

Hitler, Goebbels and the Frogs on the Nile A 1931 Political Photomontage

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1. Ancient Egypt in Political Caricature

Since the Napoleonic expedition,¹ ancient Egyptian sceneries and artifacts have played an important role in political caricatures relating to events of Egypt's own modern history.² One example discussed recently by Donald Reid is "The Wafd's last cabinet in pharaonic guise" from 1950, by Iskandar Saroukhan, which taunts the government's purported dedication to pharaonism (fig. 1).³ The caricaturist seems to have used ancient Egyptian templates for some of the depicted personae: E.g., as Reid noticed, the blind minister of education, Taha Hussein, is depicted as the Louvre scribe (with dark glasses). One may also compare Prime Minister Mostafa al-Nahhas who sits as Egyptian king on the throne to the left: with an individual depicted to his right (in a woman's dress but representing a male cabinet minister), the blue crown on his head, the *heqa* sceptre in his left hand, and mace, flail and ankh in his right hand, this is precisely modelled on the depiction of Amenhotep III and his mother Mutemwia in Theban Tomb 226 (fig. 2), to give just one additional example.⁴

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¹ A first example is satirist James Gillray in his 1799 "Egyptian Sketches", see Draper Hill, ed., *The Satirical Etchings of James Gillray* (New York: Dover Publications, 1976). The frontispiece shows the title cartouche supported by sphinxes wearing tricolor cockades on their cocked hats, with a French soldier ape and a naked jester scaling a pyramid: [reference accessed August 4, 2017](#).

² Cf. Donald Reid, *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from World War I to Nasser* (Cairo: American University Cairo Press, 2015), fig. 18 (Mother Egypt nursing Bank Misr; 1920); fig. 70 (Gender anxieties; 1928); fig. 72 (The Wafd's last cabinet in pharaonic guise; 1950). For political cartoons about recent events in Egypt, [see here](#) (special collections: "[Egypt Shouting for Change](#)"; "[Morsi and the future of Egypt](#)"; "[Bloodshed in Egypt](#)"; additional cartoons by using the search terms "sphinx", "pyramid", "mummy", "Egyptian elections"), accessed August 4, 2017.

³ Reid, *Contesting Antiquity*, 324-5 with fig. 72.

⁴ Note that Mutemwia's right thumb became a pointing right index finger in the caricature, either by mistake or intention.



Figure 1: The Wafd's last cabinet in pharaonic guise (1950). Courtesy Donald M. Reid



Figure 2: [Mutemwia and Amenhotep III from TT226](#). Facsimile by [Nina de Garis Davies](#), [Tempera on paper, 1915](#),
Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art (Public Domain)

While criticizing the government for emulating pharaonic Egypt, the artist betrays an even closer familiarity with the country's antiquity, and presupposes the disposition of his readership to engage with motifs adapted from that cultural past. By contrast, the satirical use of ancient Egypt with regard to non-Egyptian politics seems rather limited. Here motifs perceived by the artists and their readership as typical of ancient Egypt and representative of its key cultural ideas are applied outside an Egyptian context because the ideas are seen as best suited to represent points of critique.⁵ An example is a series of illustrations from 1877-1884 by Thomas Nast, the father of American political caricature, who derided politicians of the corrupt Democratic party, in particular former Governor of New York, Samuel J. Tilden, as politically dead through their corruption by putting them into Egyptian coffins.⁶ Adopting Nast's idea in 1892, Victor Gillam published a caricature "Going to the Tombs for their Candidates" in *Harper's Weekly* (fig. 3). It shows the nominees of the Democratic ticket, Grover Cleveland (right), and vice-presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson (left) as mummies in the "political catacombs". The embalming dates on their coffins indicate when they last held political office and then turned into political mummies. From that death, no amount of electricity from "campaign enthusiasm" can revive them; the sarcophagi of two earlier Democratic candidates are visible in the background (fig. 3).

⁵ For such cultural typologies and image citations see Angelika Plum, *Die Karikatur im Spannungsfeld von Kunstgeschichte und Politikwissenschaft. Eine ikonologische Untersuchung zu Feindbildern in Karikaturen* (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 1998), 184-7 (Orientalismen in der Karikatur; more examples 187-200).

⁶ Jasmine Day, *The Mummy's Curse: Mummymania in the English-speaking world* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 57; Bob Brier, *Egyptomania: Our Three Thousand Year Obsession with the Land of the Pharaohs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 146-9 and fig. 7.6; Bernadette M. Sigler and Kevin Stayton, *The Sphinx and the Lotus: The Egyptian Movement in American Decorative Arts* (Yonkers, NY: The Hudson River Museum, 1990), 22f. and n. 31; William Murrell, *A History of American Graphic Humor (1865-1938)* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933-38), vol. II: 1865-1938, 76; Fiona Deans Halloran, *Thomas Nast: The Father of Modern Political Cartoons* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 334; John Adler and Draper Hill, *Doomed by Cartoon: How Cartoonist Thomas Nast and the New York Times Brought Down Boss Tweed and His Ring of Thieves* (New York: Morgan James, 2008), 243.

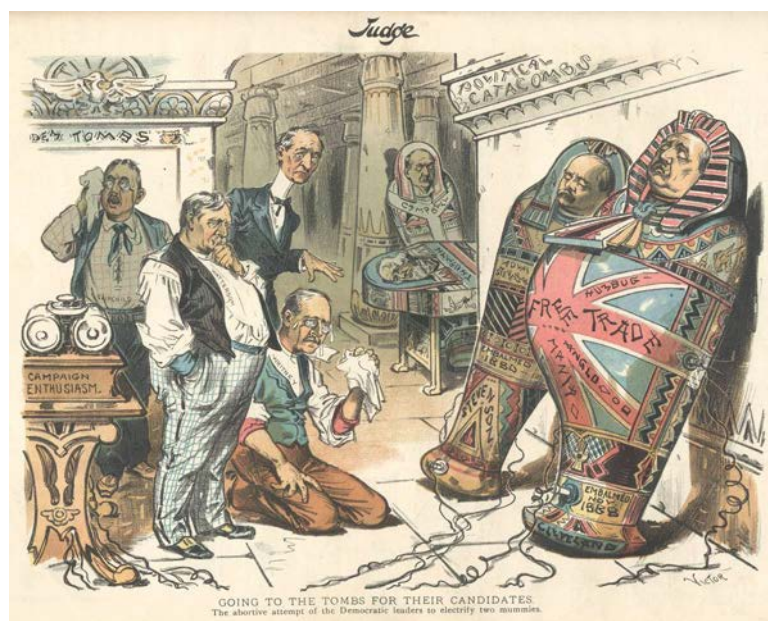


Figure 3: [“Going to the Tombs for their Candidates”, Harper’s Weekly \(July 9, 1892\): 32](#) (accessed August 4, 2017)

