GAETAN MASPERO

EGYPT

ANCIENT SITES AND MODERN SCENES

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PREFATORY NOTE

A PART of my duties as Director of the “Service des Antiquités” in Egypt consists in an annual inspection of the monuments. From 1881 to 1886, the period of my first sojourn in Egypt, a steamboat, the Menchieh, was put at my disposal. She was better known to the riverside population by the name of Nimro Hadachere, No. 11. She was a flat-bottomed brigantine, provided with an engine of a type archaic enough to deserve a place in the Museum of Arts and Crafts. From 1840 to 1860 she had regularly performed the journey to and fro between Alexandria and Cairo once a month. She was then invalided on account of old age, but was again put into working order for the visit of Prince Napoleon to Egypt in 1863. In 1875 she was presented to Mariette, and after a long period of inaction, descended to me, and I made my journeys in her for five years. My successors, however, did not preserve her, and on my return I found a princely old dahabieh, the Miriam, which I have used ever since.

At the beginning of my campaign, about the middle of December, I tow her, without making a halt, to the limit of my course, to Assouân or Ouadi-Halfah. Thence I abandon myself to the stream, the wind sometimes assisting my progress, but more often preventing it, so that day after day we are obliged to have recourse to the oars in order to advance a mile or two. Such a method of navigation, although no longer to the taste of the tourist, offers great advantages to the Director of the “Antiquités.” It gives him an opportunity of visiting less important sites where no one stops unless compelled, sites that he would not himself have thought of visiting had not the impossibility of proceeding against the wind forced him to drop anchor in their neighbourhood. To these unpremeditated delays I owe

not only several monuments which make no bad figure in the Museum, but also impressions of modern Egypt that help me to a better understanding of ancient Egypt. I noted down these impressions from day to day without any object beyond that of giving adequate expression to what I felt or observed, and from 1900 printed in Le Temps every year those of them that seemed likely to interest Egyptologists, and at the same time to make appeal to the general public.

M. Guilmoto, the publisher of “New Light on Ancient Egypt,” suggested that I should collect these articles and issue them in volume form. The idea found favour with me, and I consented. I obtained M. Hébrard's permission to use the articles that had appeared in Le Temps, and I added to them some that had been printed in La grande Revue and in La Revue d'Orient.

May I express the hope that readers who know Egypt will recognise it in this book, and those who do not yet know it, may be inspired by these pages to make its acquaintance?

G. MASPERO.

BIBEH.

NOTE ON THE SPELLING OF THE EGYPTIAN NAMES (Written specially for the English edition)

THE transcriptions of the Egyptian names in this volume differ so materially from those in general use in England that a word of explanation in regard to them seems advisable. For such barbarous pronunciations as Thoutmes, Ahmes, Râusormâ, I have substituted Thoutmôsis, Ahmôsis, Ousimarês, a vocalisation nearer that of the ancient pronunciation. Some of the vowel sounds, like those of the three names just quoted, are derived from the Greeks, or from the Egyptians of the Græco-Roman period; others are deduced by analogy with Greek transcriptions from forms the exact transliteration of which has not been preserved for

us by the ancients. The reader will easily recognise the former in those where I have kept the Greek or Latin terminations cs, os, or us, is, ous; where those terminations are wanting, the form is deduced by analogy, or determined in accordance with the rules of grammar. Thus Amenôthes (Amenhotep), Khâmois (Kha-em-uas), Harmakhis (Hor-em-Khou) are pronunciations justified by the Greek renderings; Amenemhaît (Amenemhat), Hatshopsouîtou (Hatasou, Hashepsou) are grammatical deductions. Many points are still doubtful and some of the vowel sounds will have to be modified in the future; but they have at least the merit of testifying to an effort towards the truth, and of undeceiving the public who, on the faith of the Egyptologists, accept as legitimate, pronunciations which would have been considered monstrous by the Egyptians themselves.

An error is easily corrected when it first arises, but if it is allowed to persist it is an exceedingly difficult matter to eradicate it. No better proof can be given than the persistence of the form Hatasou for the name of the great queen who shared the throne of the Pharaohs with Thoutmôsis III. For the sake of uniformity, I have adopted the orthography and vocalisation of the Græco-Roman period, in the same way as in France we use the French forms, Clovis, Clotaire, Thierry, for the Merovingian kings in order not to introduce very dissimilar words into our history books. We must, however, remember that the vocalisation and pronunciation of names do not remain unchanged during the course of history. Not to mention dialect forms which would be too difficult to determine, I established a long while ago, partly by means of the Assyrian transcriptions, that many names of which the tonic syllable is vocalised in ô, ôu, in the Greek period, have the same syllable vocalised in â under the second Theban empire, in the vernacular of the age of the Ramses: the Amenôthes, i.e., the Amenhotep of Manethon, is Amanhatep in the inscriptions of El-Amarna. The recent discovery of Hittite archives confirms that fact, for they give

among others, for the Ramses Meiamoun Ousimares of the Ptolemaic age, a Ouashmarîya Riamâsha Maiamânou which corresponds with an Egyptian pronunciation Ouasimarîya Riamasa (ou) Maiamânou. But I did not think it advisable to introduce such variants into a book intended for the general public.

