

Egyptian Revival in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries Home Daily Life

Jean-Marcel Humbert

Ten years ago, in 2012, an exhibition with the title “Ägyptomanie *en miniature*” was held in Munich. It was a small thematic exhibition which took place in the ancient Egyptian museum just before it was transferred to the current new building. The Director Sylvia Schoske defined it as follows:

This is only a small improvised exercise accompanying the large exhibition on oriental painting in the Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung. This included a selection from Dietrich Wildung’s cigarette box collection, a small jewellery collection, and Egyptian objects in “Berliner Eisen” (Berlin iron).¹

As small as it was, this exhibition marked an important moment in the development of the study of Egyptomania because, for the first time, we could see elements of so-called popular art, with examples of production from the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.



Figure 1: One of the window cases of the Exhibition “Ägyptomanie *en miniature*”, 2012 (© Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, München)

¹ Personal mail.

One must recall the two main orientations of the studies of the resurgence or re-emergence of ancient Egyptian art in our modern societies. These two main types of approaches and studies are, firstly; those about items which I could qualify as inventoried by types of objects, by period, by country, or even by city, and secondly; those that call for more general observations and considerations, studying the historical substratum, writings, memoirs, and travel reports. In this second case, we have many more transversal studies; historical, philosophical, psychological and even psychoanalytical; on a period, a country, or a series of events...

It goes without saying that the two orientations are complementary, and that I hardly see how one could function without the other. In both cases, we have to deal with terminology, as well as with very different words according to the language of each country, which sometimes cover somewhat different realities. Besides, the history of “Egyptomania” or “Egyptian Revival” (two generic terms that I will use in order to simplify things)² remains to be addressed, and I am working on exactly that topic. In fact, I found it a bit difficult to study the two different approaches together. I have devoted my own research to the first series of studies, a painstaking task that consists of searching for every single object and iconography related to Egyptomania. I have been studying the Egyptian revival phenomenon for a little more than 50 years, naturally with some breaks due to my professional obligations. Moreover, I started to collect objects in order to be able to study them more closely. All the pictures you’ll see are part of this collection of several thousand items, which are being donated to a museum. Let me point out that to succeed in such research, one must be what I call “a generalist specialist”, that is, both an Egyptologist and one who is well-versed in the history of art and all its technical and cultural components over at least four centuries, from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. And on top of that, you have to be on the lookout, to listen, to follow public sales, private collections, and of course to be familiar with the great national collections. And little by little, a body of work is built up, often with surprising discoveries.

² Jean-Marcel Humbert, “Plaidoyer pour l’égyptomanie, ou comment s’appropriier une Égypte fantasmée”, in *Beyond Egyptomania, Objects, Style and Agency*, ed. Miguel John Versluys (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 39–52, 254–257 (notes) and 325–332 (plates).

There is one point which should not be forgotten. In relation to all the buildings, decorative objects, books and films produced in the world, Egyptomania represents only a very tiny part. However, this production is so original that it doesn't escape one's notice and, regardless of its scope, evokes something in the minds of contemporaries, whatever the era. Having said that, this begs the question: is the general public more struck and influenced by images of everyday life or by philosophical writings? The answer is that there are two different relationships with Ancient Egypt:

- the collective relationship, stemming from history, religion and culture; and
- the individual relationship, where each person mixes their own spiritual or playful approach with their more ideologically-sentient behaviour.

All that mixes and cements itself, and out of it emerges a strong and even growing relation with ancient Egypt, where each individual finally brings to it what they wish to find there. It's what we call in French "L'auberge espagnole" (The Spanish Inn).

A last question: is the Egyptian Revival part of the "Egyptian Reception"? I think that it is, because it is a kind of answer to the remembrance of Egyptian Antiquity.

Objects of art from prestigious signatures do not constitute the subject of the present study. Indeed, they are destined to decorate luxurious interiors and especially to show the superior financial ease of their owners, who at the same time can demonstrate that they are able to follow the fashion of the moment. However the simple objects of everyday life that one can find in ordinary peoples' homes are much more the fruit of personal taste, of curiosity, of a closer relationship with the whole mystery that emerges from ancient Egypt, even when they are embodied by apparently futile objects. It is these objects that will interest us here, including the motivations that govern their purchase or installation in an interior, because all of these aspects are not well known, and are yet to be studied.