2. The 1931 *Eulenspiegel* cover and its sources

The subject of this article is a little known political caricature from the end of the Weimar Republic, featured on the back cover of the May 1931 issue of the radical left satirical magazine *Eulenspiegel* (fig. 4).⁷ It presents a striking artistic representation of Joseph Goebbels as an ancient Egyptian dignitary and the Great Sphinx of Giza with the physiognomy of Hitler, in a Nilotic landscape. The magazine’s editor Otto Nagel (*Berlin 27/9/1894, †Berlin 12/7/1967), a painter

⁷ *Eulenspiegel* IV/5, May 1931. The magazine was named after the fictional Medieval prankster Till Eulenspiegel. On the magazine, see Dietrich Grünewald, *Studien zur Literaturdidaktik als Wissenschaft literarischer Vermittlungsprozesse in Theorie und Praxis. Zur didaktischen Relevanz von Satire und Karikatur. Verdeutlicht an der satirischen Zeitschrift Eulenspiegel/Roter Pfeffer 1928–1933* (Gießen: Dissertation Universität Gießen, 1976); Sabine T. Kriebel: “Radical Left Magazines in Berlin: *Die Pleite* (1919, 1923-4), *Der Gegner* (1919-22), *Der blutige Ernst* (1919), *Der Knüppel* (1923-27), *Eulenspiegel* (1928-31), and *AIZ/VI* (1924-1938),” in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*. Vol. 3: Europe, 1880-1940, ed. Peter Brooker, Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker, and Christian Weikop. Part I (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013), 835-53, 850-1. For a general overview of satirical periodicals in the Weimar Republic, see also Hermann Haarmann: “*Pleite glotzt euch an. Restlos*”. *Satire in der Publizistik der Weimarer Republik. Ein Handbuch* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1999), 123-47.

and left-wing political activist,⁸ used here the new technique of photomontage; the journal had also just adopted two-colour print (black and green).

The cover shows a bucolic landscape on the Nile, with two camel riders, huts, palm trees, and a pyramid in the left background. In the forefront, the face of Hesire – high dignitary of king Djoser in the 3rd dynasty (c. 2700 BCE) – on one of the official's famous wooden panels from Saqqara is replaced by that of Goebbels, Gauleiter of Berlin and Nazi propagandist. The figure strides along the bank of the Nile with a swastika in its left hand; swastikas are also incised on the upper end of its kilt. Behind the figure, 10 frogs line up before the Nile. The legend below them reads: "Conjuration of the holy *Knallfrösche* ("bang frogs" [German for "firecrackers"]) on the Nile by Nazi high priest Joseph Goebbels – to be fired off with more success at the next publicity assault" (*Beschwörung der heiligen Knallfrösche am Nil durch den Nazi-Oberpriester Joseph Goebbels – beim nächsten Reklame-Attentat mit besserem Erfolg zu verpuffen*). On the other side of the Nile, behind the village scene, the dominating element is the Great Sphinx at Giza with the superimposed face of Hitler, his eyes fixed across the Nile on Goebbels, Across the front of the sphinx, an incised inscription in capital letters reads: "All legal!" (*Alles legal!*).

The template used for the Nilotic village scene with the palm trees and the pyramid appears in variations in photographs of the Zangaki brothers⁹ and postcards from the late 19th century or the turn of the century.¹⁰ I provide here four examples of postcards (figs. 5-8). Instead of the small figure of the Sphinx just visible on figs. 7 and 8 below the Khephren pyramid, Otto Nagel moved the Sphinx into the upper right corner of the *Eulenspiegel* cover.

⁸ Erhard Frommhold: "Nagel, Otto", in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 18(1997), 711f.; Erhard Frommhold, *Otto Nagel. Zeit, Leben, Werk* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1974); Bernhard Mensch and Inge Ludescher, *Otto Nagel: Leben und Werk, 1894-1967: Gemälde, Pastelle, Zeichnungen*. Städtische Galerie Schloss Oberhausen (Oberhausen: Ludwig-Institut für Kunst der DDR, 1987).

⁹ John Hannavy: "Zangaki Brothers", in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, ed. John Hannavy (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), vol. I, 1521; Serra Edem, *Views of Egypt by Georgios and Constantinos Zangaki: Examining A Late Nineteenth-Century Photographic Album at the Art Gallery of Ontario* (Toronto: Ryerson University Master's Thesis, 2009), [available online](#) (accessed August 3, 2017).

¹⁰ The scene fit Western stereotypes of Egypt but with the camels would have been anachronistic for the time of Hesire.

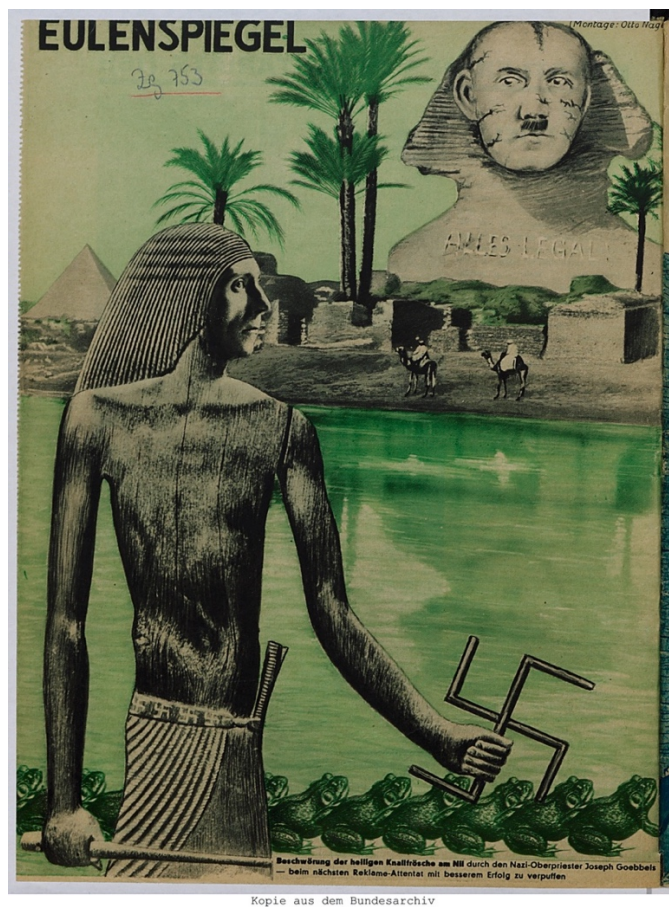


Figure 4: Otto Nagel: Beschwörung der Heiligen Knallfrösche am Nil, May 1931 back cover of the magazine *Eulenspiegel*, Courtesy bpk, Berlin

