

The Egyptian “Egyptian Revival”: Pharaonic *khayamiya* panels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

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Abstract

Touristic *khayamiya*, or Egyptian appliqués, are a fascinating example of the Egyptian revival. They represent a traditional Egyptian craft responding to the emergence of mass tourism from the late nineteenth century onwards. Rather than reflecting how Western art and design adopted pharaonic imagery, *khayamiya* reflect how Egyptian craftsmen responded to Egypt’s pharaonic heritage, and in some ways encouraged Western visions of Egypt centred around pharaonic history, in light of the commercial opportunities of tourism. This discussion outlines the history and context of *khayamiya*, before exploring the emergence of pharaonic-style pieces for the western market and their subsequent significant impact on twentieth-century British design and fashion.

Keywords

Crafts; Appliqué; Fashion; Interior design; Tourism; Nineteenth century; Twentieth century.

Touristic *khayamiya*, or Egyptian appliqués, are one of the most interesting examples of the Egyptian revival in a crafts context (Fig. 1). Made in Egypt, and particularly Cairo, these objects represent a centuries-old Egyptian tradition responding to the emergence of mass tourism from the late nineteenth century onwards. They were an inexpensive, colourful and portable souvenir of one’s trip to Egypt, decorated with pharaonic images which would have been immediately recognisable (and appealing) to tourist audiences. Such panels are interesting because, rather than reflecting how Western art and design adopted pharaonic imagery, *khayamiya* reflect how Egyptian craftsmen responded to Egypt’s pharaonic heritage—and encouraged Western visions of Egypt centred around pharaonic history—in light of the commercial opportunities provided by tourism. *Khayamiya* are also one of the most common examples of touristic “Egyptomania”; acting as a physical illustration of the scale of tourism to Egypt in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially the 1920s–1930s, they are today found widely as family heirlooms and appear frequently at local auctions. However, touristic *khayamiya* are typically seen as folk art or tourist art, a category often viewed by scholarship



Fig. 1: A touristic *khayamiya*, 20th Century. Victoria and Albert Museum, ME.4-2023. Photograph taken by the author. Given by Angela Hall. ©Victoria and Albert Museum.

as lacking cultural authenticity.¹ They have received little attention in studies of the Egyptian revival, and there is limited scholarly literature on *khayamiya* generally. This stands in contrast with Egyptian material considered “higher-end” by scholarship, such as the products of the *madrasa* craft school of the 1920s–1930s or the work of Italian-Egyptian Giuseppe Parvis, one of nineteenth-century Egypt’s leading craftsmen and chief designer to the Khedive.²

This study hopes to draw attention to a fascinating but often-overlooked type of object, that is also worthy of a place within narratives of the reception of ancient Egypt. The following discussion outlines the history and context of appliqué in Egypt more generally, before exploring the emergence of pharaonic-style pieces in the wake of mass tourism, and their significant impact on early twentieth century British design and fashion. Finally, as a case study, a specific example of *khayamiya* will be illustrated, and the sources for its decoration explored in detail.

The history of *khayamiya*

The art of making *khayamiya* (from the Arabic *khayma*, tent) is one of Egypt’s most enduring crafts.³ It is a colourful textile appliqué whereby cut-out cotton designs are hand-sewn onto a heavier backing, similar to quilting. Indeed, there is a growing interest in *khayamiya* amongst especially North American quilters.⁴ Making *khayamiya* is a vibrant and living craft today, with practitioners—primarily men—based in the stalls of Cairo’s “Street of the Tentmakers” near the Bab Zuwayla, where the craft has traditionally always been based.

As their derivation from the word for tent suggests, *khayamiya* panels were historically intended for architectural uses. They were used to create both the

1 Cohen, “Authenticity and commoditization”; Phillips and Steiner, “Art, authenticity, and the baggage of cultural encounter”, 15. Ammoun, *Crafts of Egypt*, 56 describes touristic *khayamiya* as a “corruption” of the craft. On the use of the term “tourist art” in an Egyptian context see Potter, “A note on modern (fake) shabtis as tourist art”, 280.

2 On the *madrasa* see Humbert, Pantazzi and Ziegler, *Egyptomania*, 520–521 No. 346, and on Parvis see Ricco, “Art and luxury”; Selvafolta, “Il Signor Parvis”. Parvis, who received multiple awards for his work at Universal Exhibitions, designed both pharaonic revival style and “Neo-Mamluk” pieces.

3 el-Rashidi and Bowker, *The tentmakers of Cairo* remains the only monograph treatment of the craft and its practitioners. See also Gillow, *Textiles of the Islamic world*, 91–93; Vogelsang-Eastwood, *Encyclopedia of embroidery from the Arab world*, 159–167; Bowker, “The urban fabric of Cairo”.