I FROM CAIRO TO RODAH

THE sky is overcast, melancholy trails of mist float over the banks of the river, and here and there yellowish patches indicate the place where the sun ought to shine. Can this really be Egypt? What has become of her light during the thirteen years I have been away? Now, it seems, we shiver on the Nile, and cannot venture on the upper deck of the boat without a warm overcoat. I left Cairo the day before yesterday, very uncertain of my impressions, and somewhat anxious to discover if the aspect of the river and its banks had changed as much as the climate. Not so long ago, in losing sight of the last minarets of the citadel, we seemed to bid farewell to the present century. A few factory chimneys were to be seen here and there among the palm-trees, or one of Cook's steamers noisily went its way with its cargo of tourists. But such accidents of civilisation quickly disappeared on the horizon, and with the help of the Pyramids, along which we coasted for two days, we felt as if we were setting out for a corner of the antique world that had somehow lingered on in the midst of the modern world. Between Cairo and Philae we traversed an Egypt of the past, not an Egypt of any precise epoch, but a country undefined as to age and local colour, resembling in some places that of the Pharaohs, in others that of the Turks or Mamelouks; in fact, each traveller, according to the nature of his studies, or the turn of his imagination, could believe himself to be visiting the land of the Pharaoh Sesostris, or that of the Sultans of the “Arabian Nights.” For three days the landscapes of a former age have been passing before my eyes. Although I recognise their salient points, I find something in them which used not to be there, and which

has modified their character. Industrial life has taken possession of them, and is secretly transforming them.

The change becomes apparent directly we leave the bridge of Kasr-en-Nil behind us. The background of the picture is the same, the green island of Rodah, with its clumps of trees and its Nilometer painted in variegated colours, at its southern point, then the picturesque buildings of Old Cairo , the pretty mosque of Atar-en-Nabi, standing out so boldly on its promontory, the big mounds of débris topped by the windmills of the French occupation; and as we progress the panorama of the citadel keeps with us for about an hour. But everywhere along the bank new buildings succeed each other almost as far as Helouan opposite the site of Memphis; barracks are to be seen at intervals, chimneys smoke, and as night falls electric lights flash out to right and left. We have to realise that Cairo in growing rich has built suburbs, as is the way of all great capitals, and we must thank fortune that modern industries have been established in these beautiful spots without too greatly disfiguring them.

Beyond Helouan and Bedrechein, if we carefully follow the line of the embankments, although the changes in the outskirts are fewer, they are not the less real. On the Libyan side, the dike, which formerly showed disorderly curves and was broken here and there—and no one thought of rectifying such caprices—now runs straight, and is properly supported without breaches or indentations in the coping. Iron posts placed at regular intervals mark out the course, and allow of its being restored to its former direction when, as sometimes happens, a more violent rising of the river encroaches on it. Thanks to its stability, land which used to be constantly threatened with the depredations of the Nile has been definitely gained for cultivation, and near Bedrechein I found a field of Indian millet on exactly the same spot where I had formerly sailed in about six or nine feet of water. On the Arabian side

progress has been equally great, and at first I was astonished to see verdure and groups of well-built houses where my memory told me there had been the uninterrupted yellow of the sand and a cluster of wretched hovels. From Atfieh to Bibeh, for a whole day, I ceased to observe the Libyan bank in order to concentrate my attention on the Arabian one.