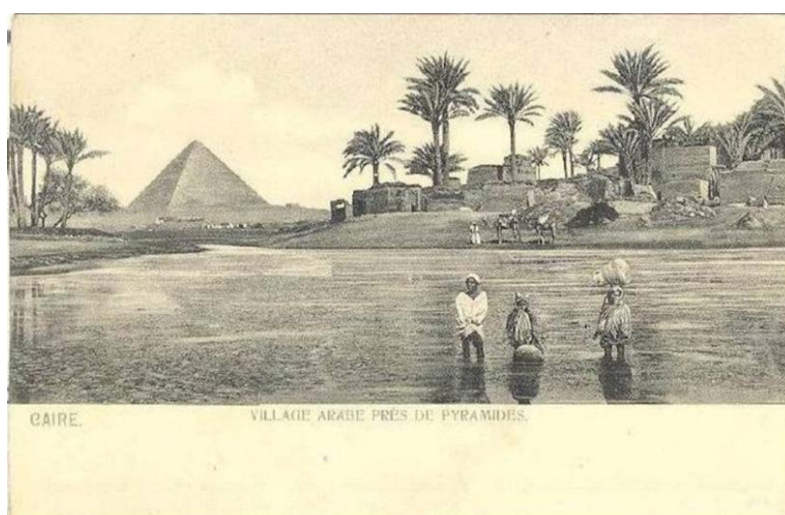


Figure 5: [Postcard \(1\) c. 1900](#) (accessed August 4, 2017)



Figure 6: [Postcard \(2\) c. 1900](#) (accessed August 4, 2017)



Figure 7: [Postcard \(3\) c. 1900](#) (accessed August 4, 2017)



Figure 8: [Postcard \(4\) c. 1900](#). (accessed August 4, 2017)

For the frontal depiction of the Sphinx, a number of photographic sources are possible. In the case of the Hesire panel (Egyptian Museum Cairo, JE 28504 = CG 1427),¹¹ three sources were most likely available to Otto Nagel: Heinrich Schäfer's monograph *Von ägyptischer Kunst, besonders der Zeichenkunst. Eine Einführung in die Betrachtung ägyptischer Kunstwerke* of 1919,¹² Hedwig Fechheimer's *Die Plastik der Ägypter* of 1923,¹³ and Georg Steindorff's revised 1926 edition *Blütezeit des Pharaonenreiches* (where the Hesire panel was added as an illustration; see below 4.).

3. Interpretation and historical context

The *Eulenspiegel* back cover illustration has so far received hardly any attention. An exception is a brief treatment in the 1979 catalogue "Berlin und die Antike".¹⁴ The author of the catalogue chapter, Claus Korte, commented that Nagel replaced scepter, baton and writing utensils of Hesire with the insignia of the *Völkisch*

¹¹ E.g., Mohamed Saleh and Hourig Sourouzian, *Die Hauptwerke im Ägyptischen Museum Kairo. Offizieller Katalog* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1986) n. 21; Ludwig Borchardt, *Denkmäler des Alten Reiches (außer den Statuen) im Museum von Kairo (CG 1295-1808)*, Teil I (Berlin, 1937) 109 and pl. 27.

¹² Heinrich Schäfer, *Von ägyptischer Kunst, besonders der Zeichenkunst. Eine Einführung in die Betrachtung ägyptischer Kunstwerke*. Erster Band (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1919) plate 1 opposite cover page (detail), and plate 10 (full panel).

¹³ Hedwig Fechheimer, *Die Plastik der Ägypter*. Die Kunst des Ostens, Band 1 (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer Verlag, 1923), plate on p. 112. On Fechheimer (who committed suicide on August 31, 1942, to avoid deportation to the extermination camps) see Sylvia Peuckert, *Hedwig Fechheimer und die ägyptische Kunst. Leben und Werk einer jüdischen Kunstwissenschaftlerin in Deutschland*. Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumswissenschaft, Beihefte, Band 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014). On Schäfer and Fechheimer's diverging approaches to ancient Egyptian art, see Sylvia Peuckert: "Überlegungen zu Heinrich Schäfers *Von ägyptischer Kunst* und zu Hedwig Fechheimers *Plastik der Ägypter*", *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 144 (2017): 108-138.

¹⁴ Claus Korte, "Das wechselvolle Bild der Antike in der Berliner Malerei und Graphik von Adolph Menzel bis zur Gegenwart", in *Berlin und die Antike. Architektur – Kunstgewerbe – Malerei – Skulptur – Theater und Wissenschaft vom 16. Jahrhundert bis heute*. Katalog der Ausstellung Berlin – Schloss Charlottenburg, Große Orangerie, 22. April bis 22. Juli 1979, ed. Willmuth Arenhövel (Berlin: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1979), 132-150: 146f. (catalogue number 217). I am grateful to Peter Raulwing for drawing my attention to this discussion of the *Eulenspiegel* cover.