When you look to interior decoration since the beginning of the nineteenth century, as in this engraving of Thomas Hope's Egyptian Room in his London mansion (1799–1804), you notice that the display mixes wall paintings, furniture and works

of art. The approach is much the same with the interior design of an Egyptian Room by Gaetano Landi, 1810.³

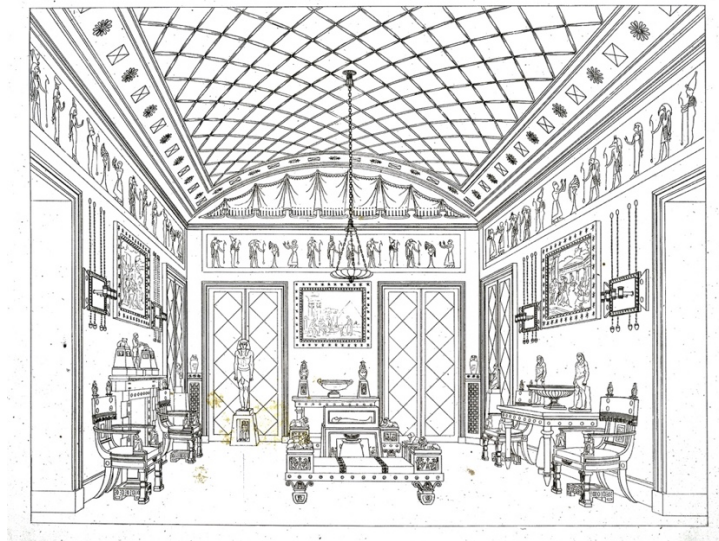


Figure 2 – Thomas Hope, Egyptian Room, Household Furniture, 1807, pl. VIII (Bard Graduate Center)

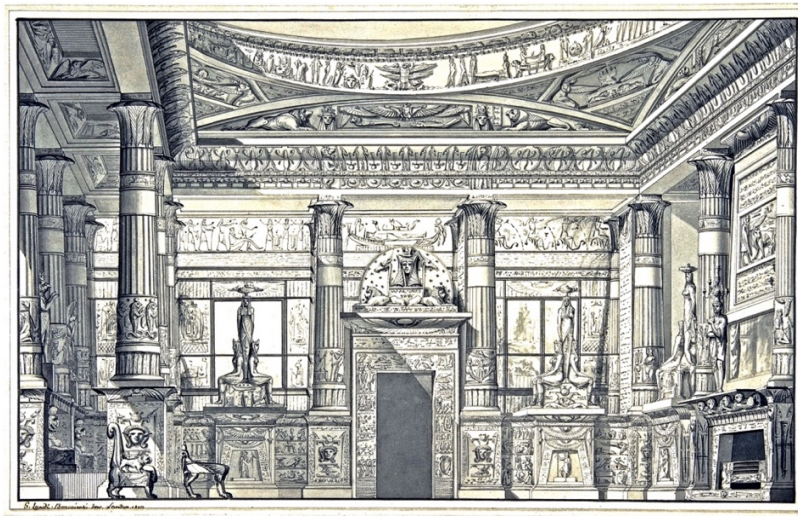


Figure 3 – Gaetano Landi, An Egyptian room, 1810 (© Collection and photograph Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

³ Gaetano Landi, *Architectural Decorations* (London: 1810).

On Landi's drawing for a Mantlepiece (1810),⁴ two bronze statues occupy the main place in the decoration. Soon after, another mantlepiece by Rudolph Ackermann,⁵ only shows a clock: it is the first step toward the nineteenth Century bourgeois interior decoration:

The propriety of designing every piece of furniture so as to correspond with the style of the apartment for which it is destined, has frequently been urged in the course of this publication; and its advantages are now generally admitted, because the public taste is prepared to distinguish the characteristic and leading features of the several styles of art usually adopted in this country; and the eye of taste is offended when articles of furniture are brought together that have not been designed on uniform principles.

In the subject of the annexed plate there are four articles that were not unfrequently placed together, as accident might produce the assemblage: the chimney-piece was bought at the mason's – the grate at the smith's – the frame at the carver's – and the clock, anywhere so that it was from Paris – all ready-made, all differing in style, and all unlike in composition and execution. Instead of this melange of conflicting parts, a uniform whole is now studied, and propriety and suitableness established in its place.

