

EDITED BY JEAN-MARCEL HUMBERT AND CLIFFORD PRICE

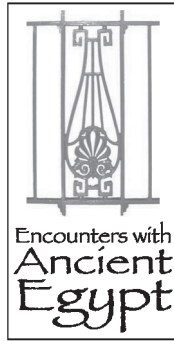


# IMHOTEP TODAY

## EGYPTIANIZING ARCHITECTURE

ENCOUNTERS WITH ANCIENT EGYPT

# **Imhotep Today: Egyptianizing architecture**



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ENCOUNTERS WITH ANCIENT EGYPT

# **Imhotep Today: Egyptianizing architecture**

Edited by

**Jean-Marcel Humbert and Clifford Price**

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standing within an Egyptianizing bronze encasement of 1878 AD,  
on the Thames embankment (© Jean-Marcel Humbert).

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## Series Editor's Foreword

This series of eight books derives from the proceedings of a conference entitled 'Encounters with Ancient Egypt', held at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London (UCL) in December 2000. Since then, many new chapters have been especially commissioned for publication, and those papers originally provided for the conference and now selected for publication have been extensively revised and rewritten.

There are many noteworthy features of the books. One is the overall attempt to move the study of Ancient Egypt into the mainstream of recent advances in archaeological and anthropological practice and interpretation. This is a natural outcome of London University's Institute of Archaeology, one of the largest archaeology departments in the world, being the academic host. Drawing on the Institute's and other related resources within UCL, the volumes in the series reflect an extraordinary degree of collaboration between the series editor, individual volume editors, contributors and colleagues. The wide range of approaches to the study of the past, pursued in such a vibrant scholarly environment as UCL's, has encouraged the scholars writing in these volumes to consider their disciplinary interests from new perspectives. All the chapters presented here have benefited from wide-ranging discussion between experts from diverse academic disciplines, including art history, papyrology, anthropology, archaeology and Egyptology, and subsequent revision.

Egyptology has been rightly criticized for often being insular; the methodologies and conclusions of the discipline have been seen by others as having developed with little awareness of archaeologies elsewhere. The place and role of Ancient Egypt within African history, for example, has rarely been considered jointly by Egyptologists and Africanists. This collaboration provides a stimulating review of key issues and may well influence future ways of studying Egypt. Until now, questions have rarely been asked about the way Egyptians thought of their own past or about non-Egyptian peoples and places. Nor has the discipline of Egyptology explored, in any depth, the nature of its evidence, or the way contemporary cultures regarded Ancient Egypt. The books in this series address such topics.

Another exceptional feature of this series is the way that the books have been designed to interrelate with, inform and illuminate one another. Thus, the evidence of changing appropriations of Ancient Egypt over time, from the classical period to the modern Afrocentrist movement, features in several volumes. One volume explores the actual sources of knowledge about Ancient Egypt before the advent of 'scientific' archaeology, while another explores knowledge of Ancient Egypt after Napoleon Bonaparte's expeditions and the unearthing of Tutankhamun's tomb. The question asked throughout these volumes, however, is how far fascination and knowledge about Ancient Egypt have been based on sources of evidence rather than extraneous political or commercial concerns and interests.

As a result of this series, the study of Ancient Egypt will be significantly enriched and deepened. The importance of the Egypt of several thousands of years ago reaches far beyond the existence of its architectural monuments and extends to its unique role in the history of all human knowledge. Furthermore, the civilization of Ancient Egypt speaks to us with particular force in our own present and has an abiding place in the modern psyche.

As the first paragraph of this Foreword explains, the final stage of this venture began with the receipt and editing of some extensively revised, and in many cases new, chapters – some 95 in all – to be published simultaneously in eight volumes. What it does not mention is the speed with which the venture has been completed: the current UCL Press was officially launched in April 2003. That this series of books has been published to such a high standard of design, professional accuracy and attractiveness only four months later is incredible.

This alone speaks eloquently for the excellence of the staff of UCL Press – from its senior management to its typesetters and designers. Ruth Phillips (Marketing Director) stands out for her youthful and innovative marketing ideas and implementation of them, but most significant of all, at least from the Institute's perspective, is the contribution of Ruth Massey (Editor), who oversaw and supervised all details of the layout and production of the books, and also brought her critical mind to bear on the writing styles, and even the meaning, of their contents.

Individual chapter authors and academic volume editors, both from within UCL and in other institutions, added this demanding project to otherwise full workloads. Although it is somewhat invidious to single out particular individuals, Professor David O'Connor stands out as co-editor of two volumes and contributor of chapters to three despite his being based overseas. He, together with Professor John Tait – also an editor and multiple chapter author in these books – was one of the first to recognize my vision of the original conference as having the potential to inspire a uniquely important publishing project.