On my first visit it remained almost exactly as French scholars had described it at the end of the eighteenth century. Although the hills lay far towards the interior, the space utilised was generally restricted and unequally cultivated for lack of sufficient water. Two or three fragments of canals watered it here and there, and in the spots where a little verdure was to be seen the chadouf or sakieh alone provided for the needs of the peasants at the cost of incessant labour. Nearly everywhere the desert or barren land extended to the edge of the stream; a few villages steeped in mud occupied the most favoured spots; a santon or a dilapidated Coptic monastery might be seen at long intervals. The few attempts to revive the perishing district made under Mehemet Ali and Ismail Pacha had failed, and it seemed as if Egypt on that side of the river was almost dead. Now it is recovering from its long exhaustion, and nothing is more curious than to note in passing the signs of re-awakening life. At the end of the tortuous pass, where the insufficient height of the water forces the stream to flow to the south of the town of Karimât, there used to be a half-ruined monastery, Deirel-Mêmoun, around the walls of which dwelt a few dozen fellahs who with the monks were the only human beings who persisted in remaining in the place. About twenty ill-cared for palm-trees formed the shelter of their straw pallets, and their wretched plots of beans or millet scarcely produced a greenish film in the foreground of the landscape. Now the monastery has been repaired; stone houses are grouped round it, the palm-trees have spread

and form a small wood, the fields have invaded the desert, and the stir of cattle and donkeys betrays the presence of a hard-working and prosperous population. Six or eight hamlets have grown up in the empty space which stretched from Deîr-el-Mêmoun to El Marazi, and the colonists, partly emigrants from the other bank, are gradually conquering the desert places. The chadouf, worked by hand, still pumps up the water with its rhythmic movement, but at the same time fixed steam-pumps, or movable steam-engines which can be used when and where necessity arises, supplement and indeed tend to replace the old-fashioned machine. Plantations of sugar-cane are increasing, then millet, corn, beans, and on the mud left by the rising of the river the vegetables of which the native is so fond—lupins, onions, mallows, cucumbers, and water-melons— are cultivated.

Most of the new villages are of hewn stone, and the surprising increase of the buildings has necessitated the opening up of numerous quarries in all the places where the rocks are close enough to the river to make exploitation easy. Now and again occur the sheds and shafts of a budding factory, then a large farm flanked with a rudimentary garden, then clumps of young date-trees, then a number of barges moored to the quay awaiting their cargoes. One of them near Deîr-el-Bayâd carried a new steam-engine, and the sailors were hurrying to erect another engine on the bank in front of a plantation of full-grown canes.

The sun has reappeared, and Egypt is herself again. The softness of the air and the beauty of the sky invite the mind and likewise the powers of observation to idle contemplation or somnolent meditation; a real effort is required to resume my study of the right bank, and to determine to note the new and surprising changes I see there. At first, beyond Bibeh activity seems to slacken, and the former lethargy to prevail. Industry has been

transported to the left bank, into the domains and factories of Dairah Sanieh. The rugged slopes of Gebel Cheîkh Embarek come down so close to us that they exclude all possibility of irrigation by machinery, and the narrow strips of alluvium at their foot are watered and cultivated in the old-fashioned way. But beyond Charronah the view changes. A broad green track stretches for miles where I recollect a dusty plain with sickly palms and rare cultivated patches thinly scattered over it, bounded on the south by the inactive chimneys of Cheikh-Fadl. The factory, founded in the good times of Ismaïl Pacha, was never finished. Sand accumulated at the foot of its half-built walls; iron shafts and portions of machinery, mere heaps of old iron, lay on the ground, abandoned before ever having been used. Now cultivated fields and plantations of young trees alternate almost from Charronah, steam-pumps distribute the water regularly behind the dikes, railway lines intersect the plain, and as we passed, several steam-engines were at work on the quay, busy with the wagons of sugar-cane. Barges as heavily loaded as the trains are placed in line along the bank, engaged in unloading. Three steam-tugs, with steam up, are waiting until they have been emptied to tow them, a dozen at a time, to the villages where they have to take in a fresh cargo. It is done rapidly amidst the deafening noise that accompanies all work in this country; the sailors shout at the porters, who answer in still shriller tones, the chimneys snort, the engines pant and whistle, the donkeys bray in a common harmony. The factory itself has become unrecognisable; its workshops are finished, and as a consequence all the suitable subordinate buildings have risen from the earth. First of all comes a fine house that seems to be that of the manager. Then a sort of triumphal gate in Moorish style opens its pointed arch of horseshoe shape framed by Arabic inscriptions traced in black on a red and white ground. It stands in front of brick buildings the use of which cannot well be determined from the river.

Lower down a long building with two rows of arcades, one on top of the other, contains shops on the ground floor, and in the upper story rooms with balconies for the employees; it might be called the social habitation of a co-operative society. I made out several shop signs: Épicerie et café, Tabacs, &c.—all in French. In fact, a French engineer, M. Mahoudeau, founded this enormous factory for the Say-Suares Company and awoke the district from its lethargy. It is no small satisfaction to note the part played by Frenchmen in the redemption of the land.

