with the heading: "So as not to eat excrement and not to drink urine in the necropolis." (Kadish 1979, 205).

#### C) Additional Taboo Actions and Behaviors

- The Egyptians regarded the Nile pollution as a taboo, and the one who incorporated with this act, would be cursed by the gods.
- Eating the meat of any sacrificed animal.
- To covet the offerings and property of the temples were taboos.
- Taking improper rewards (bribes) was also a taboo (Fairman 1958, 88).
- Criminal acts; such as theft and murder, crimes of a cultic nature; such as stealing the offerings and defiling the purity of a sacred place were taboos (Okinga 2001, 485).

### **The Epagomenal Days Taboos**

They were the additional five days at the end of each year, the discrepancy that gradually developed between the lunar year of 365 days and the solar year. They were corresponding to the birthdays of the deities; Osiris, Isis, Horus, Set and Nephty (Hornung 1992, 58). It was believed that they were a time of mortal danger, and one must know their names to survive from death (Frandsen 1986, 136).

### **The Menstruation Taboo**

Menstruation taboo was among the most universal ones, and the Egyptian material was not exception. The ordinary term for menstruation in Egyptian language was "hsmn(t)". This word was also attested with the meaning "purification." Janssen suggested that the term could refer to post-childbirth purification (Janssen 1980, 141), while "Kitchen" has translated the term, as "sick", where it occurred in the "absentee lists" at Deir el-Medina (Kitchen 2000, 361). Frandsen stated that; "The accumulated evidence for the term hsmn excludes any interpretation other than menstruation." The interrelationship of menstruation and purification is suggestive for the euphemism of the term menstruation which could be a taboo-word (Frandsen 2007, 81). References to menstruation seemed to show that any contact with women during their periods could be dangerous. This would explain why the menstruation of wives and daughters was accepted as a legitimate cause for a worker absence from work, as was documented in the well-known "absentee lists" from Deir el-Medina. The menstrual women had to get as far as the rear of their houses, or stayed in a specific area, the so-called "women's place", away from their village (Toivari 2001, 164). The fate of the laundrymen is pitied as was mentioned in the "Instructions of Dua-Kheti"; and their position in the social hierarchy was so humble that, they had to wash the clothes of menstruating women, which were also as a taboo (Frandsen 2001, 346).

Menstruation was believed to have some kind of a bad effect on both woman and her environment. Menstrual woman was forbidden to enter to any sacred and religious sites, thus, her husband became impure that, he should stay at home, either to be away from his work, or to help his wife during this dangerous period. It was suggested that, the blood of menstruation could counteract the vital processes associated with creation, as it has a negative impact on someone who has just given birth, since menstruation indicated the absence of pregnancy and thus the lack of fertility (Frandsen 2007, 106).



### **Taboos of the sacred places; "Tombs, Temples and Palaces"**

Access to such ceremonial and ritualistic buildings as tombs, temples and palaces, required certain rules of purity, such as abstinence from sexual activity, menstruation and the avoidance of certain types of taboo diet (pigs, fish or honey). The ancient Egyptian dedicated most of his time and effort, preparing for his afterlife. Since the tomb was the most essential element for his eternal survival, he wanted to preserve the tomb itself, its purity, his mummy, iconography and texts.

Thus, the thresholds of such sacred places were regarded to be taboos. Certain spells in mortuary literature, regarding magical bricks and clay figurines could function as curses for those who might threaten the purity of those buildings (Silverman 2001, 348).

A text from the temple of Edfu, addressed to the temple priests, as a final reminder to the visitors of those conditions of moral and ritual purity, indicated the god's particular concern with purity, saying; "Beware of entering in purity, for God loves purity more than millions of offerings, more than hundreds of thousands of electrum, he sates himself with truth, and his heart is satisfied with great purity." (Fairman 1958, 90).

Herodotus, mentioned that; "The Egyptians were very careful of their purity.

They were the first people, who prohibited anyone, especially the priests from entering to such sacred areas after intercourse or reciting religious formula, unless they were completely purified". To be in a priestly function, it required certain rules of purity, the priest must be clean-shaven, and have his nails cut. From at least the Late Period and onwards, it became compulsory for priests to be circumcised, as a part of the purification necessary for the performance of their temple duties (Frandsen 2007, 105).

The ancient Egyptians practiced circumcision for cleanliness sake. The victory stela of the Kushite ruler "Piy" indicated that; "They were forbidden to enter the royal palace, because they had not been circumcised" (Shaw And Nicholson 1997, 281).

### **RESULTS OF OTHER STUDIES**

1. The word " bwt " was identified as " taboo " in Egyptian language , during all periods and in different texts , although the term was occasionally used in a loose sense (Montet 1950, 85; Frandsen 1986, 135) .
2. The principal determinative of the word " bwt " was the fish , that refers to impurity , dirt , bad thing and evil action. The term " bwt " is singular , while the plural is " bwtyw " or " bwyw " (Montet 1950, 88) .
3. "Bwt" was regarded to be the opposite of "maat" (world order, truth, justice and cosmic balance). Thus, violating a taboo , had a very bad impact on its doer , an act that would bring about the second death for people and god involved (Frandsen 2000, 10) .
4. Taboos were instilled by the god, or the king (represented the god on earth), to reestablish the primeval order, the so-called "maat". The political power of a person was delimited by the taboos he could impose (Shaw And Nicholson 1997, 281).
5. Taboos affected access to such sacred and ritualistic buildings ( tombs , temples and palaces ) , this adhered to certain rules of purity such as abstinence from sexual activity , menstruation, avoidance of certain types of food ( pigs , fish or honey ) , going upside down , or even being circumcised (Frandsen 1985, 155).
6. Taboos varied from time to time, depended mainly on the local cosmology. Egypt was divided into provinces; each one had its local god, festival, emblem and also its own taboos (Frandsen 2007, 87).
7. Pigs were a taboo meat in Egypt , as the pig was the main sacred animal presenting god Set , the evil-god , the murderer of god Osiris, and the adversary of god Horus (Ikram 2001, 390).