Within UCL's Institute of Archaeology, a long list of dedicated staff, academic, administrative and clerical, took over tasks for the Director and Kelly Vincent, his assistant as they wrestled with the preparation of this series. All of these staff, as well as several members of the student body, really deserve individual mention by name, but space does not allow this. However, the books could not have appeared without the particular support of five individuals: Lisa Daniel, who tirelessly secured copyright for over 500 images; Jo Dullaghan, who turned her hand to anything at any time to help out, from re-typing manuscripts to chasing overdue authors; Andrew Gardner, who tracked down obscure and incomplete references, and who took on the complex job of securing and producing correctly scanned images; Stuart Laidlaw, who not only miraculously produced publishable images of a pair of outdoor cats now in Holland and Jamaica, but in a number of cases created light where submitted images revealed only darkness; and Kelly Vincent, who did all of the above twice over, and more – and who is the main reason that publisher and Institute staff remained on excellent terms throughout.

Finally, a personal note, if I may. Never, ever contemplate producing eight complex, highly illustrated books within a four month period. If you *really must*, then make sure you have the above team behind you. Essentially, ensure that you have a partner such as Jane Hubert, who may well consider you to be mad but never questions the essential worth of the undertaking.

*Peter Ucko  
Institute of Archaeology  
University College London  
27 July 2003*

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Note: No attempt has been made to impose a standard chronology on authors; all dates before 712 BC are approximate. However, names of places, and royal and private names have been standardized.

## Contributors

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He has lectured and published extensively on ancient Egyptian art, history, archaeology, and religious iconography, with a particular focus on the Third Intermediate and Late Periods, and is the author of *Ancient Egyptian Art in the Brooklyn Museum* (1989). He has also written on Egyptomania, both independently and with Mary McKercher. He received his undergraduate and graduate degrees at the City College of New York and the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

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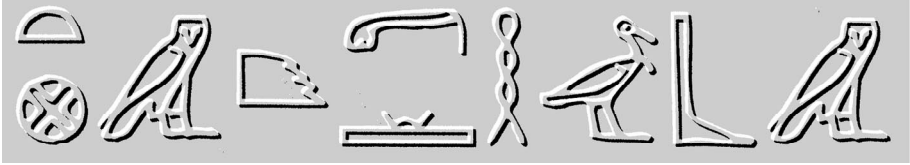
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## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION: AN ARCHITECTURE BETWEEN DREAM AND MEANING

*Clifford Price and Jean-Marcel Humbert*

This book is about the use in architecture of designs from Ancient Egypt: so called 'Egyptianizing' architecture. The authors of the various chapters demonstrate that Egyptianizing buildings and monuments have been constructed in many parts of the world, over many centuries. Cavetto cornices, torus mouldings, battered walls, sphinxes, pyramids, obelisks and numerous other features have been used to decorate structures that range from suspension bridges to zoos, from cinemas to reservoirs, and from prisons to museums. These designs have contributed to the creation of an exotic cultural image, and they can convey a range of powerful connotations, open to numerous interpretations. This may explain why the phenomenon of 'Egyptomania' has lasted so long (Rice and MacDonald 2003). Here, we use the term 'Egyptomania' for any kind of approach to anything ancient Egyptian, and 'Egyptian Revival' and 'Egyptianizing' for the use of styles originally from Ancient Egypt (and see below). 'Egyptophiles' are those who are enthusiastic about the subject of Ancient Egypt, and one might wish to coin the term 'Egyptopaths' (in preference to 'Egyptomaniacs') for those who are completely crazy about anything and everything to do with Ancient Egypt!

Visitors throughout history – be they ancient Romans, travellers, missionaries, soldiers of Bonaparte's campaign, or our own contemporaries – have all regarded *in situ* Egyptian architecture with astonishment. The colossal scale of the pyramids and the temples (Werner, [Chapter 5](#); Whitehouse, [Chapter 3](#)), the originality of design, the mystery of the hieroglyphs and the exoticism of the sphinxes and zoomorphic gods are all features which have been claimed to characterize and distinguish Ancient Egypt from other civilizations. This has resulted in an enduring fascination with Ancient Egypt that is very much alive today (Jeffreys 2003: 15–16; MacDonald and Rice 2003), and which continues to influence the imagination of architects, designers and those who commission them.

Egyptomania takes many shapes; sometimes it is the shapes themselves (notably pyramids and obelisks) that are considered to be the very essence of an ancient Egyptian identity; sometimes the Egyptian hallmark is manifested in other self-contained structures such as tombs and garden ornaments that draw heavily on Egyptian designs; sometimes decorative elements in supposed Egyptian style are 'bolted on' to non-Egyptian functioning structures; on some occasions entire

buildings may be modelled on structures that derive from Ancient Egypt; whilst less permanent structures may be built for exhibitions and for theme parks.

