

Mnemohistories and Receptions of ancient Egypt in Serbia¹

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This paper presents preliminary results and considerations on the reception(s) of ancient Egypt in the Republic of Serbia. Based on limitations to the scope of this paper, we will present main characteristics and examples of the phenomenon, creating a general overview rather than a complete analysis and discussion of all cases available. The complexity of the subject is rooted in the high variety of topics, sources and time periods. Materials included in this study stem from travelogues, public and mortuary architecture and museal artifact collections including paintings and even comic books spanning from the medieval period to the contemporary modern era. Furthermore, all sources regarding the Serbian reception of ancient Egyptian culture can only be evaluated in the context of their contemporary historical and socio-cultural circumstances. Contextualization of examples from Serbia is given in exemplars from other states in the Balkan region and beyond. Given that between contemporary cases in areas corresponding with spatial units, such as national borders, or even on an individual level, there seems to be slight shifts in the respective reception of ancient Egypt culture, it is suggested that using the term *receptions* in plural form instead of *reception* is more appropriate here.

¹ The author is most grateful to Sarah Pleuger and Steffen Berger for their valuable comments during the process of writing this article, and Kristijan Obšust from the Archive of Vojvodina and art historian Dr. Violeta Obrenović, who made available photographs from their private collections and gave permission for them to be used in this work.

1. Historical background

[...] the present world would be different if derived from a different past while the past would be different if constructed in a different present. Past and present contexts move dialectically in relation to each other.²

By analogy, if our reception of the past was different, surely our view of the present would not be the same as well. When it comes to the reception of ancient Egypt in Serbia, the aforementioned premise is the foundation of the hypothesis that the “Serbian reception” does not always correspond with the receptions in other European countries.

The most relevant medieval period serving as a source for this study is the Nemanjić dynasty, established by Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja (who ruled from 1166–1196). The first evidence of the encounter of Serbs with ancient Egypt stems from the period of Nemanjić’s rule. The end of the dynasty is marked by the death of Stefan Uroš V. in 1371. Shortly thereafter Serbia lost the Battle of Maritza (1371) and at Kosovo (1389), after which in 1459 all Serbian territories fell under Ottoman rule, where some of its parts remained for five centuries.

Since medieval times, Serbia has both geographically and culturally been part of Eastern Europe, which politically was under the influence of Byzantium,³ contrasting with the different historic path of Western Europe. Here the receptions of Egypt were largely impacted by imperial aspirations and colonialism. Under Ottoman rule and subsequent periods Serbia never became a colonial power and was essentially part of the same imperium as Egypt after the Ottoman Sultan Selim I. conquered Egypt in 1517.

Similarly to Western Europe, most significant sources for the receptions of Egypt in medieval Serbia were the Bible and historic Greek and Roman scriptures.⁴ However, the mnemohistories of Eastern and Western Europe are generally different. According to Assmann (2017) there are two possible ways to

² Ian Hodder, *Theory and practice in archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 166.

³ Szűcs Jenő, “The Three Historical Regions of Europe: An Outline”, *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 29, no. 2/4 (1983): 131–84.

⁴ Cf. Florian Ebeling, “Ägyptische Freimaurerei zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik”, in *O Isis und Osiris – Ägyptens Mysterien und die Freimaurerei*, eds. Florian Ebeling and Christian E. Loeben (Rahden/Westf.: Verlag Marie Leidorf, 2017), 29–124.

approach an understanding of the past: the historical approach, referring to the processing of events, and the mnemohistorical, referring to the history of the event's reception.⁵ During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Serbian policies featured a deeply-rooted denial of the historical connection with "the Orient" and rather sought out common historical roots with other European countries. Beyond that, Western European countries like France or England were consolidating their imperial power over Egypt, a strategy with which Serbia aspired to affiliate, not as an actual imperial force but rather symbolically through the possession of artifacts representing parts of the Egyptian world.

During most of the twentieth century, Serbia was a part of Yugoslavia. The year 1918 marked the rise of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. In 1929 the official state name was changed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which later became a republic that lasted until 1992. After an initial pursuit after World War II of establishing political connections with the communist USSR, then president of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito (who ruled from 1953–1980) turned his back on the Soviet Union the consequence of which was Yugoslavia facing isolation.⁶ Tito visited Egypt in 1956, one year after meeting Indian Prime Minister Nehru and Egyptian president Nasser at the Suez Canal.⁷ In the same year the three heads of state met in Brioni, publicly announcing their common political goals.⁸ Tito opened the first conference of the newly formed Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade in 1961, and full members of the movement were Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, Cuba, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Mali, Morocco, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, United Arab Republic, Yugoslavia and the Provisional Government of Algeria.⁹ The main aims were decolonization, the peaceful solution of all international conflicts, non-interven-

⁵ Jan Assmann, "Egyptian Mysteries and Secret Societies in the Age of Enlightenment. A 'mnemo-historical' study", *Aegyptiaca* 1 (2017): 4–25, <https://doi.org/10.11588/aegyp.2017.1.40162>.

⁶ Vladimir Petrović, "Josip Broz Tito's summit diplomacy in the international relations of socialist Yugoslavia 1944–1961", *Annales, Series Historia et Sociologia* 24, 4 (2014): 1–16.

⁷ Petrović, "Josip Broz Tito's summit diplomacy", 1–16.

⁸ Dragan Bogetić, "Jugoslavija i nesvrstanost: prilog prevazilaženju predrasuda i stereotipa", *Annales, Series Historia et Sociologia* 24, no. 4 (2014): 615–24.

⁹ Mirna Bogut, *Pokret nesvrstanih i Beogradska konferencija*, Diplomski rad, Filozofski fakultet Sveučilište Strossmayera u Osijeku (Osijek 2018), 29.

tion into the internal affairs of other countries and equality among all nations and peoples – all under the principle of anti-imperialism. Egypt, Yugoslavia and India were thus in the same “third” block in the Cold War, on the forefront of a new political entity that still exists today. The Non-Aligned Movement was created by countries that were (formally) neither aligned with, nor against power blocks during the Cold War. The close long-term cooperation of Egypt and Yugoslavia led to an historic record of frequent diplomatic communication and material gifts. Presents Tito received from Egypt are currently located in the Museum of Yugoslav history in Belgrade, temporally ranging from archaeological artefacts dating to the age of pharaohs to modern day tablecloths.¹⁰

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Serbia and Montenegro became a state union that lasted until 2006, when Montenegro separated and Serbia became an independent republic.

2. Serbian encounters with Egypt

2.1. Travelers

a) Historic sources

The first preserved materials evidencing receptions of Egypt in medieval Serbia stem from local pilgrimages to the locations mentioned in the Bible in the Near East. Travel guides to the “Holy Land” dating back to the seventh century – were written for pilgrims in the Greek language and translated into slavic languages.¹¹ Reportedly the first part of one route from Serbia to Jerusalem and other important biblical cities ran south of the Sava and Danube rivers, through the Morava-Vardar valley to Thessaloniki (Greece), and eventually via the Mediterranean to Egypt or Jaffa.¹²

¹⁰ Aleksandra Momčilović Jovanović, “Gifts for Tito: Egypt in Collections of the Museum of Yugoslav History”, in *Egypt remembered by Serbia*, ed. Emilia Epštajn (Belgrade: The museum of African art: The Veda and Dr Zdravka Pečara Collection, 2011/2013), 65–76.

¹¹ Томислав Јовановић, прир., *Света земља у српској књижевности од краја XIII до краја XVIII века* (Београд: Чигоја штампа, 2007), 9.

¹² Јовановић, *Света земља у српској књижевности*, 36.