Movement: swastika and truncheon. In the original, the right hand holds a scepter, the front part of which is here covered by the caption and thus made to appear like a baton. Korte continues to say that the artist responded to the Nazi riots aimed at establishing their legend of a Thousand Year Reich sarcastically with the symbols of the millennia-old Pharaonic culture – the royal lion, the hierarchy of officials and religious frog worship based on the idea of the Nile flood and rejuvenation. He concludes that “the National Socialist takeover of power in 1933 made this satirical choice of ancient Egyptian metaphors come true in a macabre way.” And according to another brief reference to the cover in Kristina Hoge’s 2014 Heidelberg dissertation, Otto Nagel exposed the character and machinations of Hitler and his followers artistically by photomontages such as this one in which “Goebbels as Egyptian high priest, equipped with mace and swastika, commands a division of frogs”.¹⁵

The true story behind the illustration is entirely different and is a reflection of an event from March 1931.¹⁶ At the time, Goebbels was under significant pressure both within the National Socialist movement and without. The crisis of the Nazi party and the SA culminated in the revolt of SA leader Walther Stennes (1895-1989) on March 31/April 1, 1931; Goebbels’ role in the conflict had been ambiguous and Hitler invested the full powers of his standing to reaffirm the former’s authority.¹⁷ Goebbels was also indicted in numerous trials for libel; in his own anti-Jewish organ “Der Angriff” (*The Attack*),¹⁸ he had conducted a systematic campaign of vilification against the Jewish vice president of the Berlin

¹⁵ Kristina Hoge, *Selbstbildnisse im Angesicht der Bedrohung durch den Nationalsozialismus. Reaktionen diffamierter Künstler auf die nationalsozialistische Kulturpolitik* (Heidelberg: Dissertation Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 2004), 46: [online](#).

¹⁶ I am indebted to Donald Reid, Israel Gershoni, and James Jankowski who looked at the possibility of and excluded any Egyptian background of the cover (e-mail message to the author, June 15, 2015).

¹⁷ Erwin Barth, *Joseph Goebbels und die Formierung des Führer-Mythos 1917 bis 1934*. Erlanger Studien 119 (Erlangen and Jena: Verlag Palm & Enke, 1999), 98.

¹⁸ See in detail Russell Lemmons, *Goebbels and Der Angriff* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 112-123 focusing on the attacks mounted by Goebbels against Weiss and the libel cases. Note that the German captions of several caricatures here (pp. 74; 121) are not translated correctly into English.

police, Bernhard Weiß (1880-1951).¹⁹ A major point of contention between Hitler and Goebbels was how to assume power, whether by revolution, as Goebbels wished, or strictly legally, as Hitler insisted. Both in the Stennes trial in May 1931²⁰ and in an earlier trial in Leipzig in September 1930,²¹ the courts confronted Hitler, who was a witness in the trials, with a leaflet *Der Nazi-Sozi* authored by Goebbels. In this leaflet, the Berlin Gauleiter had called for a revolution, whereas Hitler, who saw his path of legality threatened by the clashes of the SA with the state, affirmed in both statements made in court that he would always abide by the law. On May 9, 1931, the *Vossische Zeitung* sharply criticized as deceitful Hitler's claim of legality in a column titled "Adolph Légalité".²² This term (coined after Louis Philippe II Duke of Orleans' title "Citoyen Égalité") was applied to Hitler since he adopted a course of legality after his release from imprisonment in Landsberg in 1924 and was also used in a derogatory way by individuals inside the National Socialist movement, such as SA leader Ernst Röhm (1887-1934).²³ Goebbels himself accepted the official adherence to legality in 1931 and commented, "We are now strictly legal, [and with a pun to the title of the Duke of Orleans and the one

¹⁹ Joachim Rott, "Ich gehe meinen Weg ungehindert geradeaus" – Dr. Bernhard Weiß, Polizeivizepräsident in Berlin. *Leben und Wirken*. Dissertation Marburg 2009 (Berlin: Frank und Timme, 2010); on the confrontation with Goebbels: 81-84; Joachim Rott, *Bernhard Weiß (1880–1951). Polizeivizepräsident in Berlin, preußischer Jude, kämpferischer Demokrat*. Jüdische Miniaturen Bd. 61 (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2008).

²⁰ Peter Longerich, *Goebbels. A Biography* (New York: Random House, 2015), 149; Ralf Georg Reuth, *Goebbels* (München and Zürich: Piper, 1990), 149.

²¹ Reuth, *Goebbels*, 175-176.

²² "Adolph Légalité. Hitler's Bekenntnis" (Adolph Légalité. Hitler's Avowal). [Accessible online](#).

²³ Nikolaus Hovorka, ed., *Zwischenspiel Hitler: Ziele und Wirklichkeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Wien and Leipzig: Reinhold Verlag, 1932), 143f. ("Adolf Legalité" as one public aspect of Hitler); Konrad Heiden, *Der Fuehrer. Hitler's Rise to Power* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin: 1944, German first edition: 1936), ch. XVI: "Adolf Legalité", 390-412; often referred to, e.g. Jean-Denis G.G. Lepage, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Third Reich* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2014), 5; Jean-Denis Lepage, *Hitler's Stormtroopers: The SA, The Nazis' Brownshirts, 1922-1945* (Barnsley: Frontline Books, 2016); Michael Balfour, *Withstanding Hitler* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 14; Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 99.

fashioned for Hitler] *egal legal*".²⁴ The inscription on the sphinx's/Hitler's forefront, "all legal", evokes this legality debate. With Hitler's eyes fixed on Goebbels, it signals that Hitler was monitoring the Gauleiter's behaviour in that respect.

The caption of the *Eulenspiegel* cover, mentioning the "conjunction of the holy 'bang frogs'" and a "publicity assault", relate to a particular event and its propagandistic use in March 1931: an attempt on his life that Goebbels himself seems to have faked in order to draw from it political benefit.²⁵ On March 11, 1931, Goebbels advised the SA man Eduard "Ede" Weiß, a follower of Walther Stennes and employee of his magazine *Der Angriff*, to open henceforth all future mail addressed to him personally, justifying this with the fear of an attempt on his life. He then seems to have had a parcel posted by his private secretary Karl Hubertus Arndt Graf von Schimmelmann which contained some firecrackers ("bang frogs"), some gun powder and a matchbox with matches. The parcel arrived at the Berlin office of Goebbels (*Gaugeschäftsstelle*) on Friday, March 13, 1931 and was opened by Weiß, but since there was no real ignition mechanism, failed to explode. The same day, the director of the office, Hans Meinshausen, informed the local members of the Nazi party during a meeting that "at one o'clock noon a ruthless assassination attempt was made on our Goebbels". Before the police was informed, the cover for the March 14 issue of *Der Angriff* had been printed which in large letters spoke of the "assassination attempt on Dr. Goebbels" (*Anschlag auf Dr. Goebbels*) as a "brazen boy's prank" (*schamloser Bubenstreich*). A detailed account followed on the third page of the magazine under the title "Explosives in the mailed parcel – the ultimate measures of desperation" (*Sprengladung im Postpaket – Die letzten Verzweiflungsmittel*), emphasizing in particular the circumsppection of the SA man Ede Weiß who defused the "doom-bringing machine of hell" (*verderbenbringende Höllenmaschine*). In his own diary, Goebbels portrayed the attempt uncontroversially as a fact that if successful, could have cost him his

²⁴ Goebbels in a conversation with Richard Scheringer (Joseph Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1924-1945*, paperback edition, ed. Ralf Georg Reuth, vol. 1 (München and Zürich: Piper, 3rd edition, 2003), 521 n. 78). This statement is also used as a chapter title in Reuth, *Goebbels* (chapter 7; p. 163).