This is not the first book on Egyptomania in architecture. There are several renowned accounts (Curl 1994; Humbert 1989; Humbert *et al.* 1994), but we hope that the present work will prompt the reader to address some of the questions and problems that Egyptomania presents, and that have not, perhaps, been sufficiently addressed before. How, for example, can one determine whether a particular feature is truly derived from Ancient Egypt? And why have Egyptian features been adopted in so many parts of the world, when other cultures have not been adopted in the same way? The book also considers the triggers that have led to the adoption of ancient Egyptian elements into different, relatively recent circumstances. It does not provide all the answers, but we hope that, at least, it does clarify some of the questions.

## Manifestations of Egyptomania

### *Pyramids and obelisks*

Both the pyramid (Humbert, [Chapter 2](#)) and the obelisk (Hassan 2003a) are less obviously meaningful by their shapes than might first be imagined. For the ancient Greeks the term for the former was a variety of cake, and for the latter a roasting skewer (Harrison 2003). Nevertheless, both have been adopted repeatedly, in designs ranging from monumental architecture to contemporary art, and they are still often seen today. Pyramids, in particular, never cease to be present in cemeteries, appearing in a wide range of sizes and materials. Even during the last 30 years, further testaments to their popularity have been built around the world, such as the entrance to the Louvre in Paris (Humbert, [Chapter 2: Figure 2:7](#)), a hotel-casino in Las Vegas (Fazzini and McKercher, [Chapter 8: Figures 8:14, 8:15](#)), and pyramid houses, shops and offices in Memphis, Tennessee (Fazzini and McKercher, [Chapter 8: Figure 8:13](#)). Clearly, a relationship of some kind has been established between a 'new' and an 'ancient' Egypt. In the USA, this may have continued the early 19th century American need to define new symbols representative of the country (Carrott 1978: 49–50): thus, the river Mississippi became the 'American Nile', with modern incarnations of Memphis, Cairo, Karnak and Thebes all bordering its banks. Perhaps a continuing search for roots, particularly for ancient ones, has been responsible for the pyramid (as well as other objects of Egyptomania) being adopted for the private residence. A striking example is the domestic complex built for the American Jim Onan near Chicago in the 1980s (Fazzini and McKercher, [Chapter 8: Figures 8:9, 8:10, 8:11 col. pls.](#)); it is reported (Humbert 1989: 90–91, 120–121) that, much to the amusement of the owner, the structures prompted considerable public interest!

An intriguing question in itself is why the pyramid has become so firmly, and often exclusively, attached to Ancient Egypt in the recent and modern, popular (and, for that matter, Egyptomaniac) mind.<sup>1</sup> The Pyramid shape – pyramids – are also to be found in use in ancient Mexico, so why are pyramids not equally associated with Mexico? It is certainly not because the public are aware that diffusionist theories have been rejected by almost all professional archaeologists (Champion 2003: 140–145; Medina-González 2003). Why, then, should Ancient Egypt have a monopoly on the pyramid? The

pyramid is, after all, one of the simplest three-dimensional shapes, and it must surely have been known since humankind's very earliest attempts at design. What alternatives are there? A cube, perhaps? But this would require three times the volume of building materials. A sphere? Impossible, with traditional construction techniques. A regular tetrahedron? But this cannot be built so readily with regular blocks of stone, and the square plan of the pyramid lends itself also to the construction of internal chambers.<sup>2</sup> There is little wonder, therefore, that Ancient Egypt seized upon the pyramidal form, and that other cultures have done the same – without necessarily mimicking Egypt.

Similar arguments may be applied to the obelisk, for it is difficult to imagine what other shape might be adopted to create a tall structure with modest use of both natural and human resources. A column with circular cross section, certainly, although the architect Liégeon argued in 1800: "I believe that a column can be regarded only as forming part of a monument, and not as a monument in itself; whereas an obelisk by itself is a monument, since it has never formed part of any other monument" (Archives Nationales, Paris: F/13 630). Almost anything other than an obelisk or a column would be too flimsy or too 'fancy'. Little seems to be understood (even less than with the pyramid) regarding the popular and extensive spread of copies and pastiches of obelisks, despite the fact that there are an enormous quantity and variety of them worldwide (from Australia – Hope, [Chapter 9](#), to Brazil – Bakos, [Chapter 13](#)).<sup>3</sup> What does seem certain (Hassan 2003a: 27, 35–36) is that the (partially, at least, assumed) original significance(s) of obelisks for Ancient Egyptians – some kind of connection with the sun, and its giving substance to the sun's rays – was completely ignored once they entered the wider European context. Indeed, in this wider context, from having usually been one of a pair in Ancient Egypt, the obelisk is usually erected alone.