4 Gagnon, “Egyptian appliqués”; Bowker, “The symmetry of khayamiya and quilting”.



Fig. 2: A *khayamiya* awning panel, c.1900. Victoria and Albert Museum, ME.2-2016. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

large tents and pavilions which have long played an important role in Egypt's social, political and religious life, and smaller interior curtains and hangings, screens and awnings (Fig. 2). Tents varied in scale from the monumental, comprised of dozens of panels and used for hosting feasts, weddings or festivals, to smaller individual tents (Fig. 3).

To understand the origin of *khayamiya* requires first outlining the cultural importance of tents within Islamic Egyptian society. This importance can be seen already in the seventh century, when Fustat, Egypt's first Islamic capital, was founded. According to legend, the city was named after a dove laid an egg on the tent of commander 'Amr Ibn al-'As, which was taken as a positive omen for the battles to come; the tent was left in place, and the city was subsequently built around it. An account of the tents of the eleventh-century Fatimid palace



Fig. 3: Photograph depicting *khayamiya* tents arranged for a festival, by the Zangaki brothers, 1870–1890. Victoria and Albert Museum, E.1335–1995. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

storerooms (although preserved only in a later fourteenth-century copy) notes a vast number of tents, some huge. One circular tent was recorded as 500 cubits (750 feet) in circumference and was possibly two-tiered, and another, *khaymat al-farag*, “the tent of deliverance”, was 1400 cubits (2100 feet) wide.⁵ Tentmaking was a craft patronaged by royalty, used to create portable court architecture of staggering size for festivals, military campaigns, royal audiences and as royal gifts. The scale of these entire complexes, the logistics required to transport, put together and dismantle them, and the impact they would have instilled in viewers, cannot be overstated.

No physical examples of these imposing Fatimid complexes survive, and so it is not clear whether they involved appliqué. However, by the Mamluk period (1250–1517 AD), tents were certainly being made at least in part using appliqué decoration. An account of the tent commissioned by Sultan Qaytbay (r.1468–1496

⁵ al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 418ff. This passage, and such tents more generally, are discussed by Behrens-Abouseif, “Ceremonial tents in medieval Egypt”; el-Rashidi and Bowker, *The tentmakers of Cairo*, 1–42.

AD / 872–901 AH) for the Prophet's birthday describes it being detailed with appliqué patterns (*taqasis ghariba*).⁶ Similarly, the red and yellow travelling tent or *mahmal* made for the *hajj* of Sultan al-Ashraf Qansuh al-Ghuri (r.1501–1516 / 1260–1277 AH), still preserved in the Topkapi Palace, Istanbul, likewise has appliqué details.⁷

The earliest and closest visual precedent for traditional Egyptian *khayamiya*, however, are the lavishly decorated appliqué tents of the Ottomans, who conquered Egypt in 1517.⁸ Many of these tents survive still today in European collections, providing visual comparisons for later Egyptian *khayamiya* work. Interestingly, the first concrete written and visual references to *khayamiya* and their craftsmen in Egypt date to the mid-nineteenth century, which has been suggested to relate to or even coincide with a decline in the population of tentmakers in Constantinople. This suggests that the craft as practiced today finds its roots at this time, maybe even inspired by Ottoman tentmakers moving to Egypt in search of work or better conditions.⁹

Although the origin of today's appliqué tent-making seems to lie with the Ottomans, appliqué as a craft itself has a long legacy in Egypt, stretching back well before the Mamluks. Tantalising echoes of the craft exist from pharaonic times. In the Ptolemaic Period, animal mummies were sometimes decorated with linen appliqués of gods; before this, Princess Isetemkheb of the Twenty-first Dynasty (c.980 BC) owned a monumental funerary tent of appliqué coloured leather, preserved in Cairo Museum.¹⁰ Even earlier still, two types of appliqué were found on textiles from the tomb of Tutankhamun (c.1332–1323 BC). One involved rolls of linen sewn onto the ground fabric to make line drawings, and one used flatter cut-out shapes, identical to the *khayamiya* process today.¹¹ Of roughly the same period is a scrap of linen appliqué found at the Amarna

6 Ibn Iyās, *Badâ'i' al-zuhūr fī waqâ'i' al-duhūr*, 1498.

7 Jomier, "Le Mahmal de Sultan Qanush al-Ghuri". A clear picture of the tent is in el-Rashidi and Bowker, *The tentmakers of Cairo*, Pl. 5.

