

## الموروث من الخدمات و مظاهر الترفيه من خلال مناظر السوق في مصر القديمة The Legacy of Services and Entertainment through Ancient Egyptian Market scenes

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### الملخص العربي:

كان السوق في مصر القديمة أكثر من مجرد مكان لشراء وبيع السلع الأساسية اليومية. لقد كانت مناسبة احتفالية جمعت الناس معًا للمشاركة في مجموعة متنوعة من الأنشطة. كانت الحلاقة والختان وتدليك اليدين والساقين والظفر من الأنشطة الشائعة في الأسواق في القرى المصرية ولعبت دورًا مهمًا في حياة القرية في مصر المعاصرة. تهدف تلك الدراسة إلى استكشاف خصائص الترفيه في السوق بين مصر القديمة والمعاصرة. وسوف يسلط الضوء على استمرارية خصائص الترفيه والتسلية في السوق على طول الخط الزمني لمصر. اعتمدت المنهجية المستخدمة على تحليل مشاهد السوق المصري خلال عصر الدولة القديمة.

### الكلمات الدالة:

السوق - التسلية - المشروبات - مصر القديمة - مصر المعاصرة

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## Abstract

The Ancient Egyptian marketplace<sup>2</sup> was more than just a place to buy and sell daily staples; it was festive occasion that brought people together to engage in a variety of activities. Barbering, circumcision, and massage of the hands, legs, and back were among the activities that were common at market in Egyptian villages and played a significant role in village life in contemporary Egypt.

This study attempts to explore the characteristics of entertainment at the market between ancient and Contemporary Egypt. It will shed the light on the continuity of characteristics of leisure and entertainment in the market along the timeline of Egypt. The methodology used was based on analyzing ancient Egyptian market scenes from the Old Kingdom.

**Keywords:** Market, Entertainment, Beverages, Ancient Egypt, Contemporary Egypt.

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<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive study of market scenes in ancient Egypt, see H. Mokhtar, Market in Ancient Egypt till the End of the New Kingdom “ A Comparative Study of the Legacy in the Contemporary Life”, Unpublished Master Thesis, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Helwan University, 2012.

## Introduction

The marketplace was more than just a place to buy and sell daily staples; it was a festive occasion that brought people together to engage in a variety of activities. Barbering, circumcision, and massage of the hands, legs, and back were among the activities that were common at market in Egyptian villages and played a significant role in village life in contemporary Egypt.

There are several inherited features from ancient Egyptian market that has a great impact on contemporary Egyptian daily life market. This is considered as a rich material for Egyptian intangible cultural heritage.

## Services and Entertainment represented at the market

The market place is not only a place for buying and selling, it was a festive occasion gathering people peddling and carrying out several activities. Barbering, circumcision as well as the treatment of hands, legs and back by massaging, these activities were practiced in rural market in the Egyptian village and formed a main part of village life in Egypt.

Old Kingdom market scenes were depicted close or next to another type of activities which are shown and still practiced in the contemporary Egyptian markets. These were represented close to scenes depict surgical operation of circumcision, treatment of hands and feet, treatment of legs and backs by massaging ,barbers, and treatment of hands and nails. These activities formed main services

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### **Barbering**

Most of information concerning this profession comes from tomb scenes and other textual resources.

The Old Kingdom market scenes were represented either close to the scenes which representing barbers, treatment of hands and legs and backs by massaging and the operation of circumcision or shown in a separate register within the market scene itself.<sup>3</sup> These scenes show barbers shaving heads, faces, and bodies of their clients. Ancient Egyptian barbering was not regarded as highly skilled as that of hairstylists. According to daily life scenes, ancient Egyptian barbers used to sit on a stool on a market place or beneath the tree's shade while cutting their client's hair. There were no barbering workshops in ancient Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> MOUSSA and ALTENMÜLLER, Das Grab des Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep. Old Kingdom Tombs at Causeway of King Unas at Saqqara, ArchVer 21, (Mainz, 1977), pl. 24; A. BADA WY, The Tomb of Nyhetep-Ptah at Giza and the Tomb of aAnkhmaahor at Saqqara, (Berkely: Los Angeles: London, 1978), pl. 32-34; G. STEINDORF, Das Grab des Ti, Leipzig, 1913, pl. 133; H. WILD, Le Tombeau de Ti III, MIFAO 65/3, (Cairo, 1966), pl. 174.