The first evidence of travelers to Egypt is the historical text “Vita of Saint Sava” about Rastko Nemanjić (1174–1236), later known as Saint Sava, who was the son of the aforementioned Stefan Nemanja. It was written in 1264 by Domentijan (possibly also a traveler, unconfirmed). Domentijan was a monk in Hilandar, an orthodox monastery in Athos, Greece, founded by Saint Sava and his father Stefan Nemanja in 1198. Both interventions from the fourteenth century and a handwritten version from 1619 were eventually published in the nineteenth century.¹³ There is also a later original version of “Vita” written by Teodosije of Hilandar (ca. 1328), that differs from Domentijan’s text. Teodosije, for example, mentions gifts given to Saint Sava by a sultan, although there is no mention of it in Domentijan’s text.¹⁴ Since it is impossible to determine which source of information Teodosije’s text is based on (maybe not from Domentijan?) there is no reason to conclude its inaccuracy.¹⁵ Saint Sava traveled to the Holy Land twice, visiting Egypt during the second trip in 1234/35.¹⁶ On his journey he visited Alexandria, monasteries in the deserts of Lybia, Theba, Sinai¹⁷ and Cairo during the reign of sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil (1218–1238). Saint Sava traveled from Jerusalem to the monastery of Kalamon, along to the coast of the Dead Sea, to the town of Kerak and finally to “Big Babylon” and “Big Egypt”, which probably refer to parts of Cairo.¹⁸

Dating to the beginning of the seventeenth century, a travel report to Egypt was preserved, written by Lavrentije of Hilandar (a Serbian monastery in Greece) whose destinations were Jerusalem and other holy places named in the Bible. He reports visiting a location in Jerusalem to which Jesus and his parents fled from Herod and subsequently of Joseph’s granaries.¹⁹ Cosmas of Jerusalem (eighth century C.E.) ascribed the Egyptian pyramids as resembling the granaries of

¹³ Stojan Novaković, *Istorija srpske književnosti* (Beograd: Državna štamparija, 1867), 62.

¹⁴ Александар Савић, “Дарови са Нила: нови поглед на сусрет Светог Саве са египатским султаном”, *Зборник матице српске за историју* 90 (2014): 7–35.

¹⁵ Савић, “Дарови са Нила”.

¹⁶ Gerhard Podskalky, “Die Jerusalemwallfahrt in der bulgarischen und serbischen Literatur des Mittelalters”, *Vyzantinoslavica* XVI, 3 (1995): 675–86.

¹⁷ Александар Савић, “‘Измишљање’ Вавилона – географија и хагиографија у блискоисточном итинерару Светог Саве српског”, *Зборник радова Византолошког института* LII (2015): 291–312; Podskalky, “Die Jerusalemwallfahrt”.

¹⁸ Савић, “‘Измишљање’ Вавилона”.

¹⁹ Јовановић, *Света земља у српској књижевности*, 112.

Joseph,²⁰ which persisted as an explanation for the function of the pyramids for a long time.

A more recent example of historical reports from Egypt stems from Jerotej Račanin, who traveled there in the first half of the eighteenth century. In his travelogue he describes personal impressions as well as animals (ostriches), plants (sugarcane, figs, cotton), people and the pyramids:

[...] It is a miracle in the world [...]. And so great in size and height – one can see it from (the distance of) three days of walking.²¹

[...] То је једно чудо на свету [...]. Толика је величина и висина – од три дана хода може се видети.²²

b) Discussion

In the Serbia of the Middle Ages traveling was not a very popular and rather a troublesome activity.²³ Most Serbians were peasants and their feudal proprietors forbade them to leave their homes without permission, as peasants were one of the most important pillars of the society's economy.²⁴ For the vast majority of peasants the only affordable means of transport was walking, which naturally excludes long distances, e.g. to Egypt.

In his text about Sava's travel to Egypt, Domentijan constantly draws parallels between places where Jesus rested according to the Bible and those of Sava.²⁵ It is important to emphasize that Sava was not an ordinary pilgrim or traveler but a saint in the eyes of his biographers, which is why the texts about his journey contain hagiographical elements. Hagiographies generally consisted of well defined chapters, such as *vitae* or miracles/deeds carried out by the saint, but

²⁰ Regine Schulz, "Travelers, Correspondents, and Scholars. Images of Egypt through the Millennia", in *Egypt. The World of the Pharaohs*, ed. Regine Schulz and Matthias S. Könnemann, (Cologne: Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1998), 490–7.

²¹ Translation by Tamara Berger.

²² Јовановић, *Света земља у српској књижевности*, 177.

²³ Смиља Марјановић-Душанић, Даница Поповић, eds., "Путовање – живот у покрету", in *Приватни живот у српским земљама средњег века* (Београд: СЛЮ, 2004), 216.

²⁴ Марјановић-Душанић, Поповић, "Путовање – живот у покрету", 193.

²⁵ Доментијан, "Животи Светога Саве и Симеона", in *Српска књижевност у сто књига*, Књига I (Нови Сад: Српска књижевна задруга, 1970).

more importantly were organized in a specific form which was more significant than the actual content.²⁶

One main focus of Domentijan's text is how warmly Saint Sava had been welcomed to the holy places he visited following biblical narratives and how he gave valuable gifts to people in need. However, in his text he neither mentioned any ancient Egyptian monuments nor any reference to Egyptian culture, which exemplifies why mnemohistory is a key concept for understanding receptions of ancient Egypt, or any other culture for that matter. Domentijan's aim in "Vita Saint Sava" was to show the ideal image of a prince whose diplomatic work led to the autocephalous status of the Serbian church. The journey itself was seen as a challenge that served to prove faith rather than to explore exotic countries. Traveling was not only dangerous but also very expensive, which is why Saint Sava received "a lot of" or even "uncountable" gold and "other utilities" from his nephew King Radoslav²⁷ (ruled 1228–1234). It can be assumed that Saint Sava must have seen some of the Egyptian antiquities on its way, so the fact that not even the pyramids are mentioned speaks about the character of this source. When Nemanjić's state was founded, the focus was on achieving independence for the Serbian Orthodox church (through the diplomatic activity of Saint Sava) and crowning the first internationally-recognized Serbian king, which was achieved in 1217. Political interests were focused on neighboring European countries and the identity of the state was built with the Orthodox Christian religion at its core – a constellation which, at least according to the official texts, seemed to prevent any further interest in extra-European states. At this stage, Serbian mnemohistory merely connected Egypt with events reported in the Bible.

Lavrentije wrote about biblical parallels on his journey, but also included information demonstrating his curiosity outside the pilgrimage narrative. He mentions seeing human bones on the surface of a field "and the bones and skins and everything" (translation T. B.) ("[...] И кости и кожа и све цело [...]").²⁸ About the impression the sighting of mummies might have left on the Hilandar

²⁶ Савић, "Измишљање' Вавилона".

²⁷ Марјановић-Душанић, Поповић, "Путовање – живот у покрету", 209.

²⁸ Јовановић, *Света земља у српској књижевности*, 112.

monk, we can only speculate. His text is highly influenced by the context of the Renaissance, which in addition to religious themes sparked writing about observations and interpretations of Egyptian monuments.

Jerotej Račanin did not abandon the tradition of describing places mentioned in the Bible, as the purpose of his journey is a pilgrimage. However, besides the impetus of confirmation in reverence to holy places, he also intended his texts as a travel guide or an experience report to read for those people who were not able to travel themselves.

The interpretation of travelogues must always take the biography of the author into account as it likely has an important impact on their world views. Whether prince, pilgrim or wealthy adventurer in latter centuries, every travel report shows the respective *Zeitgeist* combined with individual perspectives. Through receptions from travelers, it is notable how Egypt crosses a long way from a marginal, merely spatial, stage for the Bible to the complex phenomenon that awakes the imagination.

2.2. Funerary and commemorative monuments

a) Historic sources

The Petrovaradin Fortress, which was intensely embattled in 1848/49, is located in the city of Novi Sad and contains a military cemetery from the mid-nineteenth century. In commemoration of this event, a monumental memorial was built in 1850 in the central part of the military cemetery, more specifically a massive marble obelisk in the shape of a pyramid on a rectangular pedestal (Fig. 1). It is located above the collective tomb where the members of the Austrian army's command staff were buried. This monument, comparable to a later monument at Gučevo, is an interesting example of the receptions of Egypt in Serbia by Austro-Hungarians soldiers.