8 Atasoy, *Otağ-I Hümayun*.

9 Bowker, "The urban fabric of Cairo", 478–479; Bowker and el-Rashidi, "Reading khedival *khayamiya*", 347.

10 Brugsch, *La tente funéraire de la Princesse Isimkheb*.

11 Vogelsang-Eastwood, *Tutankhamun's wardrobe*, 26–29 and *Encyclopedia of embroidery from the Arab world*, 160. These appliqué fragments are today held in Cairo Museum under the numbers JdE 62631/2 (Carter object no. 21t), 62339 (Carter 101p), 62641 (Carter 21x) and 62642 (Carter 21m). Carter's original notecards and Burton's photographs of these pieces can be found at the Griffith institute archives, accessible online at <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/carter/>.

workman’s village, and another at the city of Amarna itself.¹² These fragments, although small, speak to the wider existence of appliqué in multiple materials since at least the New Kingdom—and quite possibly earlier.

In short, the craft of appliqué has an ancient heritage in Egypt, spanning some two and a half millennia. From at least the Ottoman period, this artform became intrinsically linked to tentmaking, and from the nineteenth century, Cairo became the centre for this craft. The making of touristic *khayamiya* is an evolution of that history.

The development of touristic *khayamiya*

In the nineteenth century, the nature of *khayamiya* expanded to take advantage of new commercial opportunities. A small but steady stream of leisure travelers had visited Egypt since at least 1815.¹³ However, the end of the century witnessed the birth of mass tourism. Thomas Cook’s package holidays revolutionised excursions to Egypt. In 1869, Cook’s first group visited Cairo; by 1880, his company had signed a contract offering them exclusive control of the Egyptian government’s fleet of Nile steamers, and thus complete control of all passenger traffic.¹⁴ 11,000 Thomas Cook tourists visited Egypt in the Winter season of 1889–1890, and in 1893, a thousand in a single week.¹⁵ Visitor numbers of course translated to business: it is estimated that by 1889, tourists were spending two and a half million dollars yearly in Egypt, and by 1922 four times that.¹⁶

Khayamiya makers were quick to respond to the exponential increase in tourist demand, and consumer popularity of ancient Egypt. From the 1890s, they began to also make smaller panels, at a lower price, alongside their traditional work (Fig. 4). Unlike traditional designs, where *khayamiya* incorporated both Qur’anic inscriptions and geometric decoration inspired by Cairo’s medieval architecture, these touristic pieces predominantly featured pharaonic scenes alongside “folkloric” images of palm trees and peasants (*fellahin*) on camels. They were inexpensive to buy and could easily be carried home as a souvenir—and, being cheaper and quicker to make, theoretically represented better profits for the

12 van Driel-Murray, “Leatherwork and skin products”, 311–312, Fig. 12.9.

13 Anderson, “The development of British tourism in Egypt”.

14 Ahtola, “The lure of the season”; Hunter, “Tourism and empire”; Hazbun, “The East as an exhibit”.

15 Hunter, “Tourism and empire”, 42; Hazbun, “The East as an exhibit”, 21.

16 Brendon, *Thomas Cook*, 232.

tentmakers.¹⁷ However, as will be seen further below, the commercial gain that was actually seen by makers in practice is debatable.

As well as an expansion of the decorative repertoire of *khayamiya*, these new pieces also represented a change in function. Rather than architectural textiles, these smaller tourist pieces were primarily decorative, mostly designed as cushion covers or wall hangings. However, there are also a small number of complete tents in pharaonic style, such as an example today in the Gregg Museum of Art and Design, North Carolina (Fig. 5). Mary Roberts Rinehart's *Nomad's Land* offers a particularly evocative description of such tents:

No ordinary tent this, but one of the finest specimens of the tent-maker's art ... Here was Cleopatra, in red and blue, reclining on a yellow barge upon a bright green Nile; here was Seti I as a youth, in a rose skirt and not much more, except the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt; here were slaves in golden yellow collars, and Sphinxes and camels, pyramids and donkeys, and gods with the heads of beasts and sacred bulls—all in strong and primitive colors. And all sewed with millions of stitches to make our tent a gorgeous thing, and to bring into the desert the color it so badly lacks.¹⁸

As this quote demonstrates, in order to appeal to the international market, the designs of these panels deliberately played off of tourists' ideas of Egypt, presenting an anachronistic and Orientalising view of an ancient and picturesque land of pharaohs, pyramids and indecipherable hieroglyphs (package tours of course helped to promulgate this idea, as their itineraries invariably prioritised pharaonic sites above the Coptic or Islamic). However, importantly, this was a view of Egypt engaged with and encouraged by the tentmakers themselves, and re-interpreted in their own terms. In other words, touristic *khayamiya* were the physical outcome of interactions between Egyptians and tourists, representing not just tourist perceptions of Egypt, but how tentmakers imagined tourist perceptions of Egypt.¹⁹