²⁵ Reuth, *Goebbels*, 189f.; more briefly, Longerich, *Goebbels*, 144f. Cf. also Walter Mehring, *Naziführer sehen dich an. 33 Biographien aus dem Dritten Reich* (Paris: Éditions du Carrefour, 1934), 59 where "potting soil and two firecrackers (Knallfrösche)" are given as the parcel's content. The attempt by firecrackers is also mentioned in Ulrich Koch, *Nachgelassene Werke*, ed. Dirk Kemper, Diether Koch, Peter Marmein and Stefan Oyen. Vol. 2 (Hildesheim: Universitätsverlag, 2008), 43.

eyesight and his face.²⁶ In reality, the faked attempt from which he was saved by a SA man seems to have been aimed at showing his gratitude to the SA and at reasserting his standing there. The assassination attempt was quickly debunked. On the same evening of March 14, 1931, the *Vossische Zeitung* reported about the event and warned its readers not to eat the “boiling soup of National Socialist outrage unchilled”; on the following March 15, 1931, the newspaper taunted the “attempt” under the title “The Attempt of the Man in the Street” (*Das Attentat des kleinen Mannes*):²⁷

According to the pyrotechnicians, the effect of this explosive would at best have consisted of a – bang. Now, what impact such a bang could have had on the SA leader Goebbels may be left to the muse of the *Angriff* to describe. Before the people, however, the ‘hero’ of the assassination attempt, the political magician Goebbels, lord of blind worms and white mice, stands disenchanting. So this then was the gist of the matter – a firecracker (‘bang frog’) – this *casus* makes us laugh.

The epithets applied to Goebbels – *political magician, lord of blind worms and white mice* (politischer Zauberer, Herr der Blindschleichen und weißen Mäuse) – refer to cases where Goebbels and the SA tried to disrupt conventions of political rivals²⁸ or screenings of the movie *All Quiet on the Western Front* in early December 1930²⁹ with white mice, blind worms, firecrackers (Knallfrösche), tear and stink bombs, sneezing powder and heckling. The choice of words used by the *Vossische Zeitung* may be intentional in yet another way: the German expression “des Pudels Kern” (the gist of the matter, literally “the poodle’s core”) is taken from a famous

²⁶ Reuth, *Goebbels*, 190 writes that Goebbels deluded himself with the myth (“Mär”) of an assassination attempt.

²⁷ *Vossische Zeitung*, March 15, 1931, 5f. [Available online](#) (accessed August 4, 2017).

²⁸ E.g., a convention of the German National People’s Party (Deutschnationale Volkspartei) in Dortmund: Kurt Pätzold and Manfred Weissbecker, *Hakenkreuz und Totenkopf – Die Partei des Verbrechens* (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1982), 185 = Kurt Pätzold and Manfred Weissbecker, *Geschichte der NSDAP 1920-1945* (PapyRossa 2009), 225); Joseph Goebbels: *Tagebücher 1924-1945*, paperback edition, ed. Reuth, 543; Christian T. Barth, *Goebbels und die Juden* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003), 64.

²⁹ Anders Rydell, *Hitlers Bilder: Kunstraub der Nazis - Raubkunst in der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2013), 37; Cristina Stanca-Mustea, *Carl Laemmle. Der Mann, der Hollywood erfand* (Hamburg: Osburg Verlag, 2013); Klaus-Jürgen Maiwald, *Filmzensur im NS-Staat* (Dortmund: Verlag Peter Nowotny, 1983), 36; *Dortmunder Beiträge zur Zeitungsforschung* 32-34 (1980), 109.

scene in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* where the devil (Mephistopheles) takes the form of a poodle during an Easter walk by Faust and his assistant Wagner. After seeing him transform back into his true appearance, Faust exclaims that the devil was "the poodle's core", a phrase which since has become idiomatic in German. In the context of the faked explosives that Goebbels himself called "a machine from hell" in his journal *Der Angriff*, the author of the journal article may have wanted to taunt the attempt for having nothing hellish at all at its core – just a firecracker. Rather than being a devilish sorcerer, Goebbels is in actual fact nothing but a "lord of blind worms and white mice" and "disenchanted". This portrayal of Goebbels as a false sorcerer may be underlying the choice of the Egyptian scenery, as I will suggest below (fig. 4).

While the proceedings initiated by the Prosecutor's Office in Berlin³⁰ had to be closed in May 1931 without determining a suspect, the president of the Berlin Police stated in his report of March 27, 1931: "Everything that we know must arouse the suspicion that the attempt on Dr. Goebbels' life was conducted by the NSDAP itself as a publicity measure."³¹ Goebbels ended up dismissing his "saviour" Eduard Weiß who then repudiated his earlier statement about the assassination attempt to the prosecutor's office. His new affidavit was printed in Walther Stennes's magazine *Arbeiter, Bauern, Soldaten* ("Workers, Farmers, Soldiers") in May, where Weiß claimed that his former boss had incited him to give a false testimony.³² Stennes called the faked attempt explicitly a "publicity attempt" (Reklame-Attentat),³³ as on the *Eulenspiegel* cover. Another left wing magazine, the AIZ (*Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung, Illustrated Workers' Newspaper*), also reacted to this event with a satirical poem about Goebbels by Erich Weinert (1890-1953). It formulated as follows: "*Schon sprengte ihn beinah ein Schuft / Mit einem Knallfrosch in die Luft*" ("And a rascal almost blew him to pieces with a firecracker [Knallfrosch]").³⁴ Since the *Eulenspiegel* cover caption wishes for the firecrackers "to be fired off with more success at the next publicity attempt", one may wonder whether Otto Nagel was implying a successful assassination of Goebbels.