<sup>4</sup> Tassie, G.J.; (2009) The social and ritual contextualisation of Ancient Egyptian hair and hairstyles from the Protodynastic to the end of the Old Kingdom. Doctoral thesis , UCL (University College London), 102

In contemporary Egypt, The barbers, also called *al-mouzayin* in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, were usually sat either at market or close to it (usually beneath the shade of a tree) for the hair dressing of a father or children. They also used to move from a place to another place, the field and sometimes the client's house for example and offer his service for being paid in a certain kind of crops, not in money as barter was the main method of exchange in ancient Egypt and it was still favored by modern Egyptians in the countryside.



**Fig. 1:** An ancient Egyptian barber from the tomb of Niankhkhnun and Khnumhotep in Saqqara and a street barber in 1940's Cairo  
After: H. Mokhtar, *Market in Ancient Egypt*, fig. 58, p. 159.

## Circumcision and other Treatments

Market scenes were depicted close to scenes depicts circumcision, treatments of hands and legs which are shown and still practiced in the contemporary Egyptian markets. Circumcision was carried out by priests in ancient Egypt for ritual purity and hygiene.<sup>5</sup>

Circumcision was also practiced at modern and contemporary rural market by the barber called *halaq el-seha* or *mouzayin*. He is a barber who was responsible for making the hair dressing of children's hair and also for making circumcision for them. Egyptians in the countryside prefer to make this operation for their children during *Mouliids* 'Birthdays' or 'Anniversaries', which are celebrated by both Copts and Moslems to honor special saints or venerated *sheikhs*.<sup>6</sup>

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ministry of Health trained barbers carry out circumcision besides barbering. He is also called *Muzayen*. They were also concerned with treating simple head wounds, head boils and giving injections. 19

<sup>5</sup> M. Megahed, H. Vymazalova, "Ancient Egyptian Royal Circumcision from the Pyramid Complex of Djedkara", in *Anthropologie XLIX/2*, 2011; P. Ghalioungui, *The Physicians of Pharaonic Egypt*; for further reading on a comparative study between ancient and modern physicians see H. Mokhtar, *Popular-Medicine in Ancient Egypt from the Old Kingdom until the End of the New Kingdom "A Comparative Study of the Legacy in Contemporary Life"*, Unpublished Thesis, Helwan University, Cairo, 2018, p. 138-141.

<sup>6</sup> The belief in the existence and powers of 'saints' or (*wali*, pl. *awliya*) is widely spread throughout the Islamic world. Such individuals are often associated with Sufism, or Islamic mysticism. V. J. HOFFMAN, «Saints and Sheikhs in Modern Egypt», in *ISIM 2/99*, 1999, p. 19.

The Old Kingdom scenes carry several representations of Treatments of hands and legs.<sup>7</sup> Such scenes were usually shown close to market scenes.

As for the treatment of hands, legs, and back by massaging, it was practiced at contemporary village market by a man called *megabaraty*, the one who fixes broken bones.<sup>8</sup> It seems that these professions have declined due to the emergence of modern medicine.

### Refreshments

Refreshments are an integral part of ancient Egyptian lives that links between the past and present. It were found in ancient Egyptian market scenes and still forming a main part of daily market during the summer in particular. Beer<sup>9</sup> was one of the most important consumed items in ancient Egypt, it appeared in the Old Kingdom market scenes as a daily refreshment rather than a sold product. There are two Old Kingdom market scenes shows women presenting drinks (mostly beer) to their

<sup>7</sup> SH. El Menshawy, "Manicure and Pedicure in the Old Kingdom", in *Parfums, Onguents et Cosmétiques l'égypte ancienne*, Memnonia chaier supplémentaire 1, 37-49.