Is it, however, merely a frontage behind which the old poverty is as acute as ever? What does the fellah gain from all this wealth? Beyond Cheikh-Fadl the landscape resumes its old physiognomy, and seems scarcely touched by modern industry. Deîr-el-Bakara has whitewashed the domes of its churches and cut convenient steps in the cliff to serve instead of the breakneck staircases by which its destitute monks descended in order to beg from the dahabiehs. The region of the ancient tombs which begins at Minieh has lost nothing of its primitive barbarism: only the masons and fellahs of the other bank have attacked the hill on all sides, and destroy it even more than they work it as a quarry. The change is nowhere more apparent than in the places where Messrs. Cook & Co. assemble their tourists for the excursion to the tombs of Beni-Hassan; the houses there are better cared for, the inhabitants are cleaner and better clothed, and demands for bakhshîsch are universal.

II A FOG ON THE NILE

DIRECTLY the first rays of the sun touched the Nile this morning a fog arose. Wreaths of white vapour began to pass over the water and in less than ten minutes we were enveloped in it, and had to cast anchor in the middle of the stream. It is not like a European fog, thick and heavy, which shuts out light and deadens sound. It is an aerial, fluid substance, a curtain of almost transparent muslin which the light impregnates with silvery tones, and through which every sound clearly penetrates. Life goes on around us, but invisible, and we hear it without knowing where it is. A donkey brays somewhere, a cock crows amid a chorus of clucking hens, sounds of quarrelling are heard on one of the neighbouring barges, a quail calls, and in the distance the big steamer full of tourists that we sighted at dawn whistles desperately to warn the other boats to get out of her way. Now and again the curtain is drawn aside and a piece of landscape, floating at hazard as it seems, is discovered, but the sun, insinuating itself through the opening, warms the cold water, and so causes mists to rise which again engulf us. After about an hour there is some movement in the fog; it becomes less dense, is stretched out, is torn in pieces, and flies off in shreds, which are soon destroyed and finally vanish in the twinkling of an eye. The world reappears in a chaos of uncertain forms, which, however, become more clearly defined every second. Five women emerge on a narrow mass of brown earth, busy with their water-jars. An embankment is visible behind them, and rises steeply in graduated terraces of vegetation; it ends in a dike above which the tops of palm-trees are seen, and almost simultaneously we perceive the line of

hills, pink in colour, outlined against the background of the opaline sky. For a few minutes the remains of the fog soften the contours, bring out the shadows, accentuate the reliefs, and lightly touching the various objects, clearly mark out the sites they occupy. As the mist evaporates the relief is softened, the contours become sharp and clear-cut, distances are effaced. It seems as if objects on the far-off horizon are thrown forward, and that the foreground and the objects on it approach and, indeed, almost join it, and that they are placed one upon the other just as they appear in the pictures which decorate the walls of the tombs of Memphis or of Thebes.

Indeed, who is there who has sailed on the Nile, even for only a couple of days, who does not come to realise how closely the scenes drawn by the old Egyptians on their monuments resemble those of to-day, and how faithfully they interpreted them, even in those of their conventions which seem to us to depart farthest from reality?

The fog having entirely lifted, the dahabieh continues its way. The boatmen row vigorously, keeping the strokes in time with the voice of the singer:—

Fi'r-rodh ra'et—hebbi'l-gamil.

(In the garden I saw —my handsome friend.)

And all repeat in chorus with a low, drawling intonation, Hebbi'l - gamîl. Before they have finished, the soloist attacks the high notes of the sacramental refrain, ia lêl (O night!). He indulges in shakes, prolongs the sounds, swells them, stifles them, and then, out of breath, stops the last note with a single dry sound. He is almost choked by his runs and trills, and while the crew are bursting with applause I observe the river and the two banks. Low down in a line on a bank of tawny-coloured sand a number of big vultures are warming themselves in the sun; with claws spread out, backs bent, necks driven down into the shoulders, wings folded in front on each side of the breast, they joyfully receive the flood of sunshine which spreads