8. Fish was also a taboo, in regard with the association of fish with certain gods and goddesses, and according to the Myth of Osiris, the fish was believed that had consumed the penis of Osiris (Danneskiold 1988, 18).
9. Honey was also a taboo diet, since its association with goddess Neith and Nut, while the bees were the tears of sun-god Re (Sagrillo 2001, 172) .
10. Taboo diet , was probably never absolute , and may have applied exclusively to a certain segment of society ( the elite and the priests), or even in such religious building , or only at particular times of the year (Ikram, 2001, 390)
11. Walking upside down was among the taboo actions, as the Egyptian saw themselves as right side up with respect to their physical realm. Walking upside down had to be avoided at all costs and not only by heavenly accession, as its doer was damned that he could eat his own excrement or drink his urine, loose his offerings and after life (Kadish 1979, 213).
12. Eating excrement and drinking urine were taboos, as they spoil the purity of the deceased which was a focal point in the hereafter (Kadish 1979, 212).
13. The epagomenal days were taboo, being a time of mortal danger and one had to know their names for surviving from death (Frandsen 1986, 141).
14. Menstruation taboos are among the most universal, and the Egyptian material is not exception. The Egyptians connected menstruation with impurity and danger that the menstrual woman had to stay at the rear of her house or in the so-called "women's place" , away from her village . The " absentee lists" from Deir el-Medina referred that menstruation of wives and daughters, was an accepted excuse for workers to take days- off (Frandsen 2007, 99)

## CONCLUSION

- The origin of the word "taboo" is the Egyptian term " bwt " , which was used by the Egyptians to refer to the concept of taboo , from the Old kingdom until the Graeco-Roman period .
- The bird was occasionally used as a determinative for the word bwt; as a sign of bad things and prohibited behaviors in Egypt .
- The pigs were a taboo diet during the Old and Middle kingdoms, relating to their association with god Set ( the evil-god in Egypt ) , together with their impurity and uncleanness . As early as the New Kingdom and onwards, the pig was regarded as cheap , low-status food for the poor . Thus the pig could be a taboo diet for the elite , priests or at specific times of the years .
- Taboos were rarely depicted on artistic representations, formal and official contexts , and especially on funerary and religious texts , for example sexual acts are completely avoided in formal and ritualistic texts or scenes .
- Purity was a very important issue for the Egyptians, either in their daily life or in the hereafter . The first class taboos were those which threaten a man's purity such as (menstruation , intercourse, certain kinds of food as pigs , eating excrement and drinking urine ) .
- Being a part of the Egyptian myths and religion , or representing an evil-god , was enough to regard something a taboo such as ( pigs , fish and Honey ) .
- Violating an action against maat or the universal order was a taboo, as walking upside down , forgetting the epagomenal days , theft and murder , eating the meat of a sacrificed animal and to diminish the offerings or property of a temple .

Classification	Taboo
Foodstuff Taboo	Pigs, fish and honey.
Taboo actions and behaviors	Walking upside down. Eating excrement and drinking urine. Forgetting the so-called epagomenal days. To cause pollution to the Nile. Taking bribes. Criminal acts, such as theft and murder. Eating the meat of a sacrificed animal. To diminish the offerings or property of a temple. Defiling the purity of a sacred place.
- Contemporary Taboos (avoided in entering a sacred area ; tombs , temples and royal palaces ) .	Menstrual woman. Intercourse and sexual activities. males who were not circumcised .

Table (1) : The classifications of Taboos in Ancient Egypt

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## FATIMID INFLUENCES IN SICILY

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The history of Islamic Sicily begins in 827, when the Arabs conquered the island under the Abbasside caliphate, declaring Palermo their capital city. In 916, the Fatimids took patronage of the island (succeeding the Aghlabides of Tunisia) ; for more than two hundred years, Palermo was the capital of a flourishing Islamic civilization.

Its strategic geographic location linking Islamic and Christian civilizations, soon made it one of the most important political and cultural centers of its time, competing with Cordoba and Cairo.

In fact, the Fatimid dynasty brought great prosperity to the island by building mosques, palaces, hammams and other public facilities and by developing new advancements in the silk, ivory, paper, mosaic and ceramics.

However, internal conflicts in the heart of the dynasty led the way to Norman armies commanded by Robert Guiscard de Hauteville and his successors to accomplish the Norman conquest of the island (between 1061-1091) and they managed to overtake Sicily.

While Christian in faith, the Norman kings legally protected and tolerated Muslim population. In fact, Norman kings passed to the prosperity as real patrons of art and architecture in which Moslem craftsmen have brought great contributions.

Many of Palermo's richest monuments built during this period by Arab designers displayed the interlacing of Muslim, Roman and Byzantine stylistic forms and influences.