The tombs of prominent Novi Sad citizens dating from the nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth century are usually distinguished by a monument, most

often in the form of a high obelisk.²⁹ The surface on top of the crypt at such tombs is usually planted with different vegetation or covered with a grave slab made from granite or marble. The highest concentrations of tombs featuring monumental obelisks can be found in Almaško (Fig. 2), Uspensko (Fig. 3), and in the Roman Catholic Cemetery Complex, although they are also common at Trandžament cemetery.³⁰



Figure 1. Monumental memorial dedicated to soldiers killed during the Revolution of 1848 and 1849, from: the private collection of Kristijan Obšust.

²⁹ Kristijan Obšust, “Istorijska groblja Novog Sada i Petrovaradina kao prostori sećanja”, in *Mapiranje mesta sećanja i kultura sećanja Novog Sada*, last modified November 2017, URL: <https://kulturasecanjabiblioteka.wordpress.com/istorijska-groblja-novog-sada-i-petrovaradina-kao-prostori-secanja/>.

³⁰ Obšust, “Istorijska groblja Novog Sada i Petrovaradina”.



Figure 2. A grave at Almanáško cemetery, Novi Sad, from: the private collection of Kristijan Obšust.



Figure 3. A grave at Uspensko cemetery, Novi Sad, from: the private collection of Kristijan Obšust.

An obelisk-shaped memorial in Topčider Park was sculpted in 1859 by Franc Loran, whose name is engraved in it, honoring the return of Prince Miloš (1780–1860) to Serbia³¹ and the reestablishment of the Obrenović dynasty. The obelisk rests on a pedestal and is decorated with heraldic symbols and wreaths.

Another example of an obelisk-shaped monument on a pedestal was erected in 1880 in honor of the four-year-old Crown Prince Alexander³² and is about 10 m in height. Two years after its erection, part of the ceremony proclaiming the Kingdom of Serbia was held there.

After World War I, memorial fountains in the form of an obelisk and a column³³ were relatively frequent. One example is a fountain located in the village of Viševac and dedicated to Karađorđe, the leader of the First Serbian Uprising (1804–1813).³⁴

Architecture is not a passive entity that displays characteristics of broader social tendencies or *Zeitgeist* – architecture takes an active role in shaping the appearance of cities through ideas of purchasers, designers and architects.³⁵ A person with great stylistic influence was Ivan Meštrović (1883–1962),³⁶ a Croatian and Yugoslavian sculptor, architect and writer. He was educated in Vienna and probably for that reason was “infected” with the art movement of the Vienna Secession. Before World War I he spent time in Rome, where he encountered antique stylistic vocabulary.³⁷ Furthermore he was interested in Croatian national myths and general South Slavic myths. His model for the Vidovdan Temple was presented at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London in 1915, and it was the

³¹ Виолета Н. Обреновић, *Српска меморијална архитектура 1918–1955*. (Докторска дисертација, Универзитет у Београду, Филозофски факултет, Одељење за историју уметности, Београд, 2013), 39.

³² Тимотијевић, Мирослав, “Научник као национални херој и подизање споменика Јосифу Панчићу”, *Годишњак града Београда XLIX–L (2002–2003)*: 236.

³³ Обреновић, *Српска меморијална архитектура 1918–1955*, 129.

³⁴ Апопунтис, “Састанак у Орашцу”, *Политика*, September 2, 1930, 4.

³⁵ Кадијевић, *Александар, Архитектура и дух времена* (Београд: Грађевинска књига, 2010), 21.

³⁶ More on that: Tamara Berger, *Receptions of ancient Egypt: a case study collection* (forthcoming).

³⁷ Ема Алиходџић Јаšаровић, “Projekti Ivana Meštrovića i Harolda Bilinića na Lovčenu u tadašnjem političkom i ideološkom kontekstu”, *Prostor* 26, no. 2 (56) (2018): 320–31.

first exhibition of a living artist in the museum history.³⁸ The temple combines Greek, Roman and Egyptian motifs³⁹ and the composition of past and present, ancient and modern, in a sense forms a specifically South Slavic topoi.⁴⁰ Among other stone plastics, the most outstanding Egyptian reference is the large sphinx at the end of the string of caryatid sculptures.⁴¹ The Vidovdan Temple was supposed to be a place for worshipping the cult of Prince Lazar and commemorating the battle in Kosovo, in which Serbia lost to the Turks in 1389 (on the day of the religious holiday Vidovdan, 28.6.). In the nineteenth century this episode of Serbian history became a very popular topos and of great importance to a national identity in its infancy. Although the temple was never realized, the idea of antique and Egyptian motifs woven into the model related to the extolling of national Serbian history and, merged with the concept of unity among South Slavic people, poses an example of receptions. Linking the motifs of ancient Greece, resembling the idea of the cradle of European civilization, its predecessor Egypt and the heir to Rome, the idea of the Vidovdan Temple conceptually confirmed the affiliation of Serbia and the southern Slavs to the family of European people.

³⁸ Dean A. Porter, “Ivan Meštrović: Current State of Criticism”, *The Courier*, February 19, 1984, 17–28.

³⁹ Alihodžić Jašarović, “Projekti Ivana Meštrovića i Harolda Bilinića”, 320–31.

⁴⁰ Tatjana Petzer, “‘Balkankunst’. Bildende Kunst und Geoästhetik des Balkans seit 1900”, in *Handbuch Balkan*, ed. Uwe Hinrichs, Thede Kahl and Petra Himstedt-Vaid (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014), 733–51.

⁴¹ Petzer, “‘Balkankunst’”, 733–51.



Figure 4. Soldier-cemetery in the city of Subotica from: the private collection of Violeta Obrenović.



Figure 5. Memorial at the cemetery in Subotica, the private collection of Violeta Obrenović.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, obelisk-shaped monuments numerous appeared in Belgrade cemeteries and in cemeteries in other Serbian cities. Obelisks as tombstones became popular during World War I, and subsequently rose to high popularity.⁴² Two obelisks from the late nineteenth century, erected by architect Svetomir Lazić⁴³ commemorating the Dimić family, and the Milanović family have been preserved at the Topčider cemetery in Belgrade.⁴⁴

Located at the highest point of the Gardoš cemetery (Zemun, Belgrade) the engraved three-story pyramid made from grey stone was erected in honor of the 573 members of Zemun's Jewish community, who were killed during World War II. Commemorative ceremonies are still held today in front of this pyramid.⁴⁵ A memorial cemetery dedicated to Red Army soldiers fallen in World War II, in the city of Subotica,⁴⁶ features a series of the same obelisk-shaped tombstones (Fig. 4). The grey surface of the tombstones is highlighted by engraved and coloured red stars. Located in the center of the graveyard is a monumental obelisk on a square pedestal dedicated to 34 unknown soldiers of the Red Army with a Russian inscription (Fig. 5).⁴⁷

⁴² Нада Живковић, “Сеока гробља и појединачни надгробни споменици на београдском подручју: стање и заштита”, *Наслеђе* 3 (2001): 115–20.

⁴³ Тања Дамљановић, “Архитекта Светомир Лазич (1894–1985)”, *Саопштења ХХИХ* (1997): 249–62.

⁴⁴ Нада Живковић, “Топчидерско гробље у Београду – настанак и развој”, *Наслеђе* 8 (2007): 171–7.

⁴⁵ Миодраг Дабижић, “Земунско гробље на брду Гардош II”, *Наслеђе* 8 (2007): 179–96.

⁴⁶ Обреновић, *Српска меморијална архитектура 1918–1955*, 477.

⁴⁷ Обреновић, *Српска меморијална архитектура 1918–1955*, 477–8.



Figure 6. Nušić's home (1922) at Novo Groblje, Belgrade from, the private collection of Violeta Obrenović.



Figure 7. Nušić's home: a side view, from: the private collection of Violeta Obrenović.