over their feathers and penetrates them with its warmth. It is exactly how the old sculptors represented the vulture of Nekhabit in repose, the goddess-protector of the Pharaohs, who shelters them with her wings. In imagination, take out the biggest of the group, put the pschent or the white cap on its head, the sceptre of power in its talons, place it in profile on the tuft of full-blown lotus which symbolises Upper Egypt, and you will have the bas-relief which adorns one of the sides of the principal doors of the temple of Khonsou, and yet under all this apparatus a veritable vulture; for the covering of religious attributes has not suppressed the real bird. A fishing eagle comes and goes above our heads in quest of his morning meal. He describes immense circles, slowly beating the air, then suddenly lets himself drift along, leaning on his wings, his body suspended between them, his feet stretched out, his head bent, his eyes searching the depths of the water. Watching him progress thus, scarcely moving at all, he resembles a hawk of the Theban sculptors, Horus, who hovers above the helmet of the Pharaoh in battle, or who, displayed on the ceilings of the temples, dominates the sweep of the central nave from the doors of the hypostyle to those of the sanctuary. When presently he descends and rises again with his prey, it will be with the same gesture and bearing with which Horus in battle manipulated his mystical fly-net and his ring symbolic of eternity. A troop of donkeys coming out of a hollow behind the embankment under a load of well-filled sacks might be the very one that served as model to the draughtsmen of the tomb of Ti for the carrying in of the harvest. The mingled flock of sheep and goats which follows at a gentle trot stand out with so exact a profile, that they seem to be solely composed of moving silhouettes; it is indeed a picture come down from its ancient wall to go to the neighbouring market. And as the banks pass before me with their episodes of contemporary life, it seems to me that the bas-reliefs of the tombs have

become alive and of natural size; there are the oxen going to the fields with measured tread, the ploughing, the fishermen yoked to their net, the carpenters building a barge. They have installed their ladders on a sloping piece of shore, and crouching in the attitudes of monkeys, nail the timbers with blows of the hammer.

The creators of Egyptian art took the Nile for their point of view when they set to work to put these isolated objects together, and to engrave them harmoniously in the chapels of the tombs in order to ensure their dead continuation of earthly existence for an indefinite period. They placed all that characterised life on the river itself or on the canals at the bottom of the wall—the convoys of laden boats, the disputes of the sailors, the fishing scenes, the hunting of water-fowl. Above came the seasons of the agricultural year —ploughing, sowing, reaping, threshing, storing in the granaries. Higher still came the pastures with ruminating oxen, and above, almost touching the ceiling, the desert and the hunters on the track of the gazelle. The panorama widens out or is closed in according to the extent of the surface to be covered, and all the elements which compose it are not necessarily reproduced everywhere; one part is suppressed here, or developed there, or combined elsewhere, but what is used follows the invariable order from bottom to top. The variations of the ancient theme were forming and changing every moment under my eyes as the day advanced. In some places the river is deserted and its banks empty, but the ploughs make furrows in the plain, and the hills show their cold slopes above them. A little farther on the hills sink behind the horizon, and the plain seems a flat, empty space without vegetation or visible habitations. Three or four miles higher up stream the Nile becomes suddenly animated and a long series of boats cross each other, and are driven back or thrust gaily forward by the north wind. But the surfaces on which life circulates, instead of falling back one behind the other,

seem to rise one above the other as in the works of the old masters, who certainly both simplified and complicated the different subjects they chose to bring together. They almost all made it a rule not to attempt to depict the ground, substituting for it a single straight line on which the persons included in the same scene moved and by which they were supported. In the upper rows they depict scenes that distance did not permit them to perceive any more than it does us, despite the incredible transparency of the air, and they attribute to them the same proportions as those of the scenes in the lower rows. These defects were imposed on them by the ritual of their religion. Were not these pictures, so carefully and accurately executed, really magic charms on the composition of which depended the survival of a human being after death? The slightest error might imperil the destiny of the double, and so the artists were obliged to sacrifice the probabilities of perspective to minute truth of detail.

The dahabieh goes on its way, and the singer, grown tired, pauses to take breath, but his companions brutally recall him to his duty. “You are paid fifty piastres more than us to sing, and you want to rest: go on, open your mouth, and use your voice.” He allowed himself to be implored for a few minutes and then began again:—

“In the garden I saw —my handsome friend, Who was gently swaying—like the branch of the nabeca,”

and the crew repeats:—

“like the leaf of the nabeca. Permit and grant—O my beloved, And fulfil thy promises for the best.”

On the bank the men on the barges at anchor, the carpenters, the donkey-boys, the women drawing water, leave off their work and listen; when the refrain is reached their delight bursts forth in enthusiastic exclamations of “Ah!” or of “Allah! Allah!—Blessed be thy mother, O thou man of songs!—May our divine master guard thee! Again, again, and again may the benediction of the Prophet fall on

you!” We advance to the sounds of the general jubilation, and with approving laughter our boatmen respond to the benedictions which rain on them from the bank. The tune is slow, sweet, somewhat sad, adapted to the rhythm of the oars; it has undergone no change during the five-and-twenty years I have known it, and it must certainly have been transmitted intact for generations. It must have been sung with Egyptian words when Egypt had Pharaohs, and perhaps Ramses II. heard it when, returning from his Syrian campaigns, he regained victorious Thebes in triumph.