Among these monuments we can mention for example:

1. Cappella Palatina: built by king Roger II in 1132-1143, served as the royal chapel for the Sicilian Norman sovereignty. This small chapel exhibits an extraordinary convergence of Muslim and Byzantine stylistic influence, typical of Roger's culturally court. These influences are remarkably noticed in the typological basilica plan combined with the procession path leading up to a low positioned stage, much like the reception hall often found in Islamic palaces. The most remarkable Fatimid influence is also noticed in the painted wooden muqarnas ceiling.
2. Ziza palace: founded by kings William I and William II in 1166-1189 also exemplifies the confluence of cultures so typical of the Norman period in Sicily, by interweaving Muslim, Roman and Byzantine stylistic influences. One of the most important architectural elements bearing Fatimid influences is the marble shazirwan opposite to the pool.
3. Cuba palace: commissioned by the Norman king William II in 1180. The palace's outer surface features repeated blind arches that rise to the height of the structure. The cornice is inscribed with band of Arabic calligraphy. As its name suggests, a large dome (qubba in Arabic) surmounts the central area of the palace.

As for the objects of art, produced in Sicily during and after the Fatimid period and revealing Fatimid influences either in form, in material or in decoration, they are numerous. They are made of ivory, lime stone, marble, rock crystal, wood, luster painted ceramics and silk. They represent horns, caskets, chess pieces, plates, ewers, textiles and so on.

In fact, these productions were believed to have been crafted by skilled Muslim artisans working in Sicily, since they strongly resemble or are copied from the Fatimid repertoire, blended with European creations. This combination, so typical of Norman Sicily, produced a distinctive moment in history of art and architecture.

The aim of the study is to establish an evidence these several influences, based on a comparative study with similar elements of art and architecture dating from the Fatimid period in Egypt and Syria.

## **FATIMID INFLUENCES IN SICILY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The interaction of the Arab and Norman societies following the Norman conquest of Sicily from 453 H. /1061 to around 648 H. / 1250 marked the appearance of the so called "Arab-Norman culture". This civilization resulted in fact from the numerous exchanges in the cultural and scientific fields, based on the tolerance showed by the Normans toward Muslim society (Agius 1996). In fact, it was the product of several races which preserved side by side their separate nationality (Curtis 1912, 400).

While Christian in faith, the Norman kings legally protected and tolerated Muslim population. In fact, they passed to the prosperity as real patrons of art and architecture in which Moslem craftsmen have brought great contributions (Ahmad 1975; Wilson 1998). Many of Palermo's richest monuments built during this period by Arab designers displayed the interlacing of Muslim, Roman and Byzantine stylistic forms and influences. The aim of the study is to establish in evidence these several influences, based on a comparative study with similar elements of art and architecture dating from the Fatimid period in Egypt, in Tunisia and in Syria.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

#### **Islamic Sicily**

The history of Islamic Sicily begins in 212 H. / 827, when the Aghlabids of Tunisia conquered the island under the Abbasside caliphate. A first battle against the Byzantine troops occurred on 4<sup>th</sup> Rabi' II 201 H. / July 15, 827, near Mazara, resulting in an Aghlabid victory (Ahmad 1975; Wilson 1998; Amari 2002). Four years later, the African Berber units managed to capture the Island in Ramadan 216 H. / September 831 (Orton 1971, vol I, 370) and Palermo became then the Muslims capital of Sicily, renamed al Madinah (Ibn Jubayr 1952). In 297 H. / 909, the African Aghlabid dynasty was replaced by the Shiite Fatimids, and, in 305 H. / 917, Fatimid caliph al-Mahdi, sent an army which sacked Palermo. The island was governed by an emir, named after the Fatimid caliph first from Mahdiya in Tunisia then from Cairo after the Fatimid conquest of Egypt in 358 H. / 969 (Wilson 1998). In fact, the Fatimid dynasty brought great prosperity to the island by building mosques, palaces, hammams and other public facilities and by developing new advancements in the silk, ivory, paper, mosaic and ceramics (Bresc 2002). The exportation of Sicilian fine silk to Egypt was mentioned by the Persian traveler Nāṣir Husrū by the year 434 H. / 1042 (Husrū 1954).

The cultural Islamic impact on the island was caught by the eminent traveler / geographer Ibn Hauqal in 362-363 H. / 972-973. He described the quarters of Palermo, their palaces and their hundreds of mosques: "The mosques of the city and of the quarters round it outside the walls exceed the number of three hundred (Ibn Hauqal 1872). This Islamic identity of the island was still preserved even 100 Years after the arrival of the Normans as described by the Spanish-Moslem traveler Ibn Jubayr who visited the island in 579 H. / 1183.

#### **Norman Sicily**

However, internal conflicts in the heart of the dynasty together with economic crises led the way to

Norman<sup>1</sup> armies commanded by Robert Guiscard de Hauteville and his successors to accomplish the Norman conquest of the island (between 453-484 H. / 1061-1091) and they managed to overtake Sicily (Ibn al-Atîr 1866-1874); (Ahmad 1975); ('Abd al-Raziq 1993). Therefore, we should note that the Norman conquest of the island was the work largely of a single individual, Count Roger; though in the earliest stages he received vital help and participation from his brother Guiscard (Ahmad 1975, 53).

Soon after the death of his brother, Roger began the division of his possessions in Sicily and Italy into fiefs, and distributed them amongst the members of his family and his companions. Sicily, which had a large Muslim population, thus became feudalized.

In the decade which followed the completion of the conquest, 484-495 H. / 1091-1101, Roger ruled the island with tranquility and tolerance.

For reasons of state he resisted the ecclesiastical pressure for the conversion of Muslims to Christianity (Ahmad 1975, 54).