The engraving represents a chimney-piece of Mona marble, or verd antique, and decorated in the Egyptian style. The grate is designed to correspond; and the clock and glass frame are also in a similar style of art, exhibiting at once the advantage of designing every article with reference to the whole and to each other.

⁴ Mantlepiece in the Egyptian style, engraving from the work by Gaetano Landi, *Architectural Decorations* (London: 1810), (Sir John Soane's Museum).

⁵ Rudolph Ackermann, Egyptian Mantlepiece, in *Repository of Art, Literature, Fashions, Manufactures, etc.*, The Second Series, Vol. XIV, Dec. 1 – 1822, n° LXXXIV.



Figure 4 – Rudolph Ackermann, Egyptian Mantlepiece, 1822
(© Collection and photograph J.-M. Humbert)

On an H.-W. Batley drawing of a dining room (1878⁶), there is also only a clock over the mantelpiece on the right side, and for the first time the author uses exact reproductions of Egyptian Paintings from Prisse d’Avennes’ book.

During the same period, the design for an Egyptian bedroom by Ernest Foussier⁷ shows a large canopy bed placed against a brightly painted wall. The bed is

⁶ H.W. Batley, Design for Dining Room in the Anglo-Egyptian style, originally published in *The Building News*, June 26, 1878.

⁷ Ernest Foussier, *Nouveaux modèles de Tentures* (Bibliothèque de l’Ameublement), chromolithographie couleur, E. Thézard et Fils éditeur, Dourdan, (1880). Pl. non numérotée (lit): Bed in the Egyptian Style.

characterised by the large draped canopy which is attached to the ceiling and wall behind it. The draperies show patterns with lotus flowers and sun motifs, and are trimmed with tassels. Another decorator, Georges Rémon, proposes in the same period an “Egyptian bathroom” with the same kind of decorations⁸. If you think that such drawings are but a figment of the imagination, you must consider the Egyptian bedroom by Louis Malard actually exhibited at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair, with a bed, a cupboard, a mantelpiece and two chairs, which was recently sold in Paris on the Art market.

Of course these types of creations evolved a great deal during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and as such the objects soon replace the scenery.



Figure 5 – Ernest Foussier, Bed in the Egyptian style, 1880, Georges Rémon, Egyptian bathroom, 1895 (© Collection and photographs J.-M. Humbert), Louis Malard, Egyptian bedroom (1889), sold on the Art market, Paris, 2019 (Photograph DR)

In fact, the furniture still had great importance in bourgeois interiors, but it was no longer, or very rarely, connected to Egyptian interior decoration. If you wanted to have Egyptian decoration, you could hang some of the so-called tapestries – a kind of embroidery, as can be seen in the dining room of the Villa Victoria hotel in Madabegh street in Cairo about 1901. More recent examples are quite common, such as a bedroom created by the French decorator Louis Grange in the 1980s. The

⁸ Georges Rémon, *Soixante planches de peintures décoratives*, chromolithographie couleur par Delamotte à Paris, E. Thézard et Fils éditeur, Dourdan, [1895]. Pl. 55: Intérieur égyptien (salle de bains).

decoration is complete, and does not need any Egyptianizing objects to be added to the room.

On the other hand, in bourgeois interiors or in ordinary homes of the second part of the nineteenth or the first part of the twentieth century, there was not much money for emphatic decoration, and moreover, it might have been a bit embarrassing to show off too much of an addiction to a style that originated from both out of the country and out of the period. That's why many people simply had one or several objects to recall their interest in Ancient Egypt, but generally no more. And let's not forget that the passage to industrialisation, since the middle of the nineteenth century, enabled the multiplication and thus the commercialisation at lower prices of many objects to which the middle classes and even later indeed all strata of society, the working classes included, could have access.

In all situations (and in all examples), the question arises as to the ways in which ancient Egypt is apprehended within the framework and the limits of its use or reuse. We will therefore explore the ideas that can be drawn from the study – not of works of art, painting or sculpture, nor of the pieces of furniture with which you are already familiar – but of much simpler Egyptian-style objects, and we will do this according to two principles:

- 1) the way Ancient Egypt is used, the level of its adaptation as well as the level of new creation that accompanies it;
- 2) the use of the objects as such; namely in what way they can be adapted to Egyptian decorations or forms, and in which ways these bring to them positive elements or otherwise.