<sup>8</sup> M. ALY, "The Scenes of the Local Market in Pharaonic Egypt (An Analytical Study)", in Kh. Daoud (ed.), *Studies in Honor of Ali Radwan*, CASAE 34, vol. 1, 99.

<sup>9</sup> For further reading on Egyptian beverages in ancient and modern times, see: M. Raafat, M. Fouad, "Egyptian Beverages: A Journey through Ancient to Modern Times", in *IAJFTH*, vol. 4/1, 2018, 194-230.

Customers. It seems that beer besides bread was mostly produced at households and the excess were used in trade at markets.<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 2 . a. A Sahlab Seller at Cairo  
Ludwig Deutch Paintings

After: <http://www.orientalist-art.org.uk/deutch8.html>



Fig. 2 . b. A woman pouring a drink into a bowl  
man from tomb S920, Old Kingdom  
After: H.Mokhtar, Market scenes, fig. 60.

<sup>10</sup> Altenmuller, "Trade and Markets", *OE III*, 2001, 447; S. Ikram, "Diet", *OE I*, 2001, 392.



Despite the fact that beer was a common drink in ancient Egypt, its consumption became limited in modern and contemporary Egypt for religious purposes. However, there are other refreshments –usually local syrups- forming a main part of daily market such as *er'usus* and *sobia*. Ice cream is also a kind of refreshments offered at the local contemporary market. A man is usually peddles along with his cart of ices to sell for a small amount of money.



Fig. 3: Local syrups at marketplace in Giza

After: H. Mokhtar, Market Scenes, fig. 62, p. 163.

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## Monkey Keepers/ Quradaty

Monkeys formed an integral part of ancient Egyptian daily life since the Predynastic period onwards. They were probably adopted in daily life for their amusement and delight of witnessing.<sup>11</sup> Monkeys appeared accompanied by a leader in the Old Kingdom market scenes. Monkey leaders were shown walking through the market with baboons or monkeys on leash. There is an assumption that these representations are intended to be humorous reliefs.<sup>12</sup>

Monkey keepers appeared frequently in the Old Kingdom market scenes. Their humorous representation on the tomb walls shows the extension of culture which existed till some years ago in the rural contemporary markets in the streets of Cairo particularly during the summer vacation. Monkeys were trained to dance in order to entertain the public.<sup>13</sup> The *Quradaty* (monkey-keeper) was the one who is responsible for training them. He practices his job by holding a tambourine and sings for the monkey a famous song. The monkey start dancing and the people and young children start to gather around the *Quradaty*. Finally, they pay him in some money, mostly coins.

<sup>11</sup> M. Aly, the scenes of local market, 98.

<sup>12</sup> For further reading on monkeys in the market, see, H. Mokhtar, p. 126-128.

<sup>13</sup> M. Aly, 99



Fig. 4: Monkey Keeper from the Old Kingdom Mastaba of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep at Saqqara and a Monkey Keeper by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

After: H. Mokhtar, Market Scenes, fig. 63, p. 164.

## Conclusions

Old Kingdom ancient Egyptian market scenes present a lively local forum that provided not only goods but also other services and entertainment necessary just above pure subsistence requirements. Some of these scenes reflect several aspects that were exist in modern rural markets. These services are barbering, treatments of hands, legs, monkey keepers for entertaining customers in addition to refreshments presented for clients at market. It is noticeable that some of these

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services are either served at market or next to it. Barbers, monkey keepers, and the refreshments were being practiced in the main street. It is puzzling that Egyptians are still having the same attitudes they already used during ancient Egypt, which drive us to inquire why there is almost no change in some customs that the Egyptians already gained generations after generations.

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### Internet Resources

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