The rise of the tourist market did not create a complete binary distinction between pieces made for the touristic market, and those for Egyptian consumption. Touristic pieces occasionally incorporated motifs from Islamic Egyptian folklore or more traditional designs, as in the tent in Fig. 5, whereas pieces

17 Bowker, "The urban fabric of Cairo", 484.

18 Rinehart, *Nomad's Land*, 32.

19 On similar engagements between tourists and tourist-focused stalls in contemporary Cairo, see Hassan, "Selling Egypt".



Fig. 4: Men at work in the Tentmaker's Bazaar, Cairo. Print after piece in National Geographic, 1921. Reproduction by Textile Research Centre, TRC 2017.2350. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden.



Fig. 5: Egyptian tour tent, ca. 1900. Gregg Museum of Art and Design 2003.004.078a-g. Transferred from Chinqua-Penn Plantation.

produced for the domestic Egyptian market sometimes began incorporating pharaonic images.²⁰ The advent of new touristic markets for *khayamiya* expanded the artistic repertoire available to craftsmen, and cultural encounters created a new, hybrid form of material.²¹

Once introduced abroad, *khayamiya* garnered great interest. Perhaps most famously, they inspired the works of Matisse, who not only depicted them in several of his paintings, but also potentially looked to them the source inspiration for his “cut out” works.²² They were purchased both by tourists and, during the World Wars, troops stationed in Egypt.²³ Their popularity was such that British department stores started to import them *en masse* to sell to customers back in Britain.²⁴ In the nineteenth century, high-end stores like Liberty's had an

established practice of importing and selling “Oriental” objects such as Indian shawls and Persian carpets through agencies in those countries. As new, more mass-market department stores that targeted a wider social clientele also emerged towards the end of the century, they set up agencies in Alexandria and Port Said that allowed them to similarly collect and import *khayamiya* panels and other Egyptian items made in Cairo. The establishment of an Egyptian agency by the London-based department store Whiteley’s was noted in their 1885 catalogue, which promised “the public an opportunity of purchasing these beautiful, original, and withal serviceable wares at even less cost than they are ordinarily obtainable in the countries in which they are manufactured”.²⁵ Likewise, a 1922 advert in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, a few months before the rediscovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb, proclaimed that “Johnson and Appleyards, LTD., have just received a unique selection of real Egyptian hand appliqué work in runners, panels, and cushion squares. From 6/6/”.²⁶ In 1929, a company “Egyptian Produce and Industries Ltd”, specializing in imported design and tourist goods, had an entire section devoted to “coloured tenting work” with pieces ranging in size from cushions to curtains.²⁷ Uncomfortably, on the same page one could also buy “genuine mummy bead necklaces”.

The impact of mass import was twofold. Firstly, it made touristic *kahaymiya* more widely accessible to British customers without going to Egypt directly. However, despite what Whiteley’s catalogue claimed, their growing commodification by department stores now meant that their sales primarily benefited non-Egyptian sellers, as there was an inevitable mark-up in price once they reached Britain. The second impact was that *khayamiya* became increasingly domesticated, and increasingly targeted primarily at female audiences. Both domestic and commer-

20 el-Rashidi and Bowker, *The tentmakers of Cairo*, 110–11, 126–29.

21 This concept has also been explored for tourist textiles in other areas of the world; see Waterbury, “Embroidery for tourists”; Phillips, *Trading identities*; Moreno and Littrell, “Negotiating tradition”.

22 Bowker, “Matisse and the khayamiya”.

23 el-Rashidi and Bowker, *The tentmakers of Cairo*, 112–113 discuss the popularity of *khayamiya* in specifically Australia at this period, charting their import by ANZAC troops stationed in Egypt.

24 Lysack, “Goblin markets”; Cheang, “Selling China”.

25 Whiteley, *General Catalogue*, 458.

26 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 29 April, 1922, 12. All newspapers and magazines cited in this article can be found online at the *British Newspaper Archive*, accessible online at <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>.