As it is impossible to review here the thousands of objects that I have listed in my computer database, I have chosen a few that I found particularly representative and evocative as elements of daily life at home. I decided to present them to you through some activities which were common in the period we are studying: smoking, writing, eating, popular decorative art, and beauty care.

Smoking

This theme is becoming historical because it is on the way to disappearing. Of course, you know that part of the tobacco in this period used to come from Egypt, in colourful tin boxes, and was largely advertised in the magazines of the time. Today, you can still find clay pipes with Pharaoh's heads and lighters of all kinds, from ordinary ones to more sophisticated versions such as the famous S. T. Dupont Briquet "Pharaon" of 2004. However what I find more interesting are the accessories that were produced between the 1860s and 1930s.



Figure 6 – Smoker's set, glazed earthenware with Egyptian decoration, Longwy enamels, c. 1890 (© Collection and photograph J.-M. Humbert)

The first example is a smoker's set, circa 1880, in Longwy enamelled earthenware; the shapes are not Egyptian, and the set could just as well have been designed with other elements than Egyptian decorations, floral or otherwise. Yet here, the decoration is Egyptian, both floral and animal. There is a tray, a tobacco box, a pot for cigars, another for cigarettes, another one for matches, and an ashtray.

Other accessories may take, on the contrary, Egyptian shapes, like a great number of pyrogens (match pots with scrapers) do, of which many different models exist, such as sarcophagus, sphinx in bronze or earthenware, pots of various shapes, etc.



Figure 7 – Anonymous bronze sphinx pyrogen, part of a set of mantelpiece ornaments (© Collection and photograph J.-M. Humbert)

But the cigar holders are certainly the most surprising pieces, with their Horus shaped cover of canopic jars, especially in the 1880s. Some, more connected to elephant figures, go back as far as the 1867 Paris World Fair. The same Osiris canopic shape made either of bronze, spelter or earthenware was used as well as for tobacco jars. Other shapes were in use too, which can be viewed as surprising and different, considering the period and the place of fabrication. One can see the differences, for example, between an 1850 pot in the manner of Jules Ziegler from the Beauvaisis region in France; a queen head 1900 (maybe from Austria); and two more Osiris canopic jars in glazed earthenware made in the 1930s. Some were produced by Wedgwood, others had a masonic character; still others made in Japan

have of course a Japanese flavour. Last but not least, pseudo block statues made in Limoges with Japanese or Pierrot decoration show the wide range of models which were used for this purpose,⁹ and as well the broad set of interests developed by their buyers.



Figure 8 – Cigar holder in the form of a Horus Canopic jar, France, end of nineteenth century. Tobacco jar in the form of an Egyptian block statue, France, Limoges, 1920s (© Collection and photographs J.-M. Humbert)

Ashtrays are interesting too; one of them with lotus flowers, the second with a pharaonic head, and the third more classical, was used in the famous brothel “The Sphinx” in the Montparnasse quarter of Paris in the 1930s. Other examples in the same period were advertising ashtrays made by the sanitary ware manufacturer Royal Sphinx in Maastricht in about 1925.

⁹ “Titillons Néfertiti : l'égyptomanie, un art éminemment populaire (1880–1980)”, in *Dialogues artistiques avec les passés de l'Égypte – Une perspective transnationale et transmédiiale / Fortunes plastiques et politiques de l'art des Anciens Égyptiens*, ed. Mercedes Volait et Emmanuelle Perrin (Paris 2017), print on demand or digital version available at: <http://inha.revues.org/7200>.

Considering all of these smoker's objects, we find ourselves situated between the decorative and the utilitarian. They already provide an initial overview of the types of use and deviation of Egyptian decorative elements in this field. But one should not believe that these are exceptional cases.