Roger died in 495 H. / 1101, and after a short period of instability, his son Roger II was crowned as king at Palermo in 525 H. / 1130, and yet became one of the most illustrious of the Norman rulers of Sicily (Ahmad 1975, 55); (Curtis 1912). His reign was characterized by its multi-ethnic nature and religious tolerance where Normans, Arabs, Greeks, Lombards and Italians lived in harmony (Wilson 1998).

### **Arab-Norman interactions:**

An intense Arab-Norman culture developed under the reign of Roger II, who had Islamic soldiers, poets and scientists at his court: he spoke Arabic perfectly and was himself fond of Arab culture (Aubé 2006, 177). He even mobilized Arab architects to build monuments in the Arab-Norman style<sup>2</sup>.

In his earlier career, in fact during most of his reign, his conduct toward Moslem population was tolerant, such that Ibn al-Aṭîr praised him for protecting and liking the Moslems (Ibn al-Atîr 1866-1874). There were even unfounded rumors among both Moslem and Christian subjects of his kingdom that he was a crypto Moslem. In the same time he was a champion of the Christian church and built two magnificent religious monuments: Palatine chapel and the Cathedral at Cefalù (Ahmad 1975, 58).

Under the two Williams, the Arab influences and interactions remained as strong at court as under Roger. For example under William II, The famous Spanish-Arab geographer/traveler Ibn Jubayr visited the island in 580-581 H. / 1184-1185. To his surprise, he enjoyed a very warm reception by the Norman Christians. He was further surprised to find that even the Christians spoke Arabic, that the government officials were still largely Moslem, and that the heritage (may we say the Islamic and Arabic identity of the island) of some 130 previous years of Muslim rule of Sicily was still intact. Here are some important quotations from his travels: Speaking of Palermo, he says: "The finest town in Sicily and the seat of its sovereign is known to the Moslems as al-Madinah, and to the Christians as Palermo. It has Moslem citizens who possess mosques, and their own markets, in the many suburbs. The rest of the Muslims live in the farms and in all villages and towns. Their king, William, is admirable for his just conduct, and the use he makes for the industry of the Muslims. He has much confidence in Muslim, relying on them for his affairs. He possesses splendid palaces and elegant gardens, particularly in the capital of his kingdom, al-Madinah. He pays much attention to his Moslem physicians and astrologers, and also takes great care of them. One of the remarkable things told of him is that he reads and writes Arabic" (Ibn Jubayr 1952, 340-341).

<sup>1</sup> The name Norman is one of convenient but loose application. If we may apply it to the French-speaking conquerors of Lower Italy, we shall confine it more justly to the period of 1016-1060, after which the influx of the invaders ceased or became a mere trickling through of individuals of the race. The name still survived and served both official and rhetorical uses; thus a charter of Roger II. See (Curtis 1912, 401); (al-Madani 1365 H.)

<sup>2</sup> Such as the Capella Palatina founded between 1132-1143 to serve as the royal chapel for the Sicilian Norman sovereignty

The description mentioned above gives no doubt, that an Arab-Islamic influence was predominant during the Norman reign of the island as Roger and his dynasty passed to the prosperity as real patrons of art and architecture in which Moslem craftsmen have brought great contributions.

## FATIMID INFLUENCES

### Architectural impact

Roger I paid tribute to the beauty of Arab architecture in Sicily and the admirable skill of its constructions. The baths of Cefalù, the remains of the palaces and the baths at the fortress of Mare Dolce are the oldest Arab architectural monuments still surviving in Sicily (Ahmad 1975, 97). As for the civil architecture, the only remaining monument is the palace of Favara (fawāra) of Palermo, commissioned by the Fatimid governor of Sicily the Kalbid Amīr Ġāfar, dating back to 388-410 H. / 998-1019. Its name, meaning fountain, suggests that it contained fountains fed by water channeled from a mountain nearby. The ruin of a façade still bears some of its arcades, a feature we meet frequently in later Arab-Norman architecture (Ahmad 1975, 97), (Amari 1854-1872).

William I and William II, prolonged in fact this tradition, and both palaces La Zisa palace (deriving from the Arabic al-'Azīza, the glorious) and Cuba palace (deriving from the Arabic qubba, copula) give us some idea of the palaces of North Africa, no more existing. When built, the palaces were surrounded by splendid parks complete with fountains, pavilions and tree lined promenades. A man-made pool immediately enclosed the palace and served as a natural air-cooling system for its residents and users (Wilson 1998).

Despite the difficulty of defining a unique style of the monuments of Sicily, we should notify that the Fatimid impact was more distinctive and is strongly remarkable in the artistic and architectural creations of the island:

La Torre Pisana of the Norman royal palace in Palermo had its prototype in the Qaṣr al-Manār of the citadel (qal'a) of Banū Hammād, constructed in the fifth century of Hiġra / eleventh century A.D.<sup>3</sup>. The cubic structure of the tower and the blind arches decorating its façades, bear architectural influences of the contemporary Fatimid constructions of North Africa (Ahmad 1975, 98); (Wilson 1998, 213).

Let's cast an eye over some particular architectural elements bearing Fatimid impacts:

1) The transitional zone: On top of corners of square constructions in order to form a transition with the circle to receive the dome. It takes several techniques such as:

Pendentives: The inverted concave triangles springing from corners of a square or polygon and meeting at the top to form a circular base for the dome (al-Tayesh 1999, 4). They first appeared in the Cairene monuments such as the dome added by caliph al-Hāfiz in al-Azhar mosque, in front of the transept (Abou Seif 1989). The pendentives exist also in the mašhad al-Ġiūšī, founded by the Fatimid vizier Badr al-Ġamālī in 478H. / 1085, making the transitional zone of the dome surmounting the prayer niche ('Abd al-Rāziq 1993).