27 Egyptian produce & industries, *Catalogue*. I am grateful to Dr Louise Stewart at the Soane Museum for alerting me to this reference.

cial spaces were conventionally seen as “feminine” spheres. Through department stores, *khayamiya* were no longer just souvenirs, but part of a wider body of “Egyptianising” high-street material available to decorate one’s home. Pharaonic *khayamiya* were particularly successful because their themes preserved a sense of an Oriental, mysterious Egypt, satisfying commercial desires for the “exotic” which folded into a broader Victorian interplay between ideas of Orientalism, femininity, shopping, luxury and excess.²⁸

The broader context to this movement is also that the mass importation and high-street retail of Egyptian tourist goods was happening against the backdrop of colonial expansion, and the advent of Britain’s “veiled protectorate” in Egypt in 1882. The increasing availability of Egyptian designs, and their re-interpretation as something for the domestic space, acted as a microcosm of imperial control. Oriental departments celebrated the reach of British political power, displaying items that reflected the reach of Empire. By extension, they also offered women access to the Imperial project and empowered them in repeating it domestically, bringing control over Egypt “into the home”.

The growing consumption of touristic *khayamiya* can be charted in newspaper and magazine articles. They were widely advertised and praised in early twentieth century craft and interior design publications, where as well as extolling the virtues of the panels themselves, instructions helped readers to make their own pieces inspired by them. This betrays one of the contradictions in the consumption of such objects; they were sold as if mass-produced and were competitively priced, yet enfolded into a commercial culture of class and good design taste.²⁹ The *Every Woman’s Encyclopaedia* of 1910–1912 contained an article on tapestries, which discussed several examples of *khayamiya* (described as “quaint native design”) and noted their potential for reproduction at home, encouraging readers to copy designs seen in the British Museum collections:

Egyptian patchwork opens out a wide field, especially to those who live in London, for a visit to the mummy-room at the British Museum would repay the worker with some delightful designs, the frescoes round the rooms and the mummy cases showing pictures that could easily be copied ... As the material has the advantage of washing well, there are many ways in which it can be adapted to

28 On the complex interplay between femininity, shopping and the “Orient” in Victorian culture, see Rappaport, *Shopping for pleasure*, 21, 32; Cheang, “Selling China”, 2.

29 Crossick and Jaumain, “The world of the department store”, 27.

Western uses. It would make quaint curtain borderings and rugs, garden cushions, and wall-hangings, especially the latter, if made in long strips after the fashion of the Japanese kakemonos, and hung on wooden rollers. Very correct drawing is by no means necessary, and no two pieces are quite alike.³⁰

Similarly, a piece in a 1933 edition of the *Northern Whig and Belfast Post* taught readers how to make their own artworks in the style of “Egyptian tent-work”, noting that:

You have probably seen some of the quaint panels of appliqué-work, which originally hailed from Egypt ... the Egyptian panels are attractive enough, but Eastern patterns do not always suit English homes, so the new idea is to adapt the Egyptian method of embroidery to ordinary Western ideas. The most attractive wall decorations can be made in this way.³¹

The technique and designs of *khayamiya* also inspired their use for decoration on fashion, divorced from the original panel context. Already in 1909, a “Ladies’ Fashion: Fur and embroideries” article in the *Dundee Evening Telegraph and Post* spoke of this. Under a section entitled “Antique embroideries”, the paper reads:

In the matter of day gowns, no less than in the world of evening dresses, elaborate embroideries still hold their own, carried out in many instances in beautiful colourings, suggested by the old Egyptian designs ... a coat and skirt costume was adorned with embroideries carried out in these old Egyptian colourings.³²

Into the 1920s, as fashion inspired by Egypt became ubiquitous following the discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb, the impact of *khayamiya* remained strong. In 1923, the *Birmingham Gazette* ran a small feature-piece on “Tutankhamun decorations”, which stated:

30 Anonymous, *Every woman’s encyclopaedia*, 2925–2926.

31 *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, June 8, 1933, 11.

32 *The Dundee Evening Telegraph and Post*, December 13, 1909, 6. Although it does not mention the influence of appliqués specifically, on fashion inspired by Egypt more widely in this period before Tutankhamun see Bohleke, “Mummies are Called upon to Contribute to Fashion”.

Some effective applique decorations, in which figures copied from Egyptian monuments are expressed in coloured linens, are being shown in shops that specialise in Oriental embroideries. Used as an overmantel decoration, or at the back of a divan, they prove very effective. Smaller examples are being used as cushion covers and table runners.³³

This quote effectively highlights the influence of *khayamiya* on both garment and furnishing design. The same year, an illustration of a dinner gown in the *Belfast Newsletter* showed off its “effective Egyptian applique design of black velvet, scarab and lotus pattern” (Fig. 6).³⁴

These above examples, only a few from a vast number, showcase the impact of touristic *khayamiya* on domestic British design.

