

EDITOR'S NOTE



Articles printed in the *Bulletin of the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo* have largely been based on lectures given at the Center, reflecting the variety of themes represented in its program. While we have always stressed Egyptian themes, or those common to Egypt and Israel, there have also been articles that pertained purely to Israeli or Jewish society and culture. This was a response to the interest

expressed by members of the Egyptian academic community – scholars and students – in such subjects as Hebrew language and literature, the state of Israeli drama and theater, or the problems of Israeli society.

This issue, however, happens to be devoted entirely to themes Egyptian, or common to both peoples. That in itself shows the extent of the interest and work invested by Israeli scholars in these subjects, in relation to the ancient period and to more recent times. Both Nili Shupak and Pnina Galpaz-Feller deal with cross-influences marking the relations between Israelites and Egyptians in ancient times. Shupak brings an Egyptological light to bear upon the long-debated problem of the origins of the Jewish people. She looks particularly into certain Egyptian traces in the biblical description of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt and the Exodus. Examples include the very name Moshe (Moses), probably of Egyptian origin; the identification of biblical Ramses with Per-Ramesses, in the eastern Delta; and certain Egyptian linguistic usages that found their way into biblical Hebrew. From these and other clues in the text, Shupak concludes that the biblical story accords well with the realities of the time and place to which it is ascribed and must therefore have at least a nucleus of historical truth

Pnina Galpaz-Feller turns her attention to one particular Egyptian practice, that of embalment, which, according to the Bible, was performed upon Jacob and his son Joseph. Outwardly, this seems to contradict the more

accepted biblical approach to the treatment of a dead person's remains, which, as suggested by the dictum "you are dust and to dust shall you return" (Gen. 3:19), prescribed quick burial and a relatively short period of mourning. Galpaz-Feller finds the solution to this apparent incongruity in the theological approach of the biblical writer. As he portrays it, Jacob and Joseph were not embalmed in the Egyptian way, in order to prepare them for the afterlife, but rather with the aim of eventually removing their bodies and burying them in the land of their forefathers.

Moving across history to the Islamic period and to more material matters, Amalia Levanoni discusses the preparation of food during the Mamluk period. In medieval Cairo, she explains, only people of means could maintain amply stocked kitchens in their homes; most of the lower classes had their food prepared in the market or depended on public kitchens established by charitable religious institutions. There was also a marked difference in the quantity, quality, and variety of food consumed by the different social classes. Meat and sweets were common in the diet of the upper classes, while the poorer ones usually had to make do with bread and local crops of various kinds.

In my own contribution to the issue, I dwell on the image of Egypt in the eyes of the Arab population of Palestine at the end of the Ottoman period. The eighteenth-century campaigns of Egyptian ruler Ali Bey and his general Abu Dhahab in Palestine and the decade-long Egyptian occupation of Palestine that began in 1831–2, generated considerable respect among the Palestinian Arabs for Egyptian power, in contrast to Ottoman weakness. Notwithstanding resistance to Egyptian rule, admiration for the reforms and the law and order instituted by the Egyptian rulers remained widespread. Even as Egypt fell under British occupation, it continued to function as a role model for the Palestinian Arabs, some of whom went so far as to wish for annexation to their southern neighbor.

Victor Nahmias writes (in Arabic) about

al-Shams, an Egyptian Jewish weekly newspaper founded and edited by Yakub Maliki. From 1934 through 1948, it reported upon Jewish affairs in Egypt and throughout the world and defended the rights of Jews everywhere to security and freedom. The paper supported the movement of national rebirth taking place among the Jews of Palestine at the time, seeing no contradiction between that movement and Arab interests. Nevertheless, it saw the Jewish community in Egypt as belonging to the Egyptian people and called upon the Jews to assimilate, politically, socially, and culturally, into Egyptian society.

As I write these lines, my term of duty as Director of the Center is fast drawing to a close. These were two very interesting and challenging years. The political

circumstances prevailing in the area and their effect upon relations between the two countries, Egypt and Israel, did not make our task any easier. We tried, however, to carry on with our normal work with the faith that matters were bound to improve. Moments of joy did occur when, for example, we were able to offer a good, inspiring lecture or when we provided Egyptian researchers, scholars and students, with the material much needed for their work. The last few months, when there has again been some movement toward stability and peace in the area, have proved encouraging, and I do hope the trend continues. I wish my successor, Dr. Sariel Shalev, all the very best.

David Kushner



The Center staff,
September 2003.

Left to right:
Hussein Abdelaziz,
Do'aa Issa,
Nadya Hussein,
Shimona Kushner,
David Kushner,
Amr Zakarya,
Hisham Adel



Lecture at the Center by
Dr. Pnina Galpaz-Feller

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