A pyramid-shaped tomb is represented by the grave of Branislav Nušić, a Serbian satirist, essayist and novelist (1864–1938). It was built in 1922 and still exists today at the Novo groblje (New Cemetery) in Belgrade (Figs. 6, 7).

In 1927, a chapel was erected at Belgrade's New Cemetery in the Alley of the Greats in honor of Velimir Mihailo Teodorović (1849–1898), a Serbian benefactor and the extramarital son of the Prince Mihailo Obrenović (Fig. 8). The chapel was built in Serbian Byzantine style with elements of late Secessionism.⁴⁸ The base of the chapel is built in the style of an Egyptian temple while the upper part shows a floral and simple ornamentation and decorations partly inspired by Christian themes.



Figure 8. Chapel of Velimir Mihailo Teodorović, Novo Groblje, Belgrade, from: the private collection of Violeta Obrenović.

⁴⁸ Milan Brdar, ed., *The new cemetery in Belgrade – Guide* (Beograd: JKP “Pogrebne usluge”), 13.



Figure 9. Monument on Gučevo, from: the private collection of Violeta Obrenović.

In the first half of the twentieth century, close to border areas and beyond, ossuaries were constructed in pyramidal form, such as the representative monument in Gučevo (between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina).⁴⁹ This monument was originally erected in 1917 by Austro-Hungarians for their fallen soldiers, but they could not finish it because the Serbian army liberated the area (Fig. 9). In 1926 the Reserve Officers and Warriors Association decided to complete the monument and, by adding Serbian national symbols, ascribed it exclusively to Serbian soldiers, although the bodies of soldiers from both sides were interred in the ossuary. Architect Gojko Todić laid out a remodeling plan while the sculptor Milorad Jovanović made the sculptures for the monument⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Обреновић, *Српска меморијална архитектура 1918–1955*, 121–2.

⁵⁰ Ненад Л. Лајбенишпенгер, “Споменик и костурница на Гучеву – део историјата”,

from blocks of artificial stone in the shape of a pyramid, approximately 16 meters in height.⁵¹ The consecration was performed in the presence of Serbian Orthodox Church representatives, former Gučevo soldiers, families of fallen soldiers, and representatives of the king, government and army.⁵² The text on the monument was taken from “The Mountain Wreath” written by Petar II Petrović Njegoš: “Blessed is he who lives forever, he had a reason to be born” (“Благо оном ко довијека живи, имао се рашта и родити”), alluding to the topic of immortality or the afterlife.



Figure 10. Memorial in the city of Topola, from: the private collection of Violeta Obrenović.

in *The First World War, Serbia, The Balkans and Great Powers*, ed. Srđan Rudić and Miljan Milkić (Belgrade: Institute of History and Strategic Research Institute, 2015), 507–14.

⁵¹ Ненад Л. Лајбеншпенгер, “Споменик и костурница на Гучеву – део историјата”, 507–14.

⁵² Ненад Л. Лајбеншпенгер, “Споменик и костурница на Гучеву – део историјата”, 507–14.

Monuments in the form of obelisks or pyramids were also erected in town and village centers (e.g. Topola), as well as memorials at church ports (e.g. Lanište, Bela Palanka) or school yards (e.g. Božurnja, Topola).⁵³ Exemplary are: the monument dedicated to fallen warriors in the defense of Leskovac, erected in 1929, on the road between Leskovac and Vlasotinac; and a memorial erected in the city of Topola by King Aleksandar I Karađorđević and war invalids (Fig. 10).⁵⁴

b) Discussion

Memories may be and certainly are often construed differently on the individual and the societal level.⁵⁵ Individual as well as collective memories are subject to continuous change.⁵⁶ It is true that individuals in one society share a common mnemohistory to a certain extent, but their attitudes and perspectives on the respective mnemohistory might differ from one another. It has to be emphasized that in cases where a form of posthumous architecture occurs regularly in terms of particular space and time, such as the obelisk-shaped gravestones in Novi Sad graveyards, it cannot automatically be concluded that all individuals involved in their erection understood and interpreted the stylistic connection to Egyptian architecture in the same way. It is certainly possible that some purchasers simply followed the fashion, or that architectural fashion in turn led to greater visibility and consequently accessibility of these types of gravestones. Different receptions are visible in more explicit examples like the Nušić's tomb, where the relatively wealthy customer intentionally chose a conceptual solution in the form of a pyramid-shaped tomb as part of a broader phenomenon. Branislav Nušić acted as head of the Committee that established the Belgrade Municipal Court, which in 1930 aimed at building new monuments commemorating a list of historically important persons.⁵⁷ One group of monuments was in the shape of

⁵³ Обреновић, *Српска меморијална архитектура 1918–1955*, 122–4.

⁵⁴ Обреновић, *Српска меморијална архитектура 1918–1955*, 122–3.

⁵⁵ Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt, “Memory and Political Change: Introduction”, in *Memory and Political Change*, ed. Aleida Assmann und Linda Shortt (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2012), 1–14.

⁵⁶ Assmann and Shortt, “Memory and Political Change: Introduction”, 1–14.

⁵⁷ Обреновић, *Српска меморијална архитектура 1918–1955*, 213.

a pyramid and these were erected in historically important places. Nušić's son died in World War I, and at that time it was widespread practice to build a memorial in the form of an obelisk or pyramid in military (and even civilian) cemeteries.⁵⁸ The pyramid commissioned by Gaius Cestius⁵⁹ served as a model for many European pyramids (for example the one in Karlsruhe, Germany)⁶⁰ although it is smaller in dimensions. Formally, Nušić's pyramid is steep and narrow in comparison to the classical Gyza pyramids and rather resembles the Gaius Cestius pyramid or even small pyramids erected for workers in the village of Deir el Medina. The inscription on the tomb also indicates a connection with ancient Egyptian houses of the deceased: "Nušić's home" ("Нушићева кућа"). Regional analogies can be found at the Cabas (latter Grubišić) family tomb in the Miragoj cemetery in Zagreb, Croatia, that was finished in 1932⁶¹ or at Josef Plečnik's pyramid-shaped monument to Sigismund Zois (1927) in Ljubljana, Slovenia.⁶² Plečnik was a part of the Vienna Secession (1901–1909) and a member of the Austrian's Architect's society since 1906.⁶³ Receptions of ancient Egypt in the Secession movement are a very common phenomenon.

The tombs of the Nušić and Dimić families at Topčider cemetery were built after construction plans of the architect Svetomir Lazić, who had studied architecture in Prague under Josef Fanta.⁶⁴ It is worth mentioning that Fanta was one of the most significant Czech representatives of Art Nouveau architecture, which often used models inspired by ancient Egyptian design vocabulary, so it

⁵⁸ Обреновић, *Српска меморијална архитектура 1918–1955*, 112.

⁵⁹ Marike van Aerde, *Egypt and the Augustian Cultural Revolution. An interpretative archeological overview* (PhD Dissertation at Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, 2015), 168.

⁶⁰ Alexandra Becker and Jessica Schwinn, "Ägyptische Motive in Bauten und Denkmälern von Friedrich Weinbrenner", in *Pyramide, Sphinx und Obelisk. Ägyptische Motive in Karlsruhe und am Oberrhein* (Karlsruhe: Badisches Landesmuseum, 2002), 11–4.

⁶¹ Marina Bagarić, "Egypt as Imaged by 19th- and 20th-Century Zagreb: Buildings, Monuments and Street Furniture", in *Egypt in Croatia: Croatian Influences with Ancient Egypt from Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. Mladen Tomorad (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing LTD, 2019), 249–60.

⁶² Breda Mihelić et al., "Plečnik's Ljubljana", in *Plečnik's Ljubljana*, ed. Breda Mihelić and Boštjan Kerbler (Ljubljana: Mesna občina Ljubljana, 2017), 24–41.

⁶³ Breda Mihelić, "By way of an introduction", in *Plečnik's Ljubljana*, ed. Breda Mihelić and Boštjan Kerbler (Ljubljana: Mesna občina Ljubljana, 2017), 4–9.