Tracing the design inspiration for touristic *khayamiya*

For *khayamiya* craftsmen making pharaonic designs, their primary visual sources were not dissimilar to those accessible to Western tourists and which helped shape their visions of Egypt: postcards, guide books and art books depicting artefacts and monuments, as much as the visible remains themselves. Key sources would have included Georges Perrot and Charles Chipiez’ 1883 volume *A history of art in Ancient Egypt*, and later also Baedeker and Murray’s illustrated handbooks for visitors to Egypt. Photographs and postcards were another ready-to-hand visual reference. In 1862, Antonio Beato opened a Luxor studio to sell photographs to tourists, and by 1873, multiple studios and bookshops were active in Cairo selling prints to tourists, according to Murray’s handbook of that year.³⁵

Some motifs proved particularly popular. As well as “stock” images like the Pyramids, obelisks or a striding Pharaoh, scenes from specific tomb paintings were frequently copied, such as the driving of donkeys from the tomb of Ti at Saqqara and the frieze of birds from the tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hasan.³⁶ The popularity of donkeys might have in part been because they were also relevant to contemporary Egyptian life and slotted into folkloric narratives. Both of

³³ *Birmingham Gazette*, March 5, 1923, 6.

³⁴ *Belfast News-letter*, August 1, 1923, 7.

³⁵ Murray, *A handbook for travellers*, 118.

³⁶ For the scenes see respectively Wild, *Le tombeau de Ti*, Pl. 154; Shedid, *Die Felsgräber von Beni Hassan*, 64 Fig. 10.



Fig. 6: A silk crepe dinner gown with Egyptian appliqué designs. Image taken from the Belfast Newsletter, 1 August 1923, page 7. © The British Newspaper Archive.

the above tombs were well known by the time tentmakers turned their attention to pharaonic motifs, and widely illustrated beyond academic publications. Ti’s tomb had been rediscovered by Mariette in 1865 and Baedeker’s later guides to Egypt included extended descriptions of it, alongside plates of the scenes.³⁷ The scenes from Khnumhotep II’s tomb were published in 1893, but had already been depicted in colour in Lepsius’ *Denkmäler* of 1859.³⁸

However, although specific scenes sometimes served as inspiration, usually the tentmakers freely mixed and matched sequences of images from visual sources, rendering them freely and schematically. Hieroglyphs became simpler, often illegible; designs which the craftsmen did not understand were mis-represented or even improvised; and motifs which in the ancient canon would not necessarily be seen together were combined to make new overall compositions. This free re-interpretation of design, as well as the commonality of certain motifs in ancient Egyptian art, can often make it hard to trace specific sources of inspiration for a *khayamiya* panel.

In 2019, the Victoria and Albert Museum (henceforth V&A) acquired an example of a touristic *khayamiya* which is unusual in that a specific single artefact can be identified as the inspiration for part of its design—an inlaid gold pectoral, found in the tomb of princess Sithathoryunet at Lahun in 1914 (Fig. 7). Not only does it make this panel one of a small number where specific source material can be identified, it also means it is one of a few that can be dated somewhat securely. Given the extended period across which *khayamiya* were popular souvenirs, the “generic” nature of many of their designs without signature styles, and because the craftsmen did not typically sign their work, there are often few diagnostic criteria that can be used to determine when a panel was made. The following discussion will analyse the decoration of this panel in detail.

The V&A’s panel is structured into two sections. As is typical of touristic *khayamiya*, part of the design is an amalgam of motifs reflecting popular western ideas of ancient Egypt. The first section, comprising about two-thirds of the panel’s height, can be sub-divided into three vertical elements. At the left is an obelisk with two registers of hieroglyphs; in the middle a palm tree; and on the right, a pillar. In front of these is a black sphinx with a *nemes* headdress and royal *uraeas* cobra.

The hieroglyphs on the obelisk are largely schematic; the craftsman did not attempt to copy a particular example word-for-word, but rather to reflect the

³⁷ Baedeker, *Egypt and Sudan*, 145–155.

³⁸ Lepsius, *Denkmäler*, Pl. 130; Newberry, *Beni Hasan*, Pl. 33.