This technique is remarkably noticed in the remains of an Islamic building in the complex of the church of San Giovanni degli Eremiti and in the church of St Cataldo (Wilson 1998).

Muqarnas: Stalactite or muqarnas are honeycomb-like carvings in stone or stucco in which a multitude of small embedded niches are repeated in an intricate geometric arrangement. Muqarnas are characteristic of Islamic architecture, they are found almost everywhere in the medieval Islamic world (Abou Seif 1989, 67). The minaret of mašhad al-Ġiūšī, bears stalactite cornice on the upper edge of the rectangular shaft. It is the earliest surviving example of stalactites on a building in Egypt (Hautecoeur et Wiet 19, 232); (Abou Seif 1989, 67); ('Abd al-Rāziq 1993).

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<sup>3</sup> The Ban Hammād were of Berber origin, and were attached to the zirides, to whom the Fatimids have confié the reign of the island (Wilson 1998, 213)



The western façade of al-Aqmar mosque, built by the Fatimid caliph al-Amir in 519 H. / 1125 is also decorated with recesses crowned with four rows of stalactites considered as the earliest extant stalactites on a façade decoration (Abou Seif 1989, 72) ; ('Abd al-Rāziq 1993). However, the first use of stalactites as transitional zone in Egypt appears in the mašhad of Sayyida Ruqayya built in 528-529 H. / 1133. The octagonal transitional zone of its dome is more developed and more complex than previous monuments. It's higher, and has four two-tiered squinches at the corner subdivided into keel arch niches, thus forming large stalactites (Abou Seif 1989, 74).

Stalactites were used to form the transitional zone of several Norman monuments in Sicily.

The Capella Palatina displays a remarkable painted wooden muqarns ceiling -of typical Islamic- technique covering the nave (Kitzinger, 1983, 169); (Ahmad 1975, 101); (Wilson 1998, 214). May we add that Monneret de Villard had pointed some similarity in the structure of the ceiling of the Capella Palatina and that of the mosque of Cordova (Villard 1950).

The hall on the ground floor of the Zisa palace had a vault with niches: a novel feature in the vaulting is the cantilever of stalactite which covers not only the niches of the hall on the ground floor, but also those of lateral rooms above ( Marçais 1956) ; (Ahmad 1975, 100).

The ruins of the Uscibine palace in Palermo, built in the second half of the twelfth century, display another example of muqarnas. The vault of the niche opposite the entrance was decorated with stone and plaster muqarnas, of which only traces of the lower part remain (MWNF).

2) Crenellations: Battlement; a fortified parapet with alternate solid parts and openings, termed respectively "merlons" and "embrasures" or "crenels" (hence crenellation). Generally for defense, but employed also as a decorative motif (El Tayesh 1999, 2). Crenellations take various forms: geometrical, vegetal and even some times human-being scheme.

Most likely these elements were in common use in the Cairene monuments such as al-Azhar mosque, al-Hakim mosque and al-Aqmar mosque. During this period, the merlons followed usually the geometrical form; more precisely the stepped form.

The Arab tower in the palazzo Corvaja in Taormina, dating back to the reign of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz in 358 H. / 969, is a square plan tower built on two levels and topped with crenellations (MWNF).

At St Cataldo, the walls are crowned with a crest (crenellations) of carved stone, a kind of decorative battlement outlining itself in fine dentils (Marçais 1956); (Ahmad 1975, 99).

3) Šāzīrwān: Deriving from a Persian origin. It indicates the part of the fountain (marble slab engraved with vegetal motifs) over which water flows in a thin sheet (Nasser 1997); (El Tayesh 1999, 4).

There used to be a Šāzīrwān (salsabil or fountain) in the niche opposite the entrance of Zisa palace. Water flowed from a spring in the back wall down a corrugated-like incline and into a canal into the hall, cooling the air (Ahmad 1975, 100). This motif dates back to the Tulunide period in Egypt ('Abd al-Rāziq 1993, 134,137) and may have been introduced in Sicily by the Fatimids.

We can also find this element inside the Cuba palace where a central enclosure shelters a Šāzīrwān (archnet.org).

4) Blind arches or arched recesses: This kind of recess rising from the floor to the ceiling and dividing the façade had probably for function to enhance the majesty of the building but also to incorporate the different kinds and levels of windows.

It was first seen on the façades of the mosque of the Fatimid vizier al-Šālih Ṭalā'ī' built in 555 H. / 1160. Each of the arched recess had a large iron grilled window, placed near the floor level of the mosque. Cairo architects adopted this façade treatment in nearly all later foundations (Abou Seif 1989, 10, 76).

Both outer façades of Zisa palace and Cuba palace in Palermo feature repeated blind arches that rise to the height of the structure. Inside them were smaller blind arches and niches with double-arched windows beneath them, penetrating into the ground floor (Ahmad 1975, 100).

### **Decorative and artistic impact**

The paintings of the wooden ceiling of the Capella Palatina are considered as the only monumental-scale pictorial cycle from the Fatimid period in the Mediterranean basin to have survived in its most entirely<sup>4</sup>. In fact, they belong to the Fatimid school of Egypt<sup>5</sup> and are decorated with lively scenes celebrating the pleasures of worldly life and courtly entertainment emphasized by kufic inscriptions (Curatola 1993, 188) (Abouseif 1995, 286).