⁶⁴ Дамљановић "Архитекта Светомир Лазич (1894–1985)".

is possible that he represented a main source of influence on the ideas and style of Svetomir Lazić. Examples of Fanta's works influenced by ancient Egyptian styles are Francis Josef Station (today the Main Station) in Prague (1901–1909), designed as an Egyptian temple with pylons flanking the monumental entrance to the main hall,⁶⁵ or the Hlahol concert Hall in Prague (1903–06) with a gable that is clamped between two pylons and a cavetto cornice above the door. The field above the entrance is decorated with a colorful fenix, known to ancient Egyptians as *Benu*-bird, connected with the *benben*, a legendary place where the sun's rays touched the earth for the first time.⁶⁶

Unlike the Ottoman-administered Balkan countries, some Balkan countries such as Croatia or Slovenia were part of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy until 1918 and thus were influenced by a high interest for producing Egyptian artistic elements.⁶⁷ The formation of the bourgeoisie in the Principality and later Kingdom of Serbia was influenced by the German-speaking countries, more specifically through immigrants and Serbs who were educated there, bringing back the design vocabulary of funerary architecture inspired by ancient Egypt.⁶⁸ In Bosnia and Herzegovina the development of specific local receptions divergent from other ex-Yugoslav states is notable. After the fall of the Ottoman empire, Austro-Hungarians introduced western architectural styles into the capital city of Sarajevo.⁶⁹ One of them was the Czech architect Josip Vancaš, who regularly used Egyptian elements in his work, for example pylons at Villa Mathilde in Sarajevo (1902–1903). While in this part of the Balkans, comparably to Serbia, stylistic connections with the Ottoman past were also denied, a peculiarity of

⁶⁵ Zuzana Ragulová, "Czech Art Nouveau architecture in the cities of Prague, Brno and Hradec Krlové", in *Strand 3. The New Frontiers: Unveiling Art Nouveau Cities III Art Nouveau International Congress* (Barcelona, 2018), accessed August 2020, URL: http://www.artnouveau.eu/admin_ponencies/functions/upload/uploads/Ragulova_Zuzana_Paper.pdf.

⁶⁶ Brian A. Curran et al., *Obelisk. A history* (Cambridge: Burndy Library, 2009), 14.

⁶⁷ See Tomorad Mladen, "Egyptian revival and modern 'Egyptomania' in Croatia", in *Egypt in Croatia: Croatian Influences with Ancient Egypt from Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. Mladen Tomorad (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing LTD, 2019), 245–8.

⁶⁸ Vera Vasiljević, "Stari Egipat u našem kulturnom nasleđu?", *Etnoantropološki problemi*, n.s. god 8. sv. 3 (2013): 825–44.

⁶⁹ Katherine Marple-Cantrell, *Phoenix or Phantom: Residents and Sarajevo's Post-War Changes* (Columbia University, 2008), 17–8.

western influence entailed the preference of the Spanish Moorish Revival style as well as the Egyptian and Syrian Mamluk architecture, e.g. in the Mostar Gymnasium.

Collective memory can be divided into two main types: one that is connected with origins and another that consists of one's own memories or the "recent past".⁷⁰ This division can be adduced as an explanation for some architectural tendencies in Belgrade during the nineteenth century. British traveler Kinglake had visited Belgrade in 1834–1835 and described it as an "oriental" city.⁷¹ In 1877 Turkish garrisons left Belgrade and subsequently the city's architecture displayed less and less Turkish stylistic vocabulary, increasingly aligning with other contemporary European cities. In this regard, the recent "oriental" past has been disclaimed by the acceptance of European tendencies in the making of memorial architecture. Obelisk-shaped monuments became very common in commemorating national heroes and historical events and figures.⁷² The first Obelisk in Zagreb, Croatia was erected in 1835, and another early example can be found in Maksimir Park (1843).⁷³ Serbian examples are common from the second half of the nineteenth century, corresponding with political changes. These political, social and historical contexts of past receptions of objects/texts can often only be recognized in hindsight with temporal distance.

The Monument dedicated to soldiers killed during the Revolution of 1848 and 1849 in Novi Sad and the one in Gučevo are specific examples of memorials representing receptions by foreigners, who influenced the stylistic taste of people indigenous to the area. In the case of Gučevo the existing "skeleton" was demanded to be refurbished according to the taste of the locals. In turn there are also examples of receptions by Serbs stylistically expressed outside of Serbia. While these are not included in this study, they could be subject to future research.

⁷⁰ Jan Asmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C.H.Beck, 1997), 51–2.

⁷¹ Alexander William Kinglake, *Eothen* (London: John Lehmann, 1948), 26.

⁷² Обреновић, *Српска меморијална архитектура 1918–1955*, 39.

⁷³ Bagarić, "Egypt as Imaged by 19-th- and 20-th-Century Zagreb", 249–60.

2.3. Egypt in non-memorial architecture

The stylistic vocabulary of ancient Egypt has shaped the Serbian cultural identity and spaces through the connection with other European identities. Not only did the references to ancient Egypt symbolize ideas of immortality and eternal life, but they also provided a set of aesthetic tools that shaped the overall look of Serbian cities and towns.

One example is The National Bank building in Belgrade, built in 1889 and 1922–1925, which retains its original appearance until today,⁷⁴ e.g. through visible decorative obelisks on the top of its roof. The architect of the National Bank was Konstantin Jovanović (1849–1923), who was born in Vienna and was a student of Gottfried Semper.⁷⁵ Semper designed some of the sections of the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, which in turn largely influenced his later work.⁷⁶

“Hotel Avala” at Avala Mountain near Belgrade, was designed by architect Viktor Lukomski and built in 1931. The building has elements of decoration in the Serbo-Byzantine style, combined with contemporarily modern architectural solutions. Here the most significant architectural elements for this study are two large sphinxes carved from artificial stone flanking a stairway leading to a terrace on the north side of the building by the Russian-born sculptor Vladimir Zagorodnyuk, who also contributed decorative plastics for the facade.

In the last decade of the twentieth century the shopping mall “Piramida” (Pyramid), with a pyramid-shaped glass dome, was built in New Belgrade. The pyramid fits into the brutalist architecture of socialist realism in this part of the city, and thus shows how in Belgrade, Egyptian themes can be incorporated both into historical styles and modern architecture.

⁷⁴ Гордана Гордић, “Палата Народне банке”, *Наслеђе* 2 (1999): 85–94.

⁷⁵ Vasiljević, “Stari Egipat u našem kulturnom nasleđu?”, 825–44.

⁷⁶ James Steven Curl, *The Egyptian revival. Ancient Egypt as the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 323.

2.4. Gender studies and receptions of ancient Egypt

A particularly interesting example demonstrating receptions of ancient Egypt in comics and graphic novels in Serbia is “Princess Ru”, written and drawn by Đorđe Lobačev (Figs. 11, 12). One aspect of stereotypes about ancient Egypt regularly occurring in comic books might be rooted in common codes of communication between author and readership.⁷⁷ Ancient Egypt belongs to the global collective history and, outside of academic settings, every individual can freely express themselves in subjective commentary on the past. Artistic freedom provides a certain level of deliverance from the obligation to do extensive research on a topic before for example drawing and wording a comic book: a superficial mentioning of ancient Egypt will instantly prompt average readers to find an associative surrounding setting or context for the scene in question previously stored in their mental map. “Princess Ru” serves as a great example for creating a stage for a story with very few allusions to ancient Egypt itself. Apart from the extremely schematic head coverings of some characters, sometimes featuring decorations of an ureus, there are only few direct visual references to ancient Egypt. However, some motifs from the domain of popular culture, such as Princess Ru as a revived mummy; secret knowledge hidden from mortals; timeless female beauty⁷⁸ and similar topics are referenced. Osiris is depicted in heaven and not in the underworld, so his resemblance is actually greater with Greek mythology or even Christian themes than with Egyptian mythology. The army of the Egyptian Ahmes consists of human-animal hybrids, such as human-snakes and human-birds, alluding to common depictions of Egyptian deities. A depiction of modern Egypt included the stereotypical elements of dancers and hashish as well as “black people”, while Princess Ru as a revived female Egyptian mummy is depicted with white skin corresponding with representations of women in ancient Egyptian art. Furthermore her character is drawn as passive and feminine, although the reason for that does not

⁷⁷ Vera Vasiljević, “Princess Ru and Papyrus - Stereotypes on ancient Egypt in graphic novels”, *Etnoantropološki problemi*, n. s. god 7. sv. 3 (2012): 763–88.