Writing

Other examples are quite common among desk accessories and inkwells, which are generally quite spectacular in their use of Egyptian shapes. Some writing sets made by Wedgwood at the beginning of the nineteenth century included an Osiris canopic jar as inkwell, one pot to keep feathers, and another one for powder. The canopic jar is directly copied from one in Rome, which was published by Bernard de Montfaucon in his book *L'Antiquité expliquée* (1719–1724). Soon after, Wedgwood created a bigger canopic jar which could be used as a box, with a body and a cover. The first of these, produced at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was made of so-called Black Basalt with a black earthenware and dark red decorations. From then on, Wedgwood never ceased making it, albeit in different series that in each iteration appeared in different colours: for instance, a light cream in the 1970s, and a dark blue in 2000.



Figure 9 – Choisy-le-Roi company, Canopic jar for scents of dried flowers (1890).
Anonymous Canopic jar beginning of the twentieth century (© Collection and
photographs Jean-Marcel Humbert)

Let's pause to make an aside about the canopic jars. Many such models were made by other companies, which were intended for either a purely decorative use or for a more specific purpose. The Choisy-le-Roi company, near Paris, for example, used to make such canopic jars to contain a potpourri of dried flowers (1890), whose scents emerged from the star-shaped holes. Other canopic jars, from about 1900, were produced by other companies in cream marble from Alep and bronze decoration.

Let's come back to our writing sets to get a feel for how different they can be. The sets use various elements that are representative of ancient Egypt at the same time as they constitute a choice of rather prestigious elements (sphinxes, pharaonic heads, representations of the goddess Hathor, etc.). The material is also an indication of the importance attached to these objects. They are almost never made of spelter, because the buyers preferred patinated bronze, even if it was more expensive. There were even objects with several patinas, and others with golden parts. The most important period for this type of object is the 1880s.



Figure 10 – Emile Muller, writing set, 1890 (© Collection and photograph J.-M. Humbert)

An even more spectacular writing set was made in salted sandstone by Emile Muller in 1890. Some others are on the contrary more simple and therefore of course cheaper, produced either in spelter or porcelain, and made at the time of the film *Cleopatra*, directed by Cecil B. DeMille and starring Claudette Colbert.

Ink wells follow exactly the same template, with sophisticated shapes and generally made of bronze. They are innumerable; a seated Egyptian, a princess head, a block statue, etc. Another very precious material, this time due to its fragility and its luminous and transparent appearance, is pressed-moulded glass, made by several European and North American companies among which the Compagnie des Cristalleries de Saint Louis, which started an Egyptian style production as early as 1869. Another very original inkwell, representing two Egyptians carrying a glass inkpot, was made in New York in about 1870 by Nicholas Muller, and was made of spelter and crystal. The producers in the Art Nouveau and Art Deco periods went on making more simple pieces.

Eating

Dinnerware is a particular domain of the bourgeois or petit-bourgeois life style of the beginning of the twentieth century, with very precise codes. These are then more the domain of an evocative iconography, rather than of shapes borrowed from Egyptian art, which would have appeared rather incongruously on a bourgeois table. Instead, the iconography fits rather well, especially since this type of dinnerware could just as well be used on the table as presented in a china cabinet, or, for larger dishes, be hung on the wall. The Royal Doulton English Company in Lambeth is certainly among the most important producers in this field. It started its Egyptian production in the 1880s, making tobacco pots in cream coloured salt sandstone, decorated with figures in light relief in pale blue and straw yellow.



Figure 11 – Royal Doulton, Tea pot 1890–1910
(© Collection and photograph J.-M. Humbert)

Soon afterwards, at the turn of the twentieth century (between 1890–1910), a dark brown stoneware tea service appeared, with two shiny parts framing a light cream matte part, where figures in slight relief are applied, reminiscent of the figures of the offering bearers in the mastaba of Mereruka (Sakkarah, sixth Dynasty). Jugs of various sizes and tobacco jars were thereafter made with this same decoration. As this set met with great success, in 1911 Royal Doulton, now located in Stoke on Trent, created two ambitious dinnerware sets composed of all sizes of plates and dishes in different colours, as well as tea and coffee sets. The general form of traditional dinnerware is preserved (of which Louise Irvine's books do not give all the forms and components),¹⁰ only the decoration is adapted from ancient Egypt.

¹⁰ Louis Irvine, *Royal Doulton Series Ware*, volume 4, *Around the World* (London: Dennis Edition, 1988), 19–24.



