

DIRECTOR'S NOTE



This special issue is not only the Bulletin's twenty-fifth; it also marks the twentieth year since the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo opened its doors as a portal for communication and cooperation between Israeli and Egyptian academics and intellectuals, and as one of the first fruits of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt.

The five articles published here-in are all based on lectures given at the Center in the last few years.

Three of them touch on art and artisanship from different periods in the history of the Middle East. Irit Ziffer writes on Canaanite art in the third and second millennia B.C.E., after the processes of urbanization and state formation had already made significant inroads in the region. After dwelling on imagery of kings and feasts characteristic of the cultural centers of Mesopotamia and Egypt, Ziffer goes on to demonstrate the influences of these centers upon Canaanite art in findings from Palestine and Syria, including scarabs and ivories that reveal the effects of increasingly intensive cultural ties with Egypt. Sariel Shalev and Mira Freund concentrate on the production of metal work from the Fatimid period, on the basis of a hoard of metal objects found in the archeological excavations in Caesarea, on Israel's Mediterranean coast. Using modern techniques of chemical analysis and comparative findings from a modern-day traditional sand-casting foundry in Islamic Cairo, they show how studies of traditional industries can shed a "human" light on silent archaeological and metallurgical data. Finally, Hana Taragan writes on Mamluk art, and more specifically on the characteristic features of buildings erected by Sultan Baybars in Palestine. Baybars usually preferred not to construct religious buildings from the foundation, but to extend and refurbish existing ones. In many of them, he attempted to legitimize Mamluk rule and enhance his own personal standing in the eyes of the people by figuratively associating his reign with events or persons of religious and historical significance.

The last two articles deal with linguistics. Gabriel Rosenbaum examines the Arabic spoken by the Jews of Egypt, finding clear differences, in

terms of phonology, morphology, and particularly vocabulary, between it and the language spoken by the non-Jewish population, to the extent that Jewish Egyptian may be seen as a distinct dialect. Shlomit Shraybom-Shivtiel, writing in Arabic, comments on similarities between language revivals in Israel and the Arab world. In both cases, the need to express concepts emerging from modern life created a demand for new words and phrases, but borrowings from foreign languages were seen to conflict with the goal of preserving the independence of the national language. In response, the "revivalists" resorted first to finding suitable replacements in their respective literary legacies, and thereafter, when these sources proved inadequate, to coining new words and terms from authentic roots in their own languages (or in related Semitic languages) and to adapting foreign terms to their own language's established patterns. More recently, however, with the stabilization of the new Middle Eastern states and their official languages, a much more tolerant view toward the influx of foreign borrowings has emerged.

In commemoration of the Center's anniversary, we include in this issue brief personal reminiscences by its former directors about their terms in Egypt. In asking them to put into writing the highlights of their experiences, we did not impose any particular theme or structure, and the result is a collection of short essays varying in detail and approach. Nevertheless, they have much in common. All seven former directors emphasize the sense of mission with which they undertook the task, their great personal involvement in the daily work of the Center, their satisfaction at being able to establish direct and close relations with so many Egyptian scholars and students, and the enjoyment they derived from their stays in Cairo.

This issue appears in a sad period for the region and, consequently, at a low point in the activities of the Center, which, despite its essentially academic nature and its lack of involvement in day-to-day regional politics, has always been affected by them for good or ill. It is nevertheless my sincere hope, and that of all who are involved in the Center's work, that this is a temporary phase, and that we will soon return full swing to realizing the lofty ideals for which the Center was created.

David Kushner