⁷⁸ Đorđe Lobačev, “Princeza Ru”, in *Mika Miš* (Belgrade 1938), 205–59, reprint in Žika Bogdanović, ed., *Pegaz*, specijalni broj 2 (1989), 25–86.

necessarily have to be rooted in orientalist stereotypes,⁷⁹ but in the more general tendency of exaggerated gender characteristics in comics. Narratives like *Princess Ru*, which in this context acts as a metaphor for the passiveness of femininity in stereotypical Egypt and adjacent areas are not new and are quite common in products of pop-culture prevalently produced by men for men.



Figures 11, 12. From the comic “Princess Ru” by Đorđe Lobačev, from: Pegaz, specijalni broj 2, (1989): 30, 57.

There are few but nonetheless substantial examples of receptions from a female point of view. One of them is preserved from Jelena J. Dimitrijević (1862–1954), a feminist and passionate traveler and part of a new generation of educated female Serbian writers.⁸⁰ Dimitrijević was well-traveled and amongst other topics addressed her journey to Egypt (1926) in her writings. Interestingly she chose an unusual point of view; through the perspective of classical travel descriptions of landscapes and travel routes subtly interspersed with her feminist views and ideas.⁸¹ Describing historical places she saw in Egypt and the social position of women, she came into contact with the feminist movement in Egypt and

⁷⁹ Cf. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, New York, Toronto, Dublin, Camberwell, New Delhi, Rosedale, Johannesburg: Penguin Books, 2003), 138.

⁸⁰ Svetlana Tomić, “The travel writings of Jelena J. Dimitrijević: Feminist Politics and privileged Intellectual Identity”, in *On the Very Edge: Modernism and Modernity in the Arts and Architecture of Interwar Serbia 1918–1941*, ed. Jelena Bogdanovic, Lilen F. Robinson and Igor Marjanović (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 115–35.

⁸¹ Tomić, “The travel writings of Jelena J. Dimitrijević”, 115–35.

introduced completely new ideas of ancient and modern Egypt to female Serbian readers.

While being aware of her gender and age, Dimitrijević traveled alone without acknowledging it as problematic.⁸² As a woman from the Balkans, the exceptionality of her position is twofold – she neither viewed herself as European nor as “eastern”. Dimitrijević’s writings have a special value as no travelogues written by men refer to anyone defining as female in these times. Following Dimitrijević, another example of a female writer addressing travels to Egypt (1931) in her writing is Desa Dugalić, a Serbian actress. Dugalić writes from the perspective of a European traveler (with unspecified gender), who is fascinated with ancient monuments and history, pointing out perceived dichotomies of Europe and other continents, West and East,⁸³ modern and ancient.

An important difference between the two writers is that Dimitrijević reflected upon systemic parallels between regions, for example between poor peasants in south Serbian villages and poor villagers in modern Egypt,⁸⁴ while Dugalić solely wrote from the position of a white, European visitor to an exotic country. Moreover Dimitrijević underscored her curiosity about both traces of Egypt’s ancient past and modern Egypt, while Dugalić was not interested in modern Egypt but rather its allegedly glorious past. Dimitrijević thematized colonialism and imperialism, while Dugalić takes a Eurocentric point of view. The example of these two women, who both left precious evidence for their receptions of Egypt, shows how different viewpoints of the same phenomenon can contribute to its overall interpretation.

⁸² Milica Naumov, “In search of the East”, in *Egypt remembered by Serbia*, ed. Emilia Epštajn (Belgrade: The museum of African art: The Veda and dr Zdravka Pečara Collection, 2011/2013), 47–65.

⁸³ Naumov, “In search of the East”, 47–65.

⁸⁴ Naumov, “In search of the East”, 47–65.

2.5. Ancient Egypt “personally” in Serbia

a) Historical sources

Collections of Egyptian artefacts can be found in the National Museum in Belgrade, and less numerously in the Museum of History of Yugoslavia as well as at the city museums in Vršac, Sombor and Užice, although almost all artefacts are in depots. The reason for that is based on the objective of most museum exhibitions to promote national continuity and narratives about the past of the Serbian state, which is complicated by displaying Egyptian artefacts.⁸⁵ To this date there have not been any new Serbian expeditions in Egypt⁸⁶ (after the 1960s),⁸⁷ and the artefacts present in Serbian museums are the product of past political constellations.

The City Museum of Vršac has the biggest collection of ancient Egyptian artefacts with a total number of 97 pieces.⁸⁸ It received them from painter Paja Jovanović (who traveled to Egypt in 1887), printer and publisher Vilmos Wetzl, Mikša Adler (through his brother Joseph who traveled to Egypt in 1869) and the antiquarian Leonhard Böhm.⁸⁹ It is unknown how long Jovanović stayed in Egypt or whether he visited the original sites or the museum in Cairo.⁹⁰ He began his studies at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts in 1877, just as the Austrian society was opening up to art featuring Near East-based motifs.⁹¹ The gallery

⁸⁵ Vera Vasiljević, “Nevidljivo nasleđe: stari Egipat i muzeji u Srbiji”, *Etnoantropološki problemi*, n. s. god 13, sv. 3 (2018): 617–30.

⁸⁶ Вера Васиљевић, “ЕГИПТОЛОГИЈА КОД НАС- ЛУКСУЗ ИЛИ ПОТРЕБА?”, *Гласник САД* 15–16 (1999–2000): 297–301.

⁸⁷ See Uroš Matić, “Images of a pharaonic past. On the development and Current State of Egyptology in Serbia”, in *Egypt remembered by Serbia*, ed. Emilia Epštajn (Belgrade: The museum of African art: The Veda and Dr Zdravka Pečara Collection, 2011/2013), 29–42.

⁸⁸ Branislav Anđelković, “Glasnik Srpskog arheološkog društva”, *Journal of the Serbian Archaeological Society* 23 (2007): 227–44.

⁸⁹ Branislav Anđelković and Miroslava Panić-Štorh. *Staroegipatska zbirka Gradskog muzeja u Vršcu / The Collection of Egyptian Antiquities in the City Museum of Vršac* (Vršac: Gradski muzej Vršac, 2002), 9–11.

⁹⁰ Вера Васиљевић, “Ентеријер каирске куће на сликама Паје Јовановића”, *Зборник народног музеја – Београд* XXI/2 (2014): 205–20.

⁹¹ Васиљевић, “Ентеријер каирске куће на сликама Паје Јовановића”, 205–20.

exhibiting his paintings organized his trip to Egypt.⁹² Jovanović, a painter of typically Balkan and Near Eastern topics, frequently took photographs on his journey where he also bought numerous everyday items on his travels. Although at least one of his paintings depicts an interior of a contemporary house in Cairo,⁹³ he was not influential to the receptions of ancient Egypt in Serbia. His art was primarily aimed at Western European customers and adapted to their taste. His major contribution is to be seen in his gifts to the museum in Vršac.