³⁰ Case number 1 polJ 388/31.

³¹ Reuth, *Goebbels*, 647 n. 105. Reuth also draws attention to the fact that Goebbels started including remarks about an expected attempt on his life in January 1931.

³² Reuth, *Goebbels*, 195, 647 n. 106.

³³ Georg-Franz Willing, *Die Hitler-Bewegung, 1925-1934*. Vol. 4 (Preussisch Oldendorf: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 2001), 251.

³⁴ Erich Weinert, *Gedichte 1930-1933* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1973), 188.

4. Why Egypt?

From an Egyptological viewpoint, the question remains why, from all possible settings for this photomontage, Otto Nagel chose Egypt in order to mount a critique of Goebbels in Germany in 1931. The depiction of Hesire from his wood panel appears in contemporaneous works (e.g., Georg Steindorff's revised 1926 edition *Blütezeit des Pharaonenreiches*) as an illustration of the purported "Nordic" nature of the Egyptians of the Old Kingdom.³⁵ Goebbels would thus appear here as a successor to the "Nordic" Hesire. The frogs provide an additional avenue of interpretation. Frog worship, as adduced by Korte in his interpretation of the photomontage, did not exist in ancient Egypt, with the exception of the minor female frog deity Heqat. We must also assume that the cover was expected to play on motifs that were more generally familiar to the *Eulenspiegel* readership. The one context which features frogs in an Egyptian setting and was widely known, and was thus most probably intended by Otto Nagel, is the second of the Exodus plagues, the plague of frogs. Conjured upon the land of Egypt by Aaron, the deed was then recreated by the Egyptian magicians. Here is the episode in the translation of the *New International Version*:

8 ¹Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. ²If you refuse to let them go, I will send a plague of frogs on your whole country. ³The Nile will teem with frogs. They will come up into your palace and your bedroom and onto your bed, into the houses of your officials and on your people, and into your ovens and kneading troughs. ⁴The frogs will come up on you and your people and all your officials.'" ⁵Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the streams and canals and ponds, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.'"

⁶So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land. ⁷But the magicians did the same things by their secret arts; they also made frogs come up on the land of Egypt. ⁸Pharaoh summoned Moses

³⁵ Susanne Voss, "Wissenshintergründe ...– Die Ägyptologie als 'völkische' Wissenschaft entlang des Nachlasses Georg Steindorffs von der Weimarer Republik über die NS- bis zur Nachkriegszeit", in *Georg Steindorff und die deutsche Ägyptologie im 20. Jahrhundert. Wissenshintergründe und Forschungstransfers*. Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde, Beihefte, Band 5, ed. Susanne Voss and Dietrich Raue. (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 106-332: here 180f., 197.

and Aaron and said, “Pray to the LORD to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the LORD.”

⁹Moses said to Pharaoh, “I leave to you the honor of setting the time for me to pray for you and your officials and your people that you and your houses may be rid of the frogs, except for those that remain in the Nile.” ¹⁰“Tomorrow,” Pharaoh said. Moses replied, “It will be as you say, so that you may know there is no one like the LORD our God. ¹¹The frogs will leave you and your houses, your officials and your people; they will remain only in the Nile.” ¹²After Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh, Moses cried out to the LORD about the frogs he had brought on Pharaoh. ¹³And the LORD did what Moses asked. The frogs died in the houses, in the courtyards and in the fields. ¹⁴They were piled into heaps, and the land reeked of them. ¹⁵But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said.

An illustration of the plague of frogs from the years of the Weimar Republic is from the German-Jewish expressionist painter and graphic artist Jakob Steinhardt (*Zerkow, 23/5/1887, †Nahariya, 11/2/1968).³⁶ It is not unlikely that as artists living and working in Berlin during the Weimar Republic, exposed to the Nazis’ anti-Jewish and anti-Communist attacks, Otto Nagel and Jakob Steinhardt knew each other. For a Passover Haggadah published in 1921 by the Berlin publishing house Ferdinand Ostertag, Steinhardt created woodcuts illustrating the ten plagues. The woodcut about the second plague, the frogs,³⁷ shows a man and a woman backing away in shock from their dining table onto which frogs have leapt; in the field outside the window, two men can be seen slaying frogs, in front of the Nile river and buildings emulating the features of Egyptian temples.

³⁶ Haim Gamzu, *The Graphic Art of Jakob Steinhardt. A Critical Appreciation* (New York: T. Yoseloff, 1963); Gabriel Ma’anit and Ruthi Ofek, *Jacob and Israel: Homeland and Identity in the Work of Jakob Steinhardt* (Tefen: The Open Museum, Industrial Park, 1998).

³⁷ [Jewish Museum Berlin, Inv.-Nr. GDR 93/8/191.](#)



Figure 9: Jakob Steinhardt: Die Zehn Plagen – “Frösche” (The Ten Plagues “Frogs”). ca. 1920, woodcut, 36 x 28.4 cm; Jewish Museum Berlin. Acquisition by funds of the Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin. Photography: Jens Ziehe. Courtesy Jewish Museum Berlin.

Seen against this background, the motivation for choosing the Egyptian scenery for the *Eulenspiegel* back cover becomes entirely clear: Goebbels as the Nazi High priest conjured up the frogs (his “bang frogs”) in analogy to the frogs conjured up by Pharaoh’s priests, as much as he was also able to conjure up blind worms and white mice (in his other publicity assaults). In consequence, he could be seen more generally as the lord of plagues – of blind worms, mice and frogs. However, just as the frogs came, upon the officials’, Goebbels’s “bang frogs” came upon him, but to the cover artist’s satirical regret, by not firing off, did not do their job properly. The faked attempt showed clearly that this high priest of National Socialist publicity was a failed political magician, capable only of a “brazen boy’s prank” that was ridiculous in its execution and contemptible for its impudent illegality. Hitler who, by virtue of the inscription, is here depicted as (purportedly) law-abiding, takes the shape of the Great Sphinx of Giza. If we assume that the (bang) frogs triggered the

choice of Egypt in the first place, the Sphinx then presented itself as an iconic part of that Egyptian setting. Quite possibly, it represented additionally the idea of a guardian – maybe of the lawfulness of the movement. Hitler as the Sphinx has a close, somewhat concerned eye on Goebbels who perhaps not coincidentally walks on the other bank of the Nile, with a different political agenda.

