

Civilization Continuity in Egypt

Dr. Mamdouh Eldamaty

On April 14, 2018, the Human Foundation hosted a lecture by Dr. Mamdouh Eldamaty, entitled: "Civilization Continuity in Egypt". Dr. El damaty is a professor of Egyptology, Ain Shams University, and the former Minister of Antiquities in Egypt.

In the beginning of the lecture, Dr. Aliaa Rafea welcomed the esteemed guest and attendees, and highlighted the importance and significance of the lecture's title. She explained that the "Civilization Continuity in Egypt" indicates that there hasn't been any historical discontinuance between the different eras in Egypt, up to the present moment. In this context, she had explained that the "fragmented mind" deals with the past, present and future as separable parts. Nevertheless, a deep or authentic vision would regard history as a flowing river. While we are now looking into the present, we cannot separate ourselves from the past by any mean, because the past exists in the present.

In his lecture; Dr. Eldamaty explained that everything has emerged from Egypt, and then started to spread all over the world. Every phenomenon related to art, civilization, culture, sports and science have its roots in Egypt. However, Egypt's geographic location had a positive impact on the continuity of civilizational expressions within. Egypt is the only country in the world that was able to maintain its structure, geographic location and size throughout five thousand years. The structure of Egypt was formed around the Nile valley, starting from the time when Upper and Lower Egypt were unified during the dynastic period. Moreover; Egyptians were the first nation to take an interest in lawmaking. They have regarded law as the basis of societal, religious and human relationships.

Architecture also has started in Egypt, and the pyramids are clear evidence. Abu Simbel temple complex is another example, with its special architectural style. It is a massive rock temple, which was originally carved within the mountainside in the 13th century BC, reflecting value and strength, and showing the geniality of the artist. All statues and halls, including the hall of

pillars and the Holy of Holies are all sculptured as a one piece carved within the mountain rock of Abu Simbel. The temple of Abu Simbel is also known for an amazing phenomenon that occurs there. The sun's alignment illuminates the faces of King Ramesses II, and Amun-Ra. Despite that the solar alignment might occur in other places, but yet it would have different characteristics. The alignment in Abu Simbel used to occur twice a year, on March 21 (March equinox), and September 21 (September equinox), where the day and night are equal. During the process of saving the Nubian monuments; the temple was relocated 200 meters backwards, and 66 meters upwards. Those in charge of the relocation process couldn't maintain the same angle, and accordingly the days have shifted to February and October.

The beginning of medicine also was in Egypt; therefore ancient Egyptians have mastered the process of mummification. They were the first to manufacture artificial human organs, as they have made an artificial wooden toe for a man who has lived ca. 3100 years ago. Treatments for all body organs were documented on a certain papyrus.

Circumcision was an Egyptian societal habit that was practiced by people, and not the royalty. This is because the king was as holy as the divine, therefore he was untouchable. As for the public; circumcision was a common practice. At a later time it was transferred to Judaism and then Christianity. Afterwards, Muslims also started to practice circumcision, which is mainly a societal practice.

Ancient Egyptians were so clever in mathematics (there are papyruses that include Trigonometry), and astronomy, which played an important role in ancient Egypt. They were the first to invent and monitor the horoscopes, such as Scorpio, Sagittarius and Capricorn. The zodiac signs were depicted in Dendera temple, before it was stolen and moved to the Louvre Museum.

Although Ancient Egyptians didn't list Sham El-Nessim as one of their feasts, but they used to have feasts that are connected to harvest and spring at same period of time (around the Eastern Christians Easter). Just like modern Egyptians; Ancient Egyptians had also known picnics, onions and Fesikh (salted fish). Although such ways of celebrating different feasts have been

developed during the Fatimid era, but we can say that they have their origin in Ancient Egypt. They are connected to spring, harvest and blossoming time.

Moreover, Ancient Egyptians were the first to invent the calendar, and have realized its connection to the flooding of the Nile. This occurred around the time of King Zoser, and his great minister Imhotep, who was also an astronomer, doctor, and architect. When the connection between Sirius and the flooding of the Nile was observed, Imhotep started to stargaze and observe the motion of stars, which was actually the beginning of the calendar. The calendar in Egypt was connected to the Nile, stars and moon. Thus, there was an astronomical connection with the Flood.

Observing the motion of stars started with realizing the length of day and night during March equinox, when the day and night are equal to each other. Then the day becomes longer, the night becomes shorter, and the cycle is complete. Ancient Egyptians monitored the horoscopes, and had observed their times and motions. This enabled them to make their own calendar, which included twelve months, multiplied by thirty days. However, 360 days wouldn't constitute a complete year, that's why they have added five days. We call this today the "Intercalary days", which are additional days. The year in Ancient Egypt was divided into three seasons. The first is the flood season, which starts with the flood in August, and continues for four months, and then it is followed by the second season, which is harvest. Until now, Egyptians in rural areas use these months that are related to the river Nile, and still use their Ancient Egyptian names.