A nobleman named Pavle Ridički traveled to Egypt in 1888, leaving behind plenty of information about his travels. He purchased an ancient Egyptian mummy and donated it to the National Museum in Belgrade, which became the first Serbian museum to exhibit an ancient Egyptian piece in August 1888.⁹⁴ In January 1888 he sailed with the ship “Austral” from Naples to Egypt where he disembarked in Suez.⁹⁵ He visited a series of important Egyptian sites, such as the Egyptian Museum, the Cheops Pyramid (which he entered) and the Sphinx in Giza, several mosques and Coptic churches, the tombs in the rock at Beni Hasan, Tel el-Amarna, the Hathor Temple in Dendera, Thebes, Karnak, Luxor, the temples in Esna and Kom Ombo.⁹⁶ In his records he mentions that the French archaeologist Auguste Mariette was excavating in Egypt and gives a reference to some of his findings. In “Letters from a Long Way”, Pavle Ridički describes landmarks with much more detail than preceding writers. The mummy he bought for the Serbian museum was scientifically examined for the first time in 1993.⁹⁷

The collection at the City Museum in Sombor features materials which Jovan Fernbach bought on his travel to Egypt in 1899.⁹⁸ There are 22 pieces from the

⁹² Васиљевић, “Ентеријер каирске куће на сликама Паје Јовановића”, 205–20.

⁹³ Васиљевић, “Ентеријер каирске куће на сликама Паје Јовановића”, 205–20.

⁹⁴ Branislav Anđelković, “The Belgrade Mummy: Current research and future Possibilities”, *Journal of the Serbian Archaeological Society* 19 (2003): 143–48.

⁹⁵ Бранислав Анђелковић, “Павле Риђички – донатор Београдске мумије: реконструкција пута на Блиски исток 1888”, *Годишњак за друштвену историју* II/3 (1995): 329–41.

⁹⁶ Анђелковић, “Павле Риђички – донатор Београдске мумије”.

⁹⁷ Anđelković, “The Belgrade Mummy: Current research and future Possibilities”.

⁹⁸ Branislav Anđelković, “Egyptian antiquities in the museums of Serbia”, in *Egyptian museum collections around the World: Studies of Centennial of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo*, ed. Mamdouh Eldamaty and Mai Trad (Cairo: Supreme Council of Antiquities, 2002), 39–50.

Third Intermediate Period until the Roman period in Sombor Museum: one *shabti* figurine, one amulet, one plaque with a high relief figure or a mold, two jewelry items, and two vessels.⁹⁹

The Museum of History of Yugoslavia harbours a bronze statuette of Osiris dating to the sixth or fourth centuries B.C.E. from Beni Suef, and three alabaster vases from the pyramid of Djoser.¹⁰⁰

Scholars in Serbia have been discussing the need for the foundation of a new museum specialized in ancient Egyptian antiquities, displaying all finds in the same location and available for public view. The necessity for this step is underlined by the fact that, for example, the Egyptian collection of the City Museum in Vršac was exhibited before World War II,¹⁰¹ only to be on display again in 2019 as part of the exhibition in the Museum of African Art.¹⁰² Overall Egyptian antiquities are almost completely inaccessible and their existence probably partly unknown to the public.

The only Egyptian artefact with an archaeological context was found at an excavation in Serbia at Trnjanci-Pilatovići, near a town called Užicka Požega. The scarab was found *in situ*¹⁰³ during an excavation of a tumulus in 1978. Dating to the 20th–22nd dynasty (1190–720 B.C.) it was probably imported by Greek merchants.¹⁰⁴ The grave mound itself was dated to ca 550–520 B.C.E.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Branislav Anđelković, “Glasnik Srpskog arheološkog društva”, *Journal of the Serbian Archaeological Society* 23 (2007): 227–44.

¹⁰⁰ Anđelković, “Glasnik Srpskog arheološkog društva”, 227–44.

¹⁰¹ Anđelković, Branislav and Miroslava Panić-Štorh. *Staroegipatska zbirka Gradskog muzeja u Vršcu / The Collection of Egyptian Antiquities in the City Museum of Vršac* (Vršac: Gradski muzej Vršac, 2002).

¹⁰² “Pod Lupom, Staroegipatske zbirke u muzejima u Srbiji”, Muzej afričke umetnosti u Beogradu, accessed September 2020, URL: <http://mau.rs/sr/pro%C5%A1le-izlo%C5%BEbe/pod-lupom-staroegipatske-zbirke-u-muzejima-u-srbiji.html>.

¹⁰³ Anđelković, “Egyptian antiquities in the museums of Serbia”, 39–50.

¹⁰⁴ Branislav Anđelković. “Arheološki materijal bliskoistočnog porekla u Srbiji”, *Journal of the Serbian Archaeological Society* 7 (1991): 67–77.

¹⁰⁵ Mladen Tomorad, “Early penetration of Ancient Egyptian Artefacts and Aegyptiaca (7th–1st Centuries BCE)”, in *A History of Research into Ancient Egyptian Culture conducted in Southeast Europe* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2015), 165–200.

b) Discussion

Most texts about the receptions of ancient Egypt emphasize the importance of the Napoleonic wars, the decipherment of the hieroglyphs or the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun as catalysts attracting new interest in Egyptian themes. Periodic “resurgences” of interest¹⁰⁶ are occurring in the context of reception studies on topics other than ancient Egypt, which is nevertheless not a passive object that waits to be rediscovered, but should be viewed as an active agent¹⁰⁷ creating history. The Napoleonic Wars are surely important, but in relation to ancient Egypt they resemble an analogy of the role the Cold War had in the Space Race; you could refer to it as the “Egyptian Race”. Owning physical embodiments of ancient Egypt and representing a passion for the exotic and a certain aesthetic, became a matter of prestige. Russia, Britain, France, the Scandinavian states, Italy, Germany and Austria were rivals¹⁰⁸ regarding the possession of Egyptian artifacts. There were significant discrepancies in the receptions of Egypt between Western European states. In Britain, for example, there is a striking dominance of classical art as a source of European narratives, as opposed to France where after the French Revolution art from Egypt was presented as equal in status to that from Greece, Italy and France itself.¹⁰⁹

Beginning in the early nineteenth century the Serbian struggle for liberation from the Ottoman rule elicited a series of changes in Serbian society. Especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, investments in scientific and cultural fields intensified. Prince Miloš Obrenović (1780–1860) financed the education of Serbs in European capitals and encouraged educated artists and architects to return to Serbia.¹¹⁰ Situated in a liminal space, neither a part of Europe nor “the Orient” (or both at the same time), Serbia pursued an emancipation from the long Turkish rule, keeping pace with the new tendencies of Western Europe and

¹⁰⁶ see Salvatore Settis, *The future of the classical* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁷ Miguel John Versluys, “‘Une géographie intérieure’: the Perpetual Presence of Egypt”, *Aegyptiaca* 3 (2018): 159–66. <https://doi.org/10.11588/aegypt.2018.3.49002>.

¹⁰⁸ Christina Riggs, “Ancient Egypt in the Museum: Concepts and Constructions”, in *A companion to Ancient Egypt*, vol II (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010), 1129–57.

¹⁰⁹ Duncan 1995, 1999 according to Riggs 2010, 1135–6.

¹¹⁰ Bojana Matejić, “Orientalizam i Drugi u modernom žanr slikarstvu”, in *Istorija umetnosti u Srbiji. XX vek: Modernost i modernizam (1878–1941)* (Beograd: Orion Art, 2014), 591–612.

also referring to actively constructing national identities. While functionally there is a need for differentiating between “real” and “constructed” (or *other*) identities,¹¹¹ for reception studies this has no relevance. Identities of the new European national states were made in connection with mutual origins, and in opposition to the *other*, which was also gaining its characteristics in the process and thus was constructed. Consequently it seems self-evident that the nucleus of Serbian museum collections with materials of Egyptian provenance donated by Serbian travelers to Egypt formed synchronously to the construction of a new national identity.

Comparable to those of other European countries, Serbian intellectuals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries traveled around the world, bringing back fascinating stories about exotic countries to their homelands. These travelers also imported some of the first artefacts from the land of the pharaohs to their compatriots. At that time these became centerpieces and a novelty for national museums and assemblages while Western Europe already had a set of ideas about Egypt. To illustrate this further, it should be emphasized that the oldest public museum, the National Museum in Serbia was founded in 1844 while the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford University in Great Britain had existed since 1683. The obvious discrepancies are still visible today, e.g. there are nine assemblages specialized in Egyptian artefacts in Germany available to public view, while in Serbia there are only small collections in museums (none of which is actually specialized in Egypt) and the material is rarely presented to the public.