Figure 12 - Royal Doulton, some plates of different colours from the two dinnerware sets: *Pottery* and *Hunting*, 1911
(© Collection and photographs J.-M. Humbert)

There were featured two different subjects: Egyptian A (“Pottery”); and Egyptian B (“Hunting”). Both were produced until 1929, in four colours, with the addition of the mention “Luxor, Treasure of Tutankhamun” and a Sema-Tauj stamp in 1923, to boost sales. The different colour combinations are either entirely black and white, or colourful with light green or brick red background decoration. During this time of continued experimentation, in 1915 a further glaze named Titanian was discovered. The unique Titanian glaze uses a titanium oxide which produces a blueish color. Examples of Titanian ware can vary from light to dark blue glazes. Both dinnerware sets are decorated with hieratic figures, and Art Deco Egyptianising interpretations on the inner borders. The figures are not very numerous, and rather repetitive, enhanced with both authentic and false hieroglyphics – some of them humorous – bringing to the whole a very striking Egyptian flavour.

Many of these false hieroglyphics are not Egyptian, but rather reflect the daily life of many contemporary people; for instance you can see cats, a pig, a glass of beer, a money bag, a bobby, a pipe, some beetles...



Figure 13 - Royal Doulton Jug, 1911, the drunk man story (© Collection and photographs J.-M. Humbert – Former Gavin Watson Collection)

From here it's quite easy to reconstruct a small tale. Here is the edifying story of a man who indulges in drinking (left top to bottom, then right idem); he drinks, smokes, plays cards, and when I say he drinks, he really drinks a lot. Afterwards, of course, he gets into a fight, he sees double; two streetlights, two moons, and lots of stars, including a shooting star... He also sings, while continuing of course to drink, and he ends up falling to the ground. A bobby takes him to the police station, puts the handcuffs on him, gives him a blow on the head to calm him down, and he finds himself in the dungeon, among mice and rats, while the columns themselves liquefy down. Of course there is nothing alphabetical in these hieroglyphics, which are purely figurative, but rather an amusing scene to entertain one's guests while eating. This is a good example of the playful side of both the general public's vision of hieroglyphics and this type of modern interpretation.

Another Royal Doulton service, called "Desert", shows desert views, often with the pyramids in the background, an Arab on a camel and palm trees. All of these series were discontinued in 1929, but decorators continued to include Egyptian decorative elements in Doulton's designs. Some signed pieces are unique, others, notably in Royal Doulton Flambe (flaming red), were manufactured continuously in the 1920s

with views of the pyramids, the Sphinx, and numerous desert scenes. Other English workshops, such as Wedgwood, Minton, and Carlton Ware also used Egyptian themes, but these productions were much more refined and expensive and are outside the scope of this study.

Royal Doulton dinnerware as such was not unique. Many other companies made such products with Egyptian decorations, which were very fashionable in the 20s, such as New Chelsea porcelain Co Ltd, Coronaware (S. Hancock and Sons, Stoke-on-Trent), Keeling and Co Ltd (Stoke on Trent), Shelley China Staffordshire (Ramses service, 1924), Derbyware Ltd (1960) or even the teapots made by Tony Wood between 1982 and 1991. Many examples can be found as well in Central Europe, such as more recently by the Company Thun Karlovarsky (Czechoslovakia, 1993).

Decorating

Popular decorative art, in the same period from the 1880s to the 1940s, is mainly represented by several companies in Central Europe. The production of Central Europe is in this respect quite remarkable and particularly representative. It comes from the “pottery region” between Liberec and Teplice (Teplitz) in the present-day Czech Republic, originally located in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Bohemia). However, it remains little studied today, largely due to the shifting of borders throughout the twentieth century. Despite the relative dispersion of a large number of small factories, the production of this region is particularly important and interesting, as well as mostly unknown. I just want to take two particular examples here, the Julius Dressler and Schafer & Vater Companies. Both supplied retailers around the world with very different products.