Since the ancient Roman and later diaspora of the obelisk, it has been argued that a solitary obelisk attracts attention and adds originality to an environment. But obelisks have not always served as monuments: they have also functioned as ornamentation on other monuments, such as fountains (Hassan 2003a: Figure 2:25), bridges ([Figure 1:1](#); Whitehouse, [Chapter 4: Figure 4:15](#)), tombs, cenotaphs and war memorials; quite frequently they have been used to commemorate an event or a personality. Both as memorials and commemorations, obelisks have served political and social roles in a variety of contexts. For example, they have acted as a dedication to a specific person, such as Chancellor d'Aguesseau in Paris, ca. 1753 (Humbert 1974: fig. 6); to commemorate a technological landmark, such as the 'Canal du Centre' in Chalon-sur-Saône, central France, 1788; and to mark a historical occasion, such as the 1590 battle of Ivry-la-Bataille in Eure, France, 1802; or a notable political event, such as the 'Column of the Jews' in Nice (1826, destroyed in 1863). However, such uses of obelisks as commemorative devices did not automatically exclude perceptions of either charm or a certain esotericism:

Set in the forest of Crécy, this obelisk occupies the centre of crossroads where three intersecting roads converge. This almost gives the crossroads the aspect of a six-pointed star. However, this star, or Seal of Solomon, is formed of the two triangles of water and fire that are joined at the tops: the symbol of the alchemist's work. This is why, according to Fulcanelli, the obelisk shows our planet subject to 'the combined forces of water and fire', when the end of civilization comes.

(Charpentier 1980: 136)



**Figure 1:1** Egyptian bridge, 1828 (restored in 2002), Minturno, Italy (© Jean-Marcel Humbert).

One common denominator in all these contexts, it appears, is that obelisks, whether in a wood or in a city, were adopted to be seen from afar, to attract attention. They can perhaps be taken as the expression of an architectural act designed to be a point of convergence for both eyes and ideas, linking together important events or personalities with significant places.

It is not only ‘obelisk-significance’ that has changed and developed since ancient Egyptian times, but also the modes of construction employed to create them (even if they have often maintained an ancient Egyptian height and volume). None of the modern interpretations are monoliths, and most frequently they consist of stone blocks that are either rendered or left exposed. They have also been constructed from materials such as concrete, or even bricks.

The 18th century witnessed an important innovation with regard to obelisks, namely their presence as park decoration, which became such a tradition that no ‘self-respecting’ Anglo-Chinese garden would have been considered complete without one. Typically they were combined with pyramids, Japanese bridges, Chinese pagodas and Gothic ruins, all of which are usually taken today as having represented a desire for exoticism and nostalgia. Several are still visible, dating from the early 18th century (such as the one installed by William Kent in Chiswick House Park in 1736 (Jekyll and Hussey 1927: 146, 149; Wilson 1984: 193–194)) through the 19th century (e.g. the suburban Pallavicini villa park in Pegli, Genoa (Calvi and Ghigino 1999: 39); Rosati, [Chapter 12](#)), and they remain popular to this day. Some of such modern examples are gigantic, such as those at Bunker Hill in Boston (68 m high), Washington (169 m; Carrott 1978: 139–141; Fazzini and Mc Kercher, [Chapter 8: Figure 8:2](#)), and Buenos Aires (67 m). These are equipped with internal staircases, observation platforms and even lifts.

However, the most important single message deriving from the study of the obelisk that must be appreciated in the context of this book is about changing perceptions of material culture. Such perceptions may alter depending on the nature of the audience as well as the particular historical and political contexts of the occasion. Such differing perceptions may even take on nationalistic glosses. For some people, and perhaps for some nationalities, the obelisk can give an instant reminder of Ancient Egypt. Archaeological artefact and curiosity – even when copied – it became to the French one of the symbols of Bonaparte's expedition, and from the reign of Louis-Philippe it celebrated the fusion of the Egyptian myth with that of the triumphant 'Napoleonic' period. By contrast, there are probably few English people who would associate the war-memorial obelisk on the village green with Ancient Egypt.

In the chapters of this volume the obelisk receives the following epithets: "giving substance to the sun's rays", "the expression of an architectural act designed to be a point of convergence for both eyes and ideas, linking together important events or personalities with significant places", "an instant reminder of Ancient Egypt", a symbol of "justice and truth" (this Introduction); a symbol of "American expansionism", of "liberty enlightening the world", and of "phallus-father, unifying god, military victor, masonic warrior for freedom" (Fazzini and McKercher, [Chapter 8](#)); a pointer to both Imperial Rome and to Catholicism, and an indicator of "the rescue of (Egypt's) past from oblivion by Napoleon and indirectly by Champollion", of "the role of France in safeguarding antiquities for 'world heritage'", and of the "association between Napoleon and a pharaoh famed for his military conquests and empire building" (Bryan, [Chapter 10](#)); "symbols of (Australia's) gold or other mineral output", "symbols of victory" and of "cultural achievement and aspiration" (Hope, [Chapter 9](#)). These many symbolic roles – where they have been correctly identified – are in addition to the obelisk's perhaps less contentious functions as location marker, decoration, commemorative monument or funerary monument.

Thus the obelisks created during the last four centuries have addressed multiple cultural and social needs. Sometimes they have concealed important and original meaning beneath a somewhat banal and repetitive surface; on other occasions, they appear to have been selected simply on grounds of tradition and geometrical efficacy. The very sites chosen to exhibit obelisks are the best sign of their success: in the centre of public places, parks and gardens, and always in a privileged location.