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century donations of Egyptian artefacts, then seen as curiosities from an exotic foreign world, can be viewed as attempts to educate and contribute to a general knowledge of the Serbian populace. In the twentieth century, museums followed more political agendas, such as the unification of the Slavic countries on the Balkan, creating narratives of communist Yugoslavia, and searching for new identities in the post-war period. An almost constant invisibility of Egyptian artefacts from World War I onwards had created a situation in which ancient Egypt was still considered as the exotic “other” and not as an important part of a general history of civilisation.

¹¹¹ Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: the memory of Egypt in western monotheism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 2.

The unique political constellation of Yugoslavia in close connection with Egypt until the death of Tito (1980) facilitated a somewhat warm, friendly and curious friendship. One example for these tendencies are the exhibitions of contemporary Egyptian art at the “Cvijeta Zuzorić” Art Pavilion in Belgrade in 1962 as well as Egyptian modern applied arts in 1967 and 1979 in the Museum of Applied Arts in Belgrade.¹¹² Further examples can be found in cinematography with the event “Week of Egyptian (UAR) Film” in Belgrade held in 1960, 1961 and 1975.¹¹³ In 2009, 2010 and 2012 events addressing retrospectives of Egyptian cinematography took place in Belgrade.¹¹⁴ In 2019 Egypt was the honorary guest of the Belgrade Book Fair, which each year promotes a different nation. While these modern examples of receptions are merely mentioned in this study, they have the potential to be core subjects for future studies.

3. Why *receptions*?

During the analysis of the phenomenon of receptions of ancient Egypt in Serbia, the need arose to provide context in order to redefine its theoretical framework. For example, referring to the pyramid-shaped tomb of Branislav Nušić, the specific constellation of events in his life, his position in society and the function he had in the planning of monuments in Serbia, sheds a whole new light on his choice as opposed to discarding it as just part of a broader phenomenon. The diversity of individual receptions is illustrated by the contemporary texts of the two female travelers, Dimitrijević and Dugalić, contrasting the usual male point of view. It has been shown that each example of receptions deserves an extensive contextual analysis.

Although it is important to become familiar with the history of events in order to gain insight into the broader context of receptions, features of history should

¹¹² Narcisa Knežević-Šijan, “Egyptian art. Important Belgrade Exhibitions of Fine and Applied Arts in the Second Half of the 20th Century”, in *Egypt remembered by Serbia*, ed. Emilia Epštajn (Belgrade: The museum of African art: The Veda and Dr Zdravka Pečara Collection, 2011/2013), 81–98.

¹¹³ Aleksandar Maričić, “To freedom... and back: Egyptian Cinematography at the week of UAR Film”, in *Egypt remembered by Serbia*, ed. Emilia Epštajn (Belgrade: The museum of African art: The Veda and dr Zdravka Pečara Collection, 2011/2013), 99–113.

¹¹⁴ Maričić, “To freedom... and back”, 99–113.

be approached with caution and not used uncritically to explain the respective receptions. Any case of individuals creating receptions of ancient Egypt in Serbia incorporates mnemohistorical aspects likely influencing the result, which is why it is important not to automatically rely on the most obvious solution. There may not be such a thing as a singular holistic understanding of reception, rather it should be referred to the concept as *receptions*. Based on our own chronological context we might be prone to view past receptions within the broader historical context, while inadvertently disregarding the ideational background of the producer. Weighing historical and mnemohistorical aspects against each other to reconstruct any reception might not necessarily result in the full picture of historic reality, which in part will always be subject to the interpretation of the respective researcher. For this reason the phenomenon should be rather referred to as *receptions* in plural than reception in singular as the latter falsely suggests that there is only one version of perception of the same phenomena. This understanding of receptions corresponds with the concept of dynamic *identities* opposed to the simplification of a singular static, essentialist identity of past and present individuals. This paper does not claim to provide a complete interpretation of receptions in Serbia from all epochs and every possible point of view, but rather presents new approaches to old phenomena which holds great potential for extensive future research.

The consideration of the past cannot be static but always needs to be in movement.¹¹⁵ A person who wants to understand the past automatically introduces a certain level of bias into his research of the subject.¹¹⁶ A scientist that researches the receptions of ancient Egypt (or other cultures) has his/her own set of ideas and prejudices and is reconstructing past receptions through also drawing from his own reception, and by doing so creating a model of understanding the present.¹¹⁷ It has to be emphasized that while a researcher usually strives for objectivity he/she might become part of the interpretation of the reception of

¹¹⁵ Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: the memory of Egypt in western monotheism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 14.

¹¹⁶ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (Continuumbooks: 2004), 270.

¹¹⁷ Florian Ebeling, "Hans Georg Gadamer's 'history of effect' and its application to the pre-Egyptological concept of ancient Egypt", *Aegyptiaca* 4 (2019): 55–73. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/aegyp.2019.4.66093>.

a historical phenomenon, which in turn is an aspect of his/her mnemohistory. Thus the aim of this work is to encourage people from different parts of the world to address the topic contributing their views in the context of their personal mnemohistories.

4. Epilogue

From the Middle Ages onwards, ancient Egypt has been a part of mnemohistories in Serbia. The evolution of the receptions of ancient Egypt runs from the simple stage where biblical stories were reenacted to the more complex language of symbols and meanings that are known and available to everyone today. Although many Serbian travelers had the opportunity to visit Egypt, one gets the impression that some tendencies, for example in architecture, have found their paths to Serbia not directly from Egypt, but indirectly, through the perception of role models in Europe and other classical sources. Therefore the receptions in Serbia are not particularly innovative and original and, for most examples of the receptions of Egypt, analogies could be found elsewhere. In Western Europe, European settings are also frequently used rather than those from Egypt, but historical circumstances have allowed Serbia to join European trends at a time when Egypt has in some ways already become part of a European global historical worldview. The most common visual markers of the presence of Serbian receptions of Egypt are obelisks, pyramids and sphinxes. Egyptian stylistic vocabulary is very common in memorial and funerary contexts, connected with ideas of eternal life and remembrance. Apart from memorial obelisks and obelisk fountains, Egyptian motifs are not vastly common or indeed are less explicit in cities. Obelisks of small dimensions on public buildings are part of the architectural vocabulary and rhythm that does not require particular explanation. They could either be seen as a part of receptions of ancient Egypt or as receptions of epitomes from other parts of Europe. In spite of all that, the unique constellation of mnemohistories and local traditions provide an authentic mark on the receptions of ancient Egypt. Other examples that are not mentioned in this article, such as receptions by Bogomilism¹¹⁸ as a religious movement, marked by some of its medieval contemporaries as heretical and of

¹¹⁸ Tamara Berger, *Receptions of ancient Egypt: a case study collection* (forthcoming).

Freemason societies, or through modern lingual references, exemplified by corporation names, like “Oziris Elektrik” (a company for the production, service and sale of electrical devices), “Sfinga (Sphynx) Gym & Spa Club”, “Sfinga” funeral services, are embedded in and are considered a normal part of local contexts as part of the mental maps of citizens.

Academic work of understanding past receptions is in fact also a type of reception. The receptions of the past presented here will hopefully become a part of some future studies of receptions, and thus will contribute a piece of the big picture of research on receptions in the past. Some possible explanations of receptions of ancient Egypt in Serbia are given in this article, and yet others are only mentioned as an illumination of a broader phenomenon. A detailed research of every example always brings some new insights. Although in a positivistic manner, an analogy can be seen in mathematics and the ancient Egyptians’ astonishing accuracy of the understanding of π ¹¹⁹— one can always try to be closer to an accurate image of receptions (just as mathematicians try to count more decimals of π), but completeness can never be reached.

¹¹⁹ Hermann Engels, “Quadrature of the circle in Ancient Egypt”, *Historia mathematica* 4 (1977): 137–40.