Figure 14 – Julius Dressler, vases with Egyptian scenes, 1905–1920 (© Collection and photographs J.-M. Humbert)

Julius Dressler specialised in various vases and containers, some of which were Egyptian, with a mixture of shapes and decorations. Dr. Ernst Czerny, Austrian Academy of Sciences Vienna, and I are currently studying this production, which we will publish very soon. About 1885, Julius Dressler founded in Bohemia, in the district of Bělá in Podmokly (now part of Děčín), a new earthenware and porcelain factory that disappeared in 1944–1945. Many pieces from the beginning of the twentieth century, made of light and clear, brown or grey earthenware, are decorated with Egyptian or Egyptianising figures treated in bright and brilliant colours. However it has not yet been possible to determine the origin of Dressler's taste for ancient Egypt, nor why he appreciated the art of that country so much and adapted in an original and inimitable way. Most of their production is decorated with scenes from Egyptian tombs, daily life, dances and play, or pharaonic ceremonies. Generally, they are quite respectful of the originals, but the way they are interpreted is rather modern.



Figure 15 – Julius Dressler Company, Art deco production, 1920's (© Collection and photographs J.-M. Humbert)

His production followed the fashion of the moment, either Art Nouveau, as can be seen on an important jardinière (which is more than one metre high). From 1921 onwards, they started a new and colourful production, more in an Art Deco style, in particular the pharaonic nemes with daring connections of glossy orange, blue and green made to resemble enamel.



Figure 16 – Schafer & Vater Hathoric vase, c. 1925 (© Collection and photograph J.-M. Humbert)

The second one, the Schafer & Vater Company, made very popular small earthenware biscuit objects, some of them also in the Egyptian style. It was founded by Gustav Schafer and Gunther Vater in Volkstedt Rudolstadt, Thuringia, in 1890. It is characterised by the production of small pieces, usually in grey and light pink, produced in very large numbers. Kneeling Egyptian ladies nodding their heads, others standing and carrying jars, and pots and boxes decorated with sphinxes, boats, Hathoric heads and even pharaonic elements, sometimes polychrome – the imagination of the creators knew no limits. Some Egyptian-style figurines, of a more contemporary style, continued to be produced after World War II. The company operated until 1962; ten years later, the East German government had all moulds and archives destroyed.



Figure 17 – Small porcelain mantelpiece clock made in the twenties by Schafer & Vater Company (© Collection and photograph J.-M. Humbert)

Making oneself pretty

Now we come to the fifth and last section, beauty care, with just one more recent example. Each year, at Christmastime, the Elizabeth Arden company used to sell a special series. For Christmas 1982, the theme was Egyptian, created by designer Marc Rosen, made in Japan in white porcelain, and mainly accompanied by the Blue Grass perfume line. This series of 20 Egyptian objects was marked “Treasures of the Pharaohs” with one of Tutankhamun’s cartouche.



Figure 18 – Elizabeth Arden Leaflet for Christmas 1982 (© Collection and photograph J.-M. Humbert)

A leaflet included in the boxes (USA, autumn 1982) gives the list of the items:

- 1 – Cleopatra’s Cat (Blue Grass Bath Oil Crystals). Trinket box.
- 2 – The Luxor Vessel, with stand (Blue Grass Bath Oil Crystals). Brass Stand.
- 3 – The Karnak Urn, with stand (Blue Grass Bath Oil Crystals). Brass Stand.
- 4 – The Imperial Urn (Blue Grass Bath Oil Crystals). Egyptian Canopic Jar.
- 5 – The Ceremonial Barge (Blue Grass Perfumed Guest Soaps). Double headed ibex boat held three shell shaped soaps.
- 6 – The Papyrus Candle (Mémoire Chérie Fragranced Candle).
- 7 – The Lotus Candle (Blue Grass Fragranced Candle).
- 8 – The Pharaoh’s Soap Dish (Blue Grass Perfumed Bath Soap).
- 9 – The Pharaoh’s Jar (Blue Grass Bath Oil Crystals).
- 10 – The Pharaoh’s Tray.
- 11 – The Gilded Ibis Jar (Blue Grass Fluffy Milk Bath; Mémoire Chérie Fluffy Milk Bath).
- 12 – The Gilded Ibis Soap Dish (Blue Grass Perfumed Hand Soap).