Fig. 7: A touristic *khayamiya*, c.1914–1921. Victoria and Albert Museum, ME.112-2019. Photograph taken by the author. Given by Wendy Williams. ©Victoria and Albert Museum.

general “concept” of an inscribed obelisk. However, some of the signs are rendered closely enough to show that the craftsman did look at actual inscriptions for inspiration, although they are not in the formula of those found on obelisks (Fig. 8). In particular, the top two signs of the left register are a rendering of the phrase *dd mdw in* (“words spoken by”) that are typically followed by a royal or divine name, and indeed below that is the basket-heiroglyph (the word *nb*, “Lord”) and then a cartouche. Further down, the groups of paired horizontal and vertical signs above another *nb* sign are perhaps derived from the royal epithet *nsw-bity nb t3.wy* (“King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Lord of the Two Lands”), rendered very schematically. Thirdly, the Sun-disk and scarab beetle can be understood as a group of three signs including the long rectangular sign below the beetle, a rendering of the throne name of either Tuthmosis III (*mn-hpr-R*) or Tuthmosis IV (*mn-hpr.w-R*). Finally, below this are signs representing the royal symbols of the crook and flail. All of these clues point to a royal inscription from the Tuthmoside period, possibly a stela, as the source inspiration for the hieroglyphs on the obelisk.

The hieroglyphs of the right-hand register are rendered more closely to original signs in shape, although their meaning is harder to discern. At the top is an ostrich feather representing *m3:t* (“truth/justice”). The arm hieroglyph under this is legible but has been transplanted ninety degrees to fit in the space, and is now vertical. Below this are loaves of bread (the letter “t”) and an owl (the letter “m”); there are groups with the signs *m3'* and *nfr*; a cobra representing the sound *q*; another *nb* sign and two reeds, representing the sound *y*. At the bottom is a throne, the hieroglyph for the god Osiris. At the very bottom of the obelisk, spanning both registers, is a more accurate rendering of the group also seen on the left-hand register, *nsw-bity* (“King of Upper and Lower Egypt”).

Beside the obelisk is a palm tree. Whilst this could be just a generic folkloric motif to further evoke Orientalist connotations of Egypt, palm trees like this are also often depicted in images of gardens within tombs, many of which—like that in the tomb of Sennefer at Thebes, the “tomb of the vineyards”—were well known by the time tentmakers started making touristic panels.³⁹ The palm tree here also tells us something about the craftsman’s *chaîne opératoire*—it was added after the obelisk and pillar, as its two lowest branches are bent down at an unnatural angle in order to fit the space left for it, without overlapping the other designs.

³⁹ Sennefer’s tomb has been known since at least 1826, when Robert Hay visited and made copies of its scenes for the British Museum; the “garden” was depicted in [Wilkinson, *Manners and Customs*](#), 143.

of these pillars were easily accessible.⁴¹ The middle of the pillar is decorated with an Egyptian figure in a kneeling pose of worship, possibly inspired by the composition of the original Karnak pillars, which have a frieze of divine figures around the centre—beyond the fact that this figures’ long dress suggests that an image from the new Kingdom or later was used as inspiration, the motif is too common to suggest a more specific source. The bottom of the pillar is decorated with a frieze of alternating closed and open lotus buds, again mimicking the floral decoration often found around original pillars.

Because the above scenes draw on generic “Egyptian” motifs, tracing specific sources has proved difficult, except for the pillar. By contrast, the bottom third of the V&A’s panel, comprising one elaborate design, has a much clearer origin. At the centre is a cartouche containing a quite readable royal name, *ḥ'-ḥpr-R'*, the throne name of pharaoh Senwosret II. This is flanked by two crowned falcons standing atop the hieroglyphic sign *nbw* (“gold”), and behind these are a pair of sun disks with *uraei* holding ankhs. Between the falcons and the cartouche are designs resembling lamps with wicks. Above the cartouche is an at-first unclear design, with three vertical stripes in white and blue. Although this again seems like an arbitrary selection of motifs arranged symmetrically, here the composition is key. Specifically, compare this set of motifs with those on the famous pectoral from the tomb of princess Sithathoryunet (the likely daughter of Senwosret II), discovered at Lahun during the 1914 excavation season (Fig. 9).⁴² The similarity between the two is too close to be co-incidental. Notice especially the completely legible royal name in the cartouche on the panel, unlike those on the obelisk above, suggesting much more faithful copying from an actual object. Both are flanked by similar falcons, although on the *khayamiya* the cobras and Sun-disks originally atop the falcon’s heads have been transplanted to behind, and the falcons have been given crowns instead. Even the unclear symbol on top of the cartouche on the *khayamiya* panel makes sense if seen as a schematic version of the kneeling figure (the hieroglyphic sign *Ḥeḥ*, the God of infinity) below the cartouche on the jewellery, with its position simply flipped from bottom to top. All of these similarities point to the pectoral of Sithathoryunet as the original inspiration for the *khayamiya* design, followed relatively faithfully.

Copying from the Sithathoryunet pectoral would also make sense in terms of dating, based on when this panel was purchased. Although its discovery

41 A particularly influential image of the hall for western designers was that found in Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, Pl. 34; this view down the hall was in turn widely copied in and disseminated through photography.