They depict among others birds such as affronted doves. This scene was depicted on a fresco panel (squinch) found in the Fatimid hammām in Cairo dating back to the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century.

Another motif is the falcon attacking an animal such as an antelope. A similar scene is executed in an inlaid wooden panel also dating back to the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century in Cairo, representing a falcon attacking a hare.

On the other hand we find numerous human representations directly copied from the Fatimid repertory, that throw some light on the daily life of Normans, Arabs and others in Norman Sicily. These scenes represent among others drinking scenes as we see on a luster painted ceramic plate from the Fatimid Cairo;

Female dancers copied exactly (the bodily movement and the details of fashion) upon the dancer of a luster painted ceramic plate dating back to the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century in Cairo and musicians with musical instruments very much in common in the Muslim world such as tambourines, flutes and lutes.

We should notify that the human representations of the Capella Palatina usually wear head-gear such as turbans or crowns and clothes that reflect the deep impact of the Fatimid costume repertory<sup>6</sup>.

Another category of representations in the Capella Palatina consists of mythical and fantastic creatures such as sphinxes with the bodies of lions and heads of women; griffons; mermaids and harpies with the bodies of birds and heads of women also represented in a luster painted ceramic plate from the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century in Cairo.

These scenes are usually combined with geometric and vegetal decorations. The polygons with 8 rays are surrounded by inscriptions of good omens in kufic script (Watson 1998, 214).

May we add that the paintings of the wooden roof construction above the nave of the cathedral of Cefalù also recall the Islamic paintings of the Capella Palatina. The parallels between the two are very evident particularly where animals and figural motifs are concerned (Jorgenson 1987). Although, Jorgenson replies that "There is not a single inscription in the decoration at Cefalù, whereas Kufic inscriptions, both legible and of purely ornamental nature, are to be found everywhere in the ceiling decoration in the Capella Palatina" (Jorgenson 1987, 22).

As for the objects of art, produced in Sicily during and after the Fatimid period and revealing Fatimid influences either in form, in material, in decoration and in technique, they are numerous. They are made of ivory, lime stone, marble, luster painted ceramics and silk...etc

The starting point is the ivory objects representing caskets, pyxis, crosiers, horns and chess pieces.

The caskets and pyxis were originally intended for bridal chests or jewel boxes. Later, they were used almost universally as reliquaries; hence most of the preserved examples are to be found in church treasuries (Cott 1930, 132).

The caskets are rectangular in shape; the covers being in some cases flat and in others of a truncated pyramidal form (Cott 1930, 132). As regards technique, they are made of thin plaques of ivory fastened usually by ivory pegs, to a wooden core. The smaller examples are of pure ivory without wood (Cott 1930, 132) (Ahmad 1975, 104). The Staatliche Museum in Berlin conserves an ivory casket made out of

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<sup>4</sup> *Of the original paintings of the ceilings some have not survived; others have been completely repainted in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and some of the surviving paintings have been much damaged (Ahmad, 1975, 102)*

<sup>5</sup> *This school had been influenced by the style of Sāmmarā' and flourished under the Fatimids (Ettinghausen, 1962, 45-50)*

<sup>6</sup> *For more details concerning costumes in the Fatimid period see (Yūsuf, 1995)*

carved ivory dating back to the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries produced in Sicily or southern Italy. It is almost entirely covered in decorative animal-motif friezes, which are framed by narrow bands of tendrils of half-palmettes. A great variety of animals are represented: lions, hares, ibex, stags, camels, giraffes and birds. Mythological creatures such as griffins are also included. The human figures appear as hunters or giraffe leaders (Wilson 1998, p.219).

Another category of ivory productions are those famous hunting horns or oliphants<sup>7</sup>, probably well known in Egypt during the Fatimid Period where they also served for drinking. The engraved relief carving consists of three friezes portraying animals and mythological creatures intertwined with vines. The middle frieze is composed of five rows of animals, while the remaining outer two friezes only contain one row of animals each (Watson 1998, 218) (MWNF).

It is worthy mentioning that the repertory of decorated motifs and designs of these ivories has much in common with the motifs and designs in the ceiling of the Capella Palatina (Cott 1930, 145).

The coronation mantle of Roger II preserved in The Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna is a surviving evidence of the Arab-Norman *tirāz* for the manufacture of rich textiles under the Normans. It is made out of silk embroidered with gold thread and emphasized with pearls. The decoration of the back, in monumental mirror form, is in gold on a red background and is entirely underlined with two rows of little pearls. Backing on to either sides of a date-palm, there are two couples of lions attacking camels. The scene designs a powerful symbol of the victory of the Normans over the Arabs. On the lower border, a flowery kufic inscription bears the date of production in 528 H. / 1133-1134 in the royal *tirāz* in Sicily (Curatola, 1993, 188, 205-207) (Watson, 1998, 215,220).

The cylindrical memorial marble columns and sepulchral stelae represent another kind of Sicilian productions marked by the Fatimid influence.

The regional gallery of Sicilia encloses a sculpted marble column dated around 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century (MWNF). On the top of the shaft, within a rectangular scroll, there is an Arabic inscription in kufic characters that recites a basmala. In the center of the column, within a square scroll, is inscribed the *šahāda* (Amari, 1971, 107-108).

The Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Napoli displays a marble funerary stele bearing remarkable resemblance with similar examples of Fatimid productions. It contains an Arabic inscription consisting of 10 lines of kufic characters reciting the basmala and the name of the faqih Abi 'Umar Ahmad ibn Sa'd ibn Mālik who died in 411 H. / 1021 (Curatola 1993, 201).