Whether this is how the Communist readership perceived the image within the conflicted time of spring 1931, is difficult to ascertain. It is still interesting to note that only a few days after the faked attempt, on March 29, 1931 and within the context of legality and heightened political tensions, Goebbels evoked a twofold strategy in his diary: for the Nazis to represent both imminent mischief and the mystery of a Sphinx (and he would perceive in the Great Sphinx of Giza above all mystery when he stood face to face with it in 1939 – see below 5.):

My skepticism has not been deceptive. As of yesterday, Hindenburg has issued an emergency decree [against the riots and political excesses, TS] on the basis of §48; with it, the constitution has been completely abolished. Conventions are notifiable, which means, prohibited. Posters and leaflets subject to censorship. Gun control law. This is dictatorship for the young. And Brüning is Göring's friend! Cheers! Long live legality! Absolutely sickening! Now we have to think of new methods of work. This will be very difficult. On top of everything, the simmering crisis with the S.A. and about socialism. There's plenty of reason to be sad. We have made many mistakes. Above all, we have engaged too much with the enemy. Now he betrays us. This is Göring's fault. We had to remain imminent mischief and mysterious Sphinx. After all, they are humans, too. Now we have been unmasked! About-face! Again into the stolid opposition. Fight, work, act, not negotiate.³⁸

³⁸ "Meine Skepsis hat nicht getrogen. Hindenburg erlässt mit dem Gestrigen aufgrund von §48 eine Notverordnung; damit ist die Verfassung gänzlich aufgehoben. Versammlungen anmeldepflichtig, d.h. Verbot. Plakate und Flugblätter unter Zensur. Waffengesetz. Das ist die Diktatur für Jung. Und Brüning ist Görings Freund. Prost! Es lebe die Legalität. Zum Kotzen! Nun müssen wir neue Methoden der Arbeiten ersinnen. Das wird sehr schwer sein. Dazu die latente Krise mit der S.A. und um den Sozialismus. Man hat schon Grund, traurig zu sein. Wir haben viele Fehler gemacht. Vor allem uns zu viel mit dem Feind eingelassen. Heute betrügt er uns. Das geht auf Görings Konto. Wir mussten drohendes Unheil und rätselhafte Sphinx bleiben. Jetzt sind wir demaskiert. Das sind ja auch Menschen. Steuer herum! Wieder in die sture Opposition. Kämpfen, arbeiten, handeln, nicht verhandeln." (Joseph Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1924-1945*, paperback edition, ed. Ralf Georg Reuth, vol. 1, 573).

5. Epilogue

On January 30, 1933 – just 20 months after the *Eulenspiegel* cover had derided the high priest Goebbels as amateurish –, the Nazis seized power with Hitler's appointment as Reichskanzler. On the same day, Otto Nagel was named president of the Reich's Association of Visual Artists (Reichsverband bildender Künstler Deutschlands) but his election was annulled as early as the next day by the new government. With the *Decree of the Reich's President for the Protection of People and State*, issued after the Reichstag fire on February 28, 1933, the civil liberties of the state, including freedom of expression and freedom of press, were suspended. Communist and social-democratic newspapers were declared illegal; including the former *Eulenspiegel* which since January 1932 had appeared under the new name *Roter Pfeffer* (*Red Pepper*). After massive threats by the SA in early March 1933, Jakob Steinhardt emigrated with his wife and daughter to Palestine. Otto Nagel was prohibited to paint in 1934, and 27 of his paintings were declared "degenerate art" and destroyed. Arrested several times, he was imprisoned in the concentration camp Sachsenhausen from 1936 to 1937.

Eight years after Goebbels' fictional encounter of with the Sphinx on the *Eulenspiegel* back cover, on April 6, 1939, Goebbels landed in Cairo for a long-planned visit to Egypt.³⁹ Goebbels described the visit to Cairo, Saqqara and Giza, which was unforgettable for him, in detail in his diary. The trip included a reception for Goebbels and his entourage at the Austrian excavation house in Giza ("We are sitting amidst the pyramid fields in the house of the German Professor Junkers [sic] at tea. All want to hear of the Homeland") and a tour of Giza guided by Hermann Junker, the Institute's director. The visit is recorded in the documentation of the Institute ("Reich Minister Joseph Goebbels with entourage"⁴⁰); film recordings of the visit for a newsreel show how Junker leads

³⁹ Initially planned for January 1938 but then deferred for concerns about Goebbels' security. The visit is described in Goebbels' diaries retrospectively under the entry of April 8. Susanne Voss has reconstructed the visit in detail in her monograph *Die Geschichte der Abteilung Kairo des DAI im Spannungsfeld deutscher politischer Interessen. Band 2, 1929 – 1966. Menschen – Kulturen – Traditionen: Studien aus den Forschungsklustern des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 8, 2 (Rahden/Westfalen: Verlag Marie Leidorf, 2017), 103-109. I am grateful to Susanne Voss for information on the visit.

⁴⁰ For a photograph of the corresponding index card from the German Archaeological Institute Cairo I thank Susanne Voss. On Junker's role under National Socialism see now Susanne Voss, *Die Geschichte der Abteilung Kairo des DAI im Spannungsfeld deutscher politischer Interessen. Band 2, 1929 – 1966. Menschen – Kulturen – Traditionen: Studien*

Goebbels around the site.⁴¹ Most dramatic for Goebbels was to face the Great Sphinx; he notes in his diary:⁴² “And of a sudden, I find myself standing in front of the mysterious head of the smiling Sphinx. I am all churned up. Rarely in my life has a sight shaken me as this one. Most often in such cases, there is disappointment. Here reality surpasses imagination.”⁴³ A detailed description of the visit can also be found in the memoirs of the diplomat Werner Otto von Hentig (1886-1984), who directed the Middle Eastern section (*Orientabteilung*) of the Foreign Office in 1937-1939 and in the spring of 1939 attended the wedding of Persian crown prince Mohammed Reza Pahalavi (1919-1980) with Princess Fawzia of Egypt

aus den Forschungsclustern des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts 8, 2 (Rahden/Westfalen: Verlag Marie Leidorf, 2017); Susanne Voss, “Der lange Arm des Nationalsozialismus. Zur Geschichte der Abteilung Kairo des DAI im Dritten Reich”, in *Ägyptologen und Ägyptologien zwischen Kaiserreich und Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten*. Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde, Beiheft 1, ed. Susanne Bickel, Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert, Antonio Loprieno and Sebastian Richter (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2013), 267-298, and in the same volume, Julia Budka and Claus Jurman, “Hermann Junker. Ein deutsch-österreichisches Forscherleben zwischen Pyramiden, Kreuz und Hakenkreuz”, 299-331; Thomas Schneider, “Ägyptologen im Dritten Reich: Biographische Notizen anhand der sogenannten ‘Steindorff-Liste’”, in: *Journal of Egyptian History* 5 (2012): 119-246: 175-178 (reprinted in Thomas Schneider and Peter Raulwing, eds., *Egyptology from the First World War to the Third Reich: Ideology, Scholarship, and Individual Biographies* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013).