### *Tombs and funerary monuments*

Manifestations of Egyptomania have spread to an extraordinary number of cemeteries throughout the world. Only sometimes do the reasons seem self-evidently clear: the individual who is buried or commemorated in the cemetery may have had very strong links with Egypt during his/her lifetime. Bryan ([Chapter 10](#)) cites numerous examples. On other occasions, the reason is less evident, and 'interpretations' have had to make allusions to an assumed human commonality of concern with an afterlife. This is then somehow brought into a derivative relationship with Ancient Egyptians, who are characterized as having concentrated more effort into death and the hope of an afterlife than any other peoples. Such a view recognizes that an assurance of having a correct interment constituted one of the four supreme

graces to which all Egyptians aspired. The Egyptian, remarked a Greek, puts more heart into preparing his eternal house than setting up a home (Yoyotte 1959: 288).

Apparently based on such perceptions, many have argued that ancient Egyptian architecture embodies a message of eternity: its grandeur and imposing aspect, its solidity and its durability, all seem appropriate to the job of sending the deceased off to the Kingdom of the Dead. Such perceptions stress that although the belief systems and construction methods of Egyptianizing designers have obviously differed widely from those of Ancient Egypt, the important common denominator is the making of due provision for the afterlife and leaving behind a tangible reminder of 'oneself'. The choice of a funerary obelisk shape is explained – albeit only at a very general level – with reference, for example, to its “stern and severe proportions [which] seem to speak of eternal duration” (Gallier 1836: 381).

The first explicit links between Egyptomania and the Christian realm of death took place in churches. There, funerary monuments quickly consecrated an assimilation of ancient beliefs about an afterlife, by promising the deceased, consciously or not, a happy continuation of life, such as the Ancient Egyptians believed in. Sphinxes could also be used in this sense, decorating the tomb of Guillaume de Bellay (Marquet 1983: 22–23) in 1557, followed in 1563 by the funerary column of the heart of François II (Erlande-Brandenburg 1976: fig. 16); however, from the 17th century onwards it was the obelisk and the pyramid which were the forms most commonly adopted for funerary monuments.

Other Egyptianizing funerary forms that are frequently found include 'chapels' (characterized by their entrance which is often framed by columns and topped by a pediment) and mastabas, which resemble a pylon with a door and perhaps windows, but without any non-Egyptian decoration. Both have a small space in their interior, which allows visitors to enter. These give the impression of being little houses built for the afterlife, and their designs are noticeable for their inventiveness. Further forms include pylons with battered walls and cavetto cornice, stelae, hypogeums, naos shrines (for example, the tomb of Joseph Fourier in Père-Lachaise cemetery, Paris – Bryan, [Chapter 10](#)), columns and capitals, winged disks, floral and faunal decoration (notably torus moulding), and (rarely) figures with Egyptian hairstyles and clothes. Such forms were not always restricted to tombs and monuments themselves, but could sometimes also be seen as part of cemetery gateways (e.g. in France ([Figure 1:2](#)) – in Italy ([Figure 1:3](#)) – in the UK (Elliott *et al.*, [Chapter 6](#)) – and in the USA (Fazzini and McKercher, [Chapter 8](#))).

Most published discussions of this subject have failed to consider the extent to which structures and forms must be similar to their putative 'inspirations' before they can, or should, be recognized as their 'derivatives'. Clearly, the forms taken by post-ancient Egyptianizing tombs are very different from those of ancient ones. Externally, with the exception of pyramids – although these are rather small – the former appear inventive, even overly-spectacular, creations. Internally, there are usually no painted decorations describing the life aspired to in the hereafter; and seldom are there sarcophagae or mummies, despite the extremes to which some passionate tomb builders go (Humbert 2001: 165).



**Figure 1:2** The entrance to the cemetery of Terre Cabade, Toulouse, France, designed by Urbain Vitry, 1840 (© Jean-Marcel Humbert).



**Figure 1:3** The entrance to the cemetery at Alberobello, Italy, designed by Antonio Curri, 1882–1905 (© Jean-Marcel Humbert).