The regional gallery of Sicilia preserves also a sepulchral stele made out of carved stone. The stele has a shaped base decorated with an elegant frieze with plant volutes. The Arabic script is in elongated kufic characters in the Fatimid style and declares that this tomb belongs to Ayyūb son of Muhallaf, who died in Raġab 517 H./ September 1123 (Amari 1971, 190-191).

The previous study may allow us to conclude that these productions were believed to have been crafted by skilled Muslim artisans working in Sicily, since they strongly resemble or are copied from the Fatimid repertoire, blended with European creations. This combination, so typical of Norman Sicily, produced a distinctive moment in the history of art and architecture.

However, we should agree that the Norman artistic effort in Sicily, with its innate magnificence, its high standards of quality, and its wealth of forms and of content, was a beacon whose light radiated all over Europe.

<sup>7</sup> According to the legend of Roland, He blew on an oliphant to call for help before his death in the battle against the Arabs in 161 H. / 778 AD (Shalem, 2004)

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### **The Cross-fertilization between Egypt and North Mediterranean**

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#### **Abstract:**

The relationship between Egypt and the North Mediterranean could be traced back to the V<sup>th</sup> and the VI<sup>th</sup> Dynasties (2465-2150 B.C). However with the advance of time, this relationship becomes stronger and closer. The supporting evidence for such claims based on the recovery of many Egyptian objects and artifacts of this period from some of the Aegean islands. Egyptians called the people of these islands as (Keftiu) and most scholars believe that this name was given to the people of Crete. In later period, the whole Mediterranean people were given the name Haou- nebou. In the New Kingdom, some people from Crete came to Egypt and settled in Tell el Dabaa in the Eastern Delta, forming a foreign community there. As a result the Cretian influence appeared on the style of the motifs of some objects recovered from this area.

The scenes of the tomb of Rekhmire, the high official who lived during the reign of king Thutmosis III<sup>rd</sup> of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (1479-1425 B.C.), show some Cretian merchants while concluding some deals with their Egyptian counterparts.

Another example is the stelea which date back to King Amenophis III<sup>rd</sup> (1391-1353 B.C) and was found in his mortuary temple at Luxor. The texts on the stelea give the names of certain sites and cities in the area of the Aegean Sea. The texts also suggest the presence of an Egyptian embassy there. The walls of the tomb of Meren-re II<sup>nd</sup> at Tell El Amarna which dates back the king Amenophis IV<sup>th</sup> (1353-1335 B.C.) are decorated with scenes showing some of the Mediterranean people serving as mercenaries in the royal Egyptian guards.

In about 1200 B.C. the civilized ancient world was invaded by the sea people. The term (sea people) or (Na Khat.w n pa-yam, was given by the Egyptians to the invaders who possibly came from central Europe and they were of non-semetic origin. They consisted also of different tribes such as: Sherden, Danuna, karkisa, Tjakkar, Pleset, Shekelesh, Meshouesh, Iukka, Labu. Their invasion was by land and sea. They succeeded in taking over most of the ancient world but King Ramses III<sup>rd</sup> (1193-1163 B.C) defeated them in naval and land battles and thus Egypt was saved from them. As a result of this victory, he captured thousands of them. Later on and during his reign, they served as mercenaries in the Egyptian army.

In the late period and during the XXVI<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (664-525 B.C.), the Egyptian kings encouraged the Greeks to settle in Egypt, large number of them came to Egypt and some of them served in the army while others became merchants. In 610 B.C., they founded the first Greek city in Egypt which was called Naucratis on the western bank of the Nile. In few years, it became the main trading center in Egypt. In 323 B.C., Alexander III<sup>rd</sup> invaded Egypt and ended the Persians occupation of the country then

he annexed Egypt to his newly created empire. It was not long; Egypt became an important part of the Hellenistic world.

It is potently obvious that the relationship between Egypt and the people of the Mediterranean developed over a large period of time. However the relationship considerably increased.

In the later period of history, moreover this relationship began by some military conquests then it was converted gradually into commercial and cultural exchange. As a result both the Egyptian and the people of the Mediterranean were influenced by each other and the Egyptian influence could be traced in the North Mediterranean while the influence of North Mediterranean could be felt in Egypt.

**Key words:**

**1-Egypt**

**2- Ramses III<sup>rd</sup>**

**3-Islands**

**4- Greeks**


**5-Sea people**

## INTRODUCTION

The geographical history is an interesting subject. However, it faces several problems concerning the study of the ancient Near East. Many names of locations are mentioned in the ancient texts. Some times it is possible to identify these locations and sometimes it is difficult to succeed.

The international relations of Egypt during the New Kingdom are confirmed by the frescos of the foreign envoys' paintings among the daily life scenes in the noble tombs at Thebes. Such scenes depict foreign men, who are occasionally accompanied by their wives and carrying their tributes or presents towards the deceased or the ruling pharaoh. However, among all the foreigners of the noble tombs only the Aegeans or preferably called the inhabitants of the Mediterranean islands are thought to be the most interesting and enigmatic. The Egyptians traded with them in return for silver, olives, wine, oil and kidney beans. On the other hand, they also brought to Egypt baskets full of gold, precious stones, hippopotami and ivory in return for the Egyptian corn.

The contact between the two sides was on a small scale and there are no inscriptions mentioning an Egyptian visit to these islands. However, the excavations which were carried out in the remains of the great towns of the Middle and New Kingdoms revealed pottery vases, undoubtedly related to the artistic style of the Mediterranean towns. Moreover, Egyptian monuments were discovered in Crete and Macedonia dating back to different periods. Furthermore, a number of Egyptian, Canaanite and Cyprian potteries were discovered on the southern coast of Crete. These potteries indicate that there were commercial activities between the countries of this region, possibly through Syria and not directly with Egypt.