42 Brunton, *Lahun I*, 22–41; Petrie, “The treasure of Lahun”.



Fig. 9: The pectoral of Sithathoryunet, c.1887–1878 BC. Metropolitan Museum of Art 1613.1.3.

and shipment to England was initially treated with secrecy, the jewellery from Sithathoryunet's tomb made mainstream press headlines in Summer 1914 once it was displayed in London, with announcements in both the *Times* (May 20) and the *Illustrated London News* (June 20).⁴³ By comparison, this *khayamiya* was acquired by its previous owner between 1919–1921.⁴⁴ By this point the jewellery had been acquired by the Metropolitan Museum (discussed further below) and the image of the pectoral had become embedded in academic and popular books on Egyptian art.⁴⁵ The jewellery was heavily publicised and illustrated, and images were readily accessible to Egyptian craftsmen by 1919.

In a quirk of fate, it is poetic that a touristic *khaymiya* panel inspired by the pectoral of Sithathoryunet is owned by the V&A. Although the pectoral is today in the Metropolitan Museum, upon its discovery in 1914 the entire burial group

⁴³ British School of Archaeology in Egypt, *The treasure of Lahun*, 7–11.

⁴⁴ It was donated to the V&A in 2019 by Mrs Wendy Williams, whose grandmother purchased it whilst she was living in Egypt between 1919–1921. Mrs Williams' grandfather worked as an engineer in Egypt during WW1, and returned in 1919 to organise irrigation and water supply projects in the delta and Sinai. After 1921 Mrs Williams' grandmother returned to England, with the panel and other items bought during her time in Egypt.

⁴⁵ Winlock, *The treasure of el Lahun*.

of jewellery was actually first offered to a select handful of British museums, including the V&A. For context: after the formation of the Egypt Exploration Fund (now Society) in 1882, a condition of its concession to work was that material discovered during each years’ excavations be presented to the Egyptian Antiquities Service, for it to take first pick. The remaining material not selected to stay in Cairo was allowed to be brought to London, a system termed *partage*, where it was displayed and subsequently divided amongst the subscribing individuals and institutions who had funded that years’ work.⁴⁶ This was the exception to the prohibition of antiquities export outlined through a succession of antiquities laws in Egypt in action since 1835.⁴⁷ In this way, both local and national museums, not just in Britain but worldwide, heavily supplemented their collections in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through EEF activities.

In the case of the Sithathoryunet jewellery however, rather than have it be split amongst various museums, Petrie was keen that it be kept together, and specifically kept together in London. It was first offered as one lot to three museums in Britain, one of which was the V&A, in exchange for a sum of £9000 which would be used to fund future work to excavate material for those museums missing out on the chance of acquiring this material. However, the V&A found it could not raise the money:

I should immensely like to see it added to our collections here; but when it comes to a question of my personally going round with the hat, I am faced with serious obstacles.

There can be little doubt that, as between the British museum and this Museum, the jewellery would more appropriately belong to the British. If one or two benevolent individuals chose to find the money and offer them as a gift to us, I should most thankfully accept them; but it is quite another matter for me to go round asking for donations in such a case.⁴⁸

Disappointed at what he saw as reticence on the part of British museums, Petrie offered the material to the Metropolitan Museum in New York, a decision which

46 On the formation and running of the EES, and its *partage* system, see James, *Excavating in Egypt*; Stevenson, “Artefacts of excavation” and *Scattered finds*, especially Chapters 1–3; Stevenson, Libonati and Williams, “A selection of minor antiquities”. For the yearly “exhibitions” of excavated artefacts in London see Thornton, “Exhibition season”.

47 Khater, *Le regime juridique*; Osman, “Occupiers’ title to cultural property”.

48 Correspondence held within V&A Nominal file BSAE I: MA/1/B2694.

he later described as being done “reluctantly”.⁴⁹ However, Petrie’s writings clearly outline his encouragement of competition between museums, and his communications with the Metropolitan Museum at the time actually suggest little reluctance that they take it, despite his later assertions.⁵⁰

In conclusion, humble *khayamiya* panels such as these are much more than meets the eye. They are an often-overlooked but important Egyptian manifestation of Egyptian revival design, one which illustrates craftsmen engaging directly with, and in turn helping to further propagate, touristic perceptions of Egypt. There is much to be gained by re-evaluating other types of “tourist art” from an academic perspective.

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⁴⁹ The MMA’s acceptance is discussed in Winlock, *The treasure of el Lāhūn*, v.

⁵⁰ Stevenson, *Scattered finds*, 99.

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