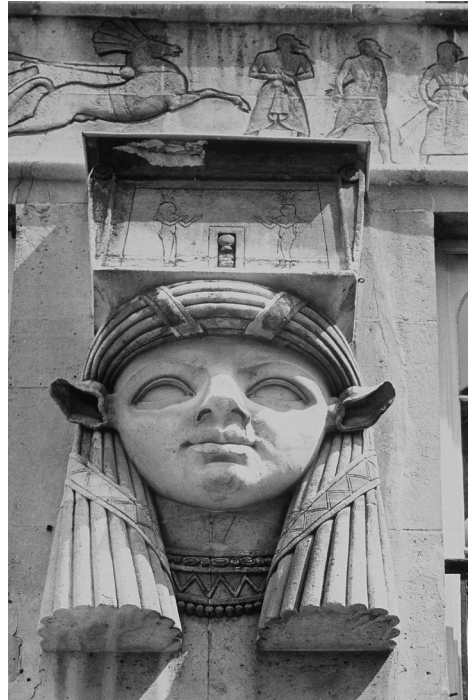
### Applied decoration

There are many examples of Egyptomania in the form of applied decoration. France provides three notable examples from the beginning of the 19th century: the façade of the Biteaux house in the rue des Trois-Frères (Humbert 1998a: 101) which is decorated with mummies and sphinxes, the Hotel Beauharnais which includes a neo-Egyptian porch built in 1806–1807 (Humbert 1998a: 98–102; Bryan, [Chapter 10](#)), and the 34 Egyptian heads – capped with Nemes – which frame the windows of a house built in Louviers in 1812 (Humbert 1988a: 55). Such appliqué works are independent of the architectural style upon which they are superimposed.

Blocks of flats – no doubt on account of their high visibility – are among those whose Egyptianizing decoration are often most striking. One of the most famous of these is the ‘Place du Caire’ in Paris, in which the shops were designed to copy a Cairo *souk*. Built by the architect Berthier, and decorated in 1828 with three monumental Hathor-like heads created by the sculptor G-J. Garraud ([Figure 1:4](#); Garraud 1887: 27, 107; Humbert 1998a: 147–153), the heads were surmounted by a characteristic décor (‘copied’ from *Description 1809–1828*), and the applied frieze depicts chained prisoners with pharaoh in his chariot.

Built in Chicago in 1923, the Reebie storage and removals firm not only reveals the impact that the discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb had on architecture and decorative arts in the United States, but it also introduces the subject of the use of hieroglyphs within Egyptomania. Constructed by Charles S. Kingsley, it was decorated by Fritz Albert with a vast display of polychrome terracottas. Decorative motifs included several full-length statues of Ramesses II ([Figure 1:5](#) col. pl.), representations of the goddess Hathor, winged beetles and hieroglyphic friezes. The colours – pink, coral, fawn, indigo and light green – and golden disks with blue wings and green snakes, appear to shine as brightly today as when they were first created. The influences of ‘Art Déco’ are clear in the use of many of the symbols – particularly floral designs – while hieroglyphs overtly proclaim the function of the building: “I offer protection to your furniture” (Gordon and Nerenberg 1979–1980).

Legible non-ancient hieroglyphs have also been used in Freemasonry. From the mid-19th century onwards, Masonic lodges increasingly displayed



**Figure 1:4** One of three Egyptian heads on the Egyptian flat in the Place du Caire, Paris, designed by G-J. Garraud, 1828 (© Guillemette Andreu).

outdoors what had, until then, remained hidden indoors (Hamill and Mollier, [Chapter 11](#)). For example, a Masonic lodge was built in 1860 in Boston, England, with a design resembling a pylon. The entrance porch was supported by two palmiform columns, covered with hieroglyphs. The top – following perhaps in the footsteps of the elephant house of the Antwerp zoo (see below) – was engraved with a readable hieroglyphic inscription: “In the Twenty-third year of the Reign of Her Majesty the Royal Daughter Victoria, Lady Most Gracious, this Building was Erected” (Curl 1994: 196).

Such use of hieroglyphs raises important theoretical points that need further consideration. It has to be presumed that very few recent observers of monumentalizing architecture and its associated decorative and other features are able to read the ancient Egyptian script, or its modern counterpart. Yet the current use of hieroglyphs in, for example, the Harrods store (as reported in Elliott *et al.*, [Chapter 6](#)) challenges several assumptions commonly made about the nature of ‘authenticity’. The urge to make the modern use of the ancient Egyptian script ‘accurate’ (to the extent and degree that it could have been understood by the ancients)<sup>4</sup> is not necessitated by a wish to have the observer recognize the modern artefact as deriving from the ancient Egyptian. The mere presence of a ‘hieroglyphic-looking’ script should be sufficient to accomplish this aim; in such a situation, the hieroglyphic marks act as signs (rather than symbols) giving out the same primary message – that a representation or object derives from, or is at least related to, Ancient Egypt. Of course, such an overriding message still allows plenty of secondary flexibility: beyond a general allusion to Ancient Egypt, reference may be to the Egypt of any era, to coded messages, to remote civilizations, or even to the observer’s own feelings of ignorance or lack of initiation.

These facts draw attention to the undoubted existence of ‘Egyptomania’ already in the ancient world; then, as now, the ‘exported’ stone vessel with hieroglyphic inscription was almost certainly not legible to the vast majority of ancient Near Easterners (and others) who received and probably treasured such products, but their (non-legible) written inscriptions identified them precisely as derived from Egypt (Bevan 2003: 58–59; Sparks 2003: 39–40, 43, 46). The reading of today’s hieroglyphic inscriptions must therefore be accepted as a conceit, a message about the elite nature of at least some aspects of Egyptomania. Full comprehension is – as it was in ancient Egyptian times also – a matter of social standing and of a supposed cultural sophistication.