The word Haou-nebout  or preferably «Those who are behind!» is mentioned one hundred and sixty times in the Egyptian texts. May be, it means behind the sea, or preferably the foreigners. This is an ancient geographic name indicating at the beginning the population of the maritime borders of the Delta during the Pre-dynastic Period, in the fourth millennium before J. C. However, during the Old Kingdom this word changed in meaning and started to be applied to the population who replaced them towards the northeast. During the Middle and New Kingdoms, this word indicated the Asiatics of the northeast who settled on the coasts of the East Mediterranean Sea or preferably the inhabitants of the Pre-Hellenistic Aegean world<sup>2</sup>, but at the end of New Kingdom, this word meant simply the barbarians or the foreigners<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Vercoutter, J. (1947)-(1949), Les Haunebu, *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie orientale*, 46, 48.

<sup>2</sup> Vercoutter, J. (1949), *Op.cit*, 48, 190-192, p.125-126.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 48, 195; Vercoutter, J. (1922), L'Egypte et le monde Egéen Préhellénique, Etude critique des sources égyptiennes (du début de la XVIII<sup>e</sup> à la fin de XIX<sup>e</sup> dynastie), *Bulletin de l'Institut Français de l'archéologie orientale* 19.



The Sea people<sup>4</sup>, Na-khatou-en-pa-yem  is a group of people of different origins who migrated across Mediterranean Sea during a period of fifty years. They are Sherden, Danuna, karkisa, Tjakkar, Pleset, Shekelesh, Meshouesh, Lukka and Lebou. These people destroyed many cities and civilizations but among all countries of the East Mediterranean region, Egypt suffered least. King Ramses III<sup>rd</sup> of the XX<sup>th</sup> dynasty put an end to their attacks which came from the North and the East. It is one of the most important Egyptian battles, the scenes of which are depicted in the temple of Ramses III<sup>rd</sup> at Madinet Habu. These scenes represent them confused, overthrown and slaughtered during the battle on their boats (Fig.1).



Fig. (1): Scene of the only naval battle which took place in front of the Egyptian borders, between the Egyptians and the Sea people, depicted in the funerary temple of king Ramses III<sup>rd</sup> at Madinet Habu. The Sea people are represented with their distinctive high feathers; they are overthrown and slaughtered by the Egyptians. After, Photo by Thierry Benderitter

The Keftius<sup>5</sup>  are mentioned in the hymn of the victory of Thutmosis III<sup>rd</sup>, in the line 4 while the inhabitants of the islands of the sea appear in the line 6. This proves that both places represent two different identities in Egyptian geography. The country of Keftius could be geographically an adjacent place. However, some Egyptologists suggest that the land of Keftius could be Crete, Syria, Sicily, Cyprus or Asia Minor.

<sup>4</sup> Leahy, A. (2001), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Donald B. Redford (Ed.), *Sea People*, V. 3, 257-260, Cairo.

<sup>5</sup> Vercoutter, J. (1922), *Op.cit.*, 33.



Although the Egyptian texts of the Old Kingdom and till the end of Egyptian history, mention Keftius, but their scenes are only represented in the tombs of the nobles during the XVIII<sup>th</sup> dynasty.

**The scenes of tombs:**

**1-The tomb n° 86<sup>6</sup> of Menkheperaseneb<sup>7</sup>:**

In this tomb, scene n° 8<sup>8</sup> depicts gifts and tributes well classified in several rows (Fig. 2). These are vases and jars having several forms and various decorations (Fig. 3). The tributes bearers are shown in two registers; they are the Keftius chiefs, Hittites and people of Tunip bringing statues of bulls, vases decorated with motifs of Boukrania and the heads of bulls, while some other people are carrying lapis lazuli necklaces. It is remarkable that there is one who carries a girl on his hand. On every register, are prostrated man and a kneeling male figure, raising both arms in adoration attitude (Figs. 4-5-6) .



Fig. (2): The tributes bearers in the tomb of Menkheperaseneb  
After, Wachsmann, S., *Op. cit.*, Pl. XXXIV.

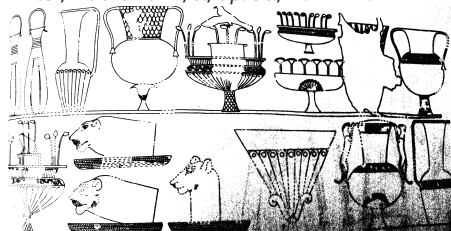


Fig. (3): The well decorated presents of Keftius depicted in two registers.  
After, Wachsmann, S., *Op. cit.*, Pl. XXXVII.

<sup>6</sup> This tomb is located at Sheikh Abd-el-Gurna.

<sup>7</sup> He is also the owner of the tomb n° 112, and he was the second and then the first prophet of Amun during the last years of Thutmosis I<sup>st</sup>; Davies, N de G.(1933), *The Tomb of Menkheperaseneb*, London, pp. 1-17; La tombe of Ramenkhepersenb in Virey, P. (1894), MMAF V, *Le tombeau de Rekhmiré, Sept tombeaux thébains*, Paris, pp. 197-215.

<sup>8</sup> Porter, B. and Moss, R.L.B. (1960), *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings, The Theban Necropolis, Part I. Private Tombs*, Oxford, 86, n° 8, p. 177.