⁴¹ They are contained in: *Das Goebbels Experiment*. Film von Lutz Hachmeister. Drehbuch Michael Kloft (2005). I am grateful to Jacco Dieleman for pointing me to these recordings. See also Samir Raafat, “When Doctor Goebbels Came to Town”, *Egyptian Mail*, 30 September 1995: [online](#), accessed August 4, 2017), with a photo of Goebbels and Junker not present in the film; Reid, *Contesting Antiquity*, 273.

⁴² *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Im Auftrag des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte und mit Unterstützung des Staatlichen Archivdienstes Rußlands herausgegeben von Elke Fröhlich. Teil I: Aufzeichnungen 1923-1941. Band 6: August 1938–Juni 1939*, bearbeitet von Jana Richter (München: K.G. Saur, 1998), 310-312; cf. also the version of the previously-edited fragments: *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Sämtliche Fragmente. Herausgegeben von Elke Fröhlich im Auftrag des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte und in Verbindung mit dem Bundesarchiv. Teil I: Aufzeichnungen 1924-1941. Bd. 3: 1.1.1937–31.12.1939* (München etc.: K.G. Saur, 1987), 589-591.

⁴³ “Plötzlich stehe ich vor dem rätselhaften Kopf der lächelnden Sphinx. Das ist erschütternd. Selten in meinem Leben hat mich ein Anblick so betroffen gemacht wie dieser. Sonst ist man meist enttäuscht: hier übertrifft die Wirklichkeit die Vorstellung.”

(born 5/11/1921) in Cairo as the representative of the German Reich.⁴⁴ He noted in retrospect:

Professor Junkers [sic], who lived directly next to the Menah House, guided us to the Pyramids. Strongly impressed by the monstrous edifices and the organized state power symbolized by them, Dr. Goebbels called his adjutant Müller, in order to give him an idea for a lead article. “There you see, Müller”, he said, “that tens of thousands of people silently did compulsory labor for decades on such a gigantic but senseless edifice, while on our end one grumbles if our Führer has such a functional, beautiful building as the new Reich Chancellery built.” Without directly entering into this observation made in his presence, Professor Junkers [sic] now gave an account of how immensely strengthened the idea of the state emerged from this provision of work during the time of the inundation, and how this social welfare was again and again recognized by the workers in still extant songs of praise. – And all of that apart from the powerful symbolic thoughts of a religious nature. Goebbels was silent, contemplating.⁴⁵

Here Goebbels’ is disabused by Hermann Junker on the purpose of the pyramids and the sphinx – not a senseless edifice but a gigantic project of social welfare that strengthened the idea of the state. This idea resonated with Hitler’s “megalomania in stone”⁴⁶ which tried to be “similar to so few of man’s works / To the eternity of

⁴⁴ *Biographisches Handbuch des deutschen Auswärtigen Dienstes*, 1871-1945, Bd. 2: G-K, bearbeitet von Gerhard Keiper and Martin Kröger (Paderborn 2008), 276.

⁴⁵ “Zu den Pyramiden führte uns der unmittelbar neben dem Menah House wohnende Professor Junkers [sic]. Stark beeindruckt von den ungeheuren Bauwerken und der durch sie symbolisierten organisierten Staatsmacht rief Dr. Goebbels seinen Adjutanten Müller, um ihm eine Idee für einen Leitartikel zu geben. ‘Da sehen Sie, Müller’, sagte er, ‘daß Zehntausende von Menschen jahrzehntelang an einem so gewaltigen, aber sinnlosen Bauwerk still gefront haben, während man bei uns meckert, wenn ein so zweckvolles, schönes Gebäude wie die neue Reichskanzlei von unserem Führer errichtet wird.’ Ohne unmittelbar auf diese in seiner Gegenwart gemachte Bemerkung einzugehen, schilderte nun Professor Junkers [sic], wie die Staatsidee aus dieser Arbeitsbeschaffung während der Überschwemmungszeit gewaltig gestärkt hervorging und diese soziale Fürsorge von den Arbeitern in noch erhaltenen Lobgesängen immer wieder anerkannt wurde. — Und das alles von den gewaltigen symbolischen Gedanken religiöser Natur abgesehen. Goebbels schwieg nachdenklich.” (Werner Otto von Hentig, *Mein Leben – eine Dienstreise*. 2., durchgesehene und ergänzte Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1963), 327. Note that on p. 325, Hentig dates Goebbels’ visit incorrectly to February, not April 1939.

⁴⁶ Johann Chapoutot, *Le national-socialisme et l’antiquité* (Paris, PUF, 2008) = Chapoutot, *Greeks, Romans, Germans: How the Nazis Usurped Europe’s Classical Past* (University of California Press, 2016), 246-8.

the pyramids, perhaps / To the monuments of ancient Rome.”⁴⁷ Whereas the Nazis aspired to emulate the monumentality and continuance of Egypt’s architecture when they had assumed power, a measure deemed to bolster German dignity and the people’s admiration, the Egyptian photomontage from the *Eulenspiegel* did the opposite – critiquing the Nazi movement for its undermining of state legality, and holding it up to ridicule.

⁴⁷ A comparison made by Austrian poet Josef Weinheber (1892-1945) with regard to the Reich’s new *Reichsautobahnen* in his “Ode to the Roads of Adolf Hitler” (“Ode an die Straßen Adolf Hitlers”) (Chapoutot, *Le national-socialisme*, 296 = Chapoutot, *Greeks, Romans, Germans*, 239-40). Hitler himself declared that “[T]he roadways of the Reich must, like the Great Wall of China, the Acropolis in Athens, or the pyramids of Egypt, become a monument on the landscape of history” (Chapoutot, *Greeks, Romans, Germans*, 239).