Apart from anything else, these examples have drawn attention to the very significant point that ‘Egyptomanic practice’ existed already in antiquity. Egyptian designs were repeatedly copied and adapted throughout the Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds. Few areas of art were untouched; although it is often remarked that it was particularly in architecture and architectural ornamentation that the most astonishing adaptations and uses of Egyptian themes occurred, it is often forgotten that Egyptianizing elements were widespread also in other contexts. Thus, for example, Assyrian palaces housed Egyptianizing ivories, and their walls may have been decorated with frescoes influenced by Egypt (Kaelin 1999).

Perhaps we would do well not to undervalue such ancient Egyptianizing activities and perhaps we should recognize them too as ‘Egyptomania’ (Maehler 2003), thus reserving the term ‘Egyptian Revival’ for the Egyptomania of the past 200 to 400 years.<sup>5</sup>

### *Entire structures*

A few recent buildings were designed to be unequivocally in an Egyptian style, and they were often highly conspicuous. In general, their design relies on temple architecture, and uses columns and capitals to alleviate the heavy forms of pylons. In 1805, architect James Randall (1806: pl. xxiv) designed a manor to be built in England in the Egyptian style which “will, I hope, evince it has beauties not inapplicable to this climate, when combined with taste and judgment”. The exterior of the house, entirely covered with pseudo-hieroglyphs, was to reproduce all the various Egyptian orders; the pylon was to contain windows, and the central colonnade (which was lowered) was to be used as a terrace. The architect also recommended that the interiors should be decorated and furnished in the same style. Unfortunately it was never built. It was therefore the ‘Egyptian Hall’ in London, built in 1811 and demolished in 1904 (Medina-González 2003: 109–111; Werner, [Chapter 5: Figure 5.3](#)), which was the first building to be built entirely in an Egyptian style.

Between 1889 and 1911, two painters – Virginie Demont-Breton and Adrien Demont – had an Egyptian manor built in Wissant, northern France. The ‘Typhonium’, as it became known (Bourrut-Lacouture 1990), constitutes an impressive testament to the continued influence of Egyptian architecture on the artistic world ([Figure 1.6](#)). Fazzini and McKercher ([Chapter 8](#)) describe several private houses in the United States that are built entirely in an Egyptian style. There are also other examples in Europe, with one particularly interesting one in Nice, France ([Figure 1.7](#)). Exceptionally, the style has been employed in Australia (Hope, [Chapter 9](#)), for example in the brilliant contemporary business architecture at 530 Collins Street in Melbourne.



**Figure 1.6** The ‘Typhonium’ designed in Wissant, Pas-de-Calais, France, by two painters, Virginie Demont-Breton and Adrien Demont (© Jean-Marcel Humbert).

It is only over the past few years that material culture studies have come to recognize the way in which different contexts of use and changes in the ‘housing’ of objects may alter the very nature of the objects themselves; similarly, changes in such contexts alter the observers’ perceptions of an object’s ‘meaning’ or ‘significance’ (Ucko 2001). Material culture objects are nowadays considered to have – or at least to deserve – their own biographical histories (Gosden and Marshall 1999). The Egyptomania literature has by and large ignored the effects of the difference in environment and situation between Ancient Egypt and the locations of recent pseudo-Egyptian monuments. This feature of modern ‘reconstructions’ – namely that they often ‘reappear’ in locations very different from their original contexts – has only been remarked upon when reviewing reactions to architectural innovations (see below). Meanwhile, the two black cats of the Carreras building in London (Elliott *et al.*, Chapter 6: Figures 6:2–6:4; Rice and MacDonald 2003: 8–11) have now been parted: “one now stands<sup>6</sup> outside [Carreras’] Basildon plant [in Essex] ... [, while] the other basks in the sunshine outside the factory of Carreras of Jamaica Ltd at Spanishtown leading a life not too far removed from that of the original domestic black cat” (Carreras 1976) (Figures 1:8, 1:9).

Clearly, it is necessary in the study of Egyptomania to assume as a matter of course that the nature of an Egyptianizing monument can never be ‘read’ as if it were an ancient construct (however ‘accurately’ legible its hieroglyphic inscriptions); the ‘modern’ observer will never be able to perceive the monument in exactly the same way as a member of a past society. This is, of course, just as ‘true’ for contemporary Egyptian ‘Egyptomania’ (Butler, Chapter 15; Haikal 2003) as it is for Egyptianizing monuments and activities located elsewhere in the world.