The Coptic year is the oldest calendar in history. In the beginning it was subject to the Egyptian appellation of the seasons relating to the flood. Then, starting from the year 284 A.D. it started being used as a calendar. This means that it existed before that date, but has never been used as a permanent calendar before the third century BC. From that date we had a library and university in Alexandria, which was a source of spreading knowledge and science. The astronomers of the University of Alexandria and the priests have noticed that the calculation of the days has become different, as winter and summer have exchanged their dates. They started to question that, which led King Ptolemy III to issue a decree in the year 238 BC, fixing the calendar. The decree changed the year from 365 days, into 365 days and quarter, so

that the intercalary days would reach 6 days every four years, which would solve the problem of the days carried forward from the previous year. The new calendar was not easily applied, due to the difficulties caused by the priests. However, in the year 46 BC, Queen Cleopatra VII has made her famous journey to Rome, in order to visit Julius Caesar. The astronomer Sosigenes of Alexandria was present with her. Julius Caesar took his advice and applied the adjusted Egyptian calendar, instead of the Roman one.

In the year 1582, Pope Gregory XIII had noticed a delay in the March equinox, as it occurred in day 11, and not day 21. After doing the necessary calculations; they have found that the year of the Julian calendar, which is 365 days, is not correct, in excess of the true solar year (365,2425) by 10 minutes and 48 seconds difference, to create a one day difference every 146 years, which delayed the March equinox for ten days. These calculations were taken into consideration due to the Pope's position, and the date was modified in the Catholic Church, as well as all catholic countries. Nevertheless, the orthodox have refrained from applying such modification, especially in Egypt, because its calendar and feasts are linked to the Coptic calendar. When the Coptic calendar was used in Rome, it came back to Egypt with Octavius Augustus, but with roman names. Although the Julian calendar complies with the Egyptian Coptic church's calendar, but they differ in the names of the months. However, the Gregorian calendar was used in many countries starting from last century. Egypt also started to use it, although it has originally started from there, and then came back to it.

The beginning of Music also was in Ancient Egypt, as there were many musical instruments. Ancient Egyptian illustrations depicted people creating rhythm by using their fingers, or by clapping.

The beginning of theatre and religious drama was also in Egypt, and not Greece. The fact that Greeks had theaters doesn't mean that they were the first to introduce theater. Ancient Egyptians had preceded Greeks in such area. However, their theaters existed inside the temples, and not in special areas like in Greece. The Dramatic Ramesseum Papyrus that currently exists in the British Museum is one of the most famous relevant papyri. It narrates a story that symbolizes the good and evil, and contains an explanation of the religious meaning

of the story, as well as the script. Even the motion on the stage and the tools used in the theater were also depicted.

Women occupied a special place in Ancient Egyptian literature. 4400 years ago; Kagemni's advice was to educate women, so that the men and people in general would be educated, as he said: *"Teach women, learns the man .. and learn the people"*. The percentage of female's education in the Ancient Egyptian society has reached the highest level, compared with other civilizations. Women were able to hold the highest positions at that time. There were women judges, female Chief Doctors in the Royal palace, as well as businesswomen. 22 Egyptian ladies have made their way to be the queens of Egypt. On another note, Egypt was the first country to officially document marriages and divorces. The marriage agreement included the dowry amount that is paid by the woman, and the deferred sum to be paid in case of divorce. Ancient Egyptian women were known for their elegance. They used make-up, jewelry and perfumes, and have also been using Kohl (eyeliner), since 6000 (BC).

Luxor is another evidence of the continuity of civilizational expressions in Egypt. Luxor temple was built for worshipping Amun on a selected holy spot. Later on, a church was built beside it, followed by Abu Al-Haggag mosque. Therefore, up to the present moment we can still witness the same ceremonies that used to occur in the temple at the time of Ancient Egyptians. Mawlid (birth) of Abu Al-Haggag is celebrated at the same time every year in Luxor. There are so many similarities between the two ceremonies. For example; Ancient Egyptians used to carry the boat of Amun during the ceremony, which is the same practice that people do in Mawlid Abu Al-Haggag, without knowing why they do that. Ceremonies used to take several days in the past, which still occurs in the present. The process of animal sacrifice during the ceremony has existed throughout time, from the past till present.

Wrestling also started in Egypt, and is still there to date. There are more than two hundred illustrations that depict wrestling on one middle kingdom's tomb. We can also find drawings of various sports that are similar to boxing, hockey and gymnastics. Things that exist now have their roots in Ancient Egypt, including the sweep (shadoof), plough and waterwheel that are used in Agriculture. Moreover, there are many terms that are used in Egyptian Arabic today that have their roots in the Ancient Egyptian language.

Ancient Egypt has witnessed the first social revolution. This was in the year 2200 BC, at the end of the reign of king Pepi II. It is important to know that Egypt has gone through eras of strength and greatness, and also times of weakness and collapse, more than any other country. This helps us to be optimistic, as we realize that even when things fall apart in Egypt; it regains its strength and greatness once again.

By the end of the Lecture, Dr. Fathy Saleh mentioned that Henry Breasted had visited Egypt around a century ago. He has described the life in Egypt at that time, photographed and documented the antiquities that he has seen, and published all that in a book. Although Egypt has become more westernized within the past century and has departed from his description, but we can still contemplate what he has written:

There is no people whose career can be followed through so long a period as that of the people of Egypt. The civilization of Babylon may be older, though that question is still under debate, but Babylonia so early disappeared as a nation, that the length of its career is shorter by many centuries than that of Egypt. Egypt still survives with a people of the same mental characteristics and the same physical peculiarities as we find in those subjects of the Pharaohs who built the pyramids. They have changed their language once and their religion twice, but they are still Egyptians as of old, pursuing the same arts, following the same occupations, holding the same superstitions, living in the same houses, using the same medicines, and employing the same devices for irrigation and cultivation of the fields, which the student of the monuments finds among their ancestors five thousand years ago. - James Henry Breasted