- 13 – The Royal Caravan Camel (Blue Grass Bath Oil Crystals). Trinket box.
- 14 – The Royal Pyramid Vase (Blue Grass Bath Oil Crystals).
- 15 – The Royal Pyramid Powder Jar (Blue Grass Dusting Powder; Mémoire Chérie Dusting Powder).
- 16 – The Sacred Frog (Pomander) – (Blue Grass Fragranced Freshener).
- 17 – The Sacred Cat (Pomander) – (Blue Grass Fragranced Freshener).
- 18 – The Sacred Hippopotamus (Blue Grass Fragranced Candle).
- 19 – The Sacred Swift (Pomander) – (Mémoire Chérie Fragranced Freshener).
- 20 – Queen Nefertari. Decorative bust on stand.



Figure 19 - Marc Rosen, Small canopic jar from the series “Treasures of the Pharaohs” by Elizabeth Arden, 1982
(© Collection and photograph J.-M. Humbert)

The colourful designs of the entire collection, inspired by ancient Egypt, decorate shapes from the same source of inspiration. But the adaptation of these forms is most of the time a complete recreation which has little to do with the original source. It is in this way that Egyptomania has preserved over the centuries an audience that likes to find a mixed style closer to that of the contemporary time.

Beside these glamour objects, the general public is today more attracted by the playful sides of Asian production. If you are puzzled by a piggy sphinx cookie jar from the Hotel Luxor in Las Vegas, just consider that it may provoke in the user an intimate and no less interesting connection. So, what lessons can be drawn from these few examples between 1880, 1920, 1980 and today? We have seen examples of elements of the evolution of interior design, and at the same time, the evolution of the relationship of people to the objects and to the so-called “Egyptianising” object. But as much the industrialisation and the advertising grow, as much the kitsch continues to increase to arrive today at rather strange decorations, especially in the Arab world, as in a salon in King’s Abdallah palace in Saudi Arabia (2006). This is now the domain of resin, and no longer of traditionally manufactured objects. It is certainly the end of an Egyptomania that still kept a strong relationship with its antique inspired models in favour of an Egyptomania that is more theatrical and commercial, more kitsch, and inspired at the same time by video games.

One can say that Egyptomania was essentially built up thanks to the general public. This occurred on one hand via general principles and icons contained within collective memory, at the same time as they were hoisted onto a pedestal by the media and at times scientists (for example, with Nefertiti and Tutankhamun). On the other hand, it has occurred through the impetus that exists within the general public to adapt it not only for personal use but in widely shared forms.

Contemplation at one’s desk between oneself and an Egyptianising tobacco jar or an inkwell with whom one is in daily confrontation is neither trivial nor gratuitous, and has certainly been carefully thought out. For I don’t believe in the act of quick buying and in the thoughtless crush, there is necessarily something else deep inside the person who decides on this connivance between oneself and such representation of ancient Egypt. This may be one of the reasons for the popularity of Egyptian Revival. We could say more or less the same thing about the creator or the

manufacturer, who tries to meet the public's demand with newly-proposed products, most often in advance, whereby this demand is not yet clearly defined.

Sponsors, owners or users of Egyptian-style objects weave, with all those elements we have described, relationships that are difficult to explain, as few speak of them or express any opinion about them. In all cases, these are just objects that they have in front of them and that they use. But their relationship with ancient Egypt has nothing to do with the use they are supposed to make of them. Does this mean that the presence of Egypt is purely and simply decorative? Of course not, because these objects express many symbols and connotations which are, in turn, well registered as such. The greatness, the mystery, the power, the "distant elsewhere" in space as well as in time, all this is part of their main components, and appropriating them gives to all these objects special importance and power.

Does Egypt then serve as a camouflage? And if so in what sense? To hide the true personality of the user? Or on the contrary to give spice to an overly-earnest environment that may produce boredom? In the comfort of home, everyone is allowed to tame an Egypt freed from the anxieties and threats it often conveys. Because even without going as far as a Freudian endorsement, they can bring a certain appeasement to the journey through life. For the infinite power of ancient Egypt still continues to express itself through these objects. The dreaming elements that are evoked by everyday Egyptian-style items should not be neglected, especially since, above all, they also inform us about ourselves.

I hope to have convinced you that the smallest objects of this type have a wider and deeper meaning than one might at first imagine. All this is part of the reason why Egyptomania continues to grow today throughout the world, certainly on different bases and with artistic characteristics that are different from those we have known in the past, but with a surprising vitality.¹¹

¹¹ Many thanks to Lisa Dabscheck for her great proofreading and excellent corrections.