If the perceived meaning of an object may be seen to change according to where it is housed, how it has been curated, or how it is displayed in a museum show-case, the perceived meaning of an Egyptianizing edifice or representation must inevitably change when it is located far from a hot Nile-fed ‘landscape’. Landscapes are cultural constructs at least as much as physical reality (Layton and Ucko 1999), and the snow-covered sphinx (Whitehouse, Chapter 4) must have an impact on the viewer that is quite different from that of sphinxes standing out in the Egyptian heat. Indeed, it may be necessary to assume that the snow-based Egyptian monument within a Russian urban context may be morphologically identical to others in Ancient Egypt (i.e. actual ancient objects transported elsewhere for whatever reasons), or morphologically similar to those of the ancient world (i.e. those constructed recently, and especially to be located outside Egypt, and termed

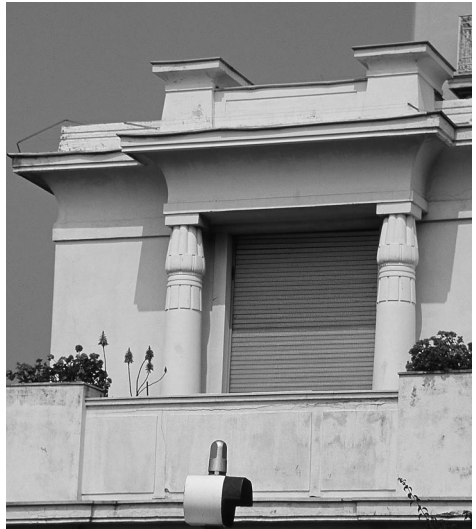


Figure 1:7 Egyptian house in Nice, France, on the Promenade des Anglais, built ca. 1925 (© Jean-Marcel Humbert).



**Figure 1:8** One of a pair of black cat statues originally located in Central London, now outside the Tabacofina-Vander Elst Museum, Antwerp, Holland (© Werner Arts). Height of cat 2.53 m.



**Figure 1:9** The other black cat statue originally located in Central London, now (2003) outside the Carreras Factory, Spanishtown, Jamaica (© Dorrick Gray).

'Egyptianizing'), but they will have quite different significances (Figure 1:10). No studies exist of the reasons why tourists buy miniature sphinxes in Russia, but they will undoubtedly have little to do with ancient Egyptian concerns (Whitehouse, Chapter 4: Figures 4:6, 4:7). Indeed, a recent (January 2003) exhibition in London, "Winter in St Petersburg", "to celebrate the 300th anniversary of St Petersburg highlights sphinxes in the snow in 'presenting' the city in various artistic approaches – real, imaginative, mystical and 'absolute'".

Egyptomania offers countless valuable examples of similarity of morphology that do not necessarily equate with continuity of 'meaning'. The Russian case alone offers several different contemporaneous perceptions of, for example, 'sphinx': from the snow-covered static and 'monumental' to the portable pocket-sized 'souvenir'. Each will be seen differently by the observer according to whether he or she is in Russia or a visitor returned back home; the 'nature' of the depiction will alter as stories are recounted about the snowy surroundings, and they will almost certainly differ if the tales are accompanied by photographs (Walker 2003).

Even without snow, the symbolism of the sphinx is itself both bewildering and instructive (Curran 2003: 109, 119, 125; Champion 2003: 163–164). The Theban sphinx of Greek legend is probably derived from Phoenician sources, and representations of sphinxes have been found in Assyria and Babylonia. The question remains as to why the 'sphinx' is nowadays so readily associated with Egypt. Is it simply that we *want* to associate it with that particular ancient civilization (for some unknown reason), that we inevitably call to mind the Great Sphinx at Giza, or that we were instructed at



**Figure 1:10** Praslov's daughter making use of a sphinx in a way presumably never imagined by the Ancient Egyptians! (1975, © S. Praslov.)

school that sphinxes derived from Egypt? After all, there are presumably few members of the public well enough educated in 'matters sphinx' only to accept those depicted with Nemes headdress as Egyptian, and 'Nemes-less' as non-Egyptian. And why is it that, in ascribing a variety of current, new symbolic meanings to the sphinx phenomenon (Haikal 2003: 134), we appear to have ignored the change of sexual ascription to the sphinx that occurred between Egyptian and classical times? The sphinx of Ancient Egypt was invariably male, and Bryan ([Chapter 10](#)) recounts how the male sphinx re-asserted itself in Paris after Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign.

### The development of Egyptomania in context

The history of Egyptomania has often been recounted (Carrott 1978; Curl 1982, 1994; Conner 1983; Leclant 1985; Humbert 1987, 1989, 1996b, 1998a, b; Humbert, Pantazzi and Ziegler 1994). Although instances of Egyptomania can be traced right back to Ancient Egypt, it is likely that they were less intensive than the great surge of Egyptian Revival which has taken place in the past 200 to 400 years. Many authors, including several in this volume, have drawn attention to particular events that fuelled the phenomenon; those that are usually highlighted are Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt (1798–1801) and the subsequent publication of the *Description* (1809–1828), Champollion's breakthrough in the decipherment of hieroglyphs (1822), the opening of the Suez Canal (1869), and the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun (1922).