

# Understanding Material Culture: Deciphering the Imagery of the "Souvenir of Egypt"

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**Online:**

< <http://cnx.org/content/col10301/1.7/> >

**C O N N E X I O N S**

Rice University, Houston, Texas

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Collection structure revised: October 8, 2006

PDF generated: October 25, 2012

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction to the "Souvenir of Egypt"<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 1.1:** "The Souvenir of Egypt" (1917). From the collection of Dr. Paula Sanders, Rice University. Available online at <http://hdl.handle.net/1911/9886><sup>2</sup> through the Travelers in the Middle East Archive (TIMEA)<sup>3</sup>.



The Souvenir of Egypt<sup>4</sup> is a decorative silk on which a variety of images are depicted, including texts, flags, portraits and a landscape scene. The silk, which is collected in the Travelers in the Middle East Archive (TIMEA)<sup>5</sup>, reveals very little about itself directly. No date appears anywhere on the silk, nor does any information about who produced it or where it was made. Around the edges are six portraits of men in military or professional dress, but no names appear. The silk includes seven unidentified flags, six of which seem to be aligned with the portraits, since the flags are adjacent to or partially underneath them. At the center are three pyramids, their images reflected in a body of water. Across the water are a man on a camel, a man standing under a tall tree, and a figure in the water with what appears to be a large basket. Bits of texts—in both English and what appears to be Arabic—are placed on the silk. In the lower right is what appears to be the title of the silk, which is in large cursive letters: "Souvenir of Egypt." A complex visual argument seems to be made in this souvenir, but we need to know more about the different references it is making before attempting to interpret it. How are we to understand this mysterious artifact? What does it depict, when was it made, for whom, and why? In this module we will explore how to categorize, identify, and historically locate the Souvenir of Egypt. The variety of flags and faces, and the apparent diversity of their national origins, make the silk particularly interesting from a historical standpoint. The near complete lack of names or dates presents a perfect opportunity to explore the resources and methods used by historians to research this kind of artifact.

### **TIMEA**

The silk is one of many artifacts and texts that have been digitized and published online by the TIMEA<sup>6</sup> project (<http://timea.rice.edu><sup>7</sup>). TIMEA (Travelers In the Middle East Archive) is a digital archive of narratives documenting travel to the Middle East published between the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, along with images and interactive GIS maps. This course contributes to the project by demonstrating how to study visual culture through a virtual research project on the Souvenir of Egypt. In this way the image of the silk in the digital archive can be used to demonstrate the practical application of certain research methods as well as to highlight the resources available to researchers.

### **The Souvenir of Egypt virtual research project**

This course will document a series of research questions in which we will research and identify each of the images in the silk in order to gain an understanding of their meanings independently and in relation to one another. In each section of the module we will introduce and explore different resources and research techniques. Although the modules are centered on the resources available through the Fondren Library at Rice University, the resources described are available at most academic libraries. The research techniques we use are addressed throughout the course as independent aspects of the project; that is, you can apply the resources and techniques we use just to a wide range of materials.

Below we have divided the project into categories of images found in the silk. Under each heading you will find lists of the sorts of historical questions that will come up in the project. You may select any of these to take you directly to the section in which they are addressed. Be aware, however, that the project is progressive and some of the resources and techniques are cumulative.

### **The Texts**

The Souvenir of Egypt contains four separate bodies of text (Chapter 2), each requiring different research methods and resources. In this section we examine each of the texts for origin and meaning, accumulating resources as we go that are used both alone and together. The following list describes the questions that arise during the examination of the texts and the resources and methods we explore for each with links to the sections in which they are introduced. (Note that the links below may not take you directly to the relevant section. When you have selected a link, wait for the target page to load completely and place the cursor after the text in your browser's address bar, then hit enter.)

How to find assistance with the translation of texts written in a language foreign to you (p. 10)

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<sup>2</sup><http://hdl.handle.net/1911/9886>

<sup>3</sup><http://timea.rice.edu>

<sup>4</sup><http://hdl.handle.net/1911/9886>

<sup>5</sup><http://timea.rice.edu>

<sup>6</sup><http://timea.rice.edu>

<sup>7</sup><http://timea.rice.edu>

How to trace the origins of a quoted phrase or verse of poetry (p. 12)

How to locate a specific phrase in the holdings of your university library using subject searches (p. 14)

How to use online reference sources to define specific words in a text (p. 15)

### **The Flags**

There are seven flags represented in the Souvenir of Egypt. In this section we use a variety of resources to discover the origins and periods of use for each flag. Below is a list of the methods and resources we have used for each with a link to their locations in the course. The following list describes the questions that arise during the examination of the flags and the resources and methods we explore for each with links to the sections in which they are introduced.

How to locate the relevant reference material to research the identity of an unnamed flag

Which we then follow with a few examinations of some of those materials

How to identify unnamed flags using online resources

How to use the online resources and reference materials together to overcome research obstacles

A warning about hasty examinations of seemingly obvious imagery, including a personal confession from the author

A warning about assuming that historical images such as flags are accurately represented in your artifact

A complete list of the origins and periods of use for our flags

And a discussion of the ways to use the different dates we have found to narrow down the period of the Souvenir of Egypt's production

### **The Faces**

The Souvenir of Egypt contains six different faces, but no adjoining labels with which to identify them. In this section of the module we will use a variety of resources to identify the individuals represented in the six portraits. Below is a list of the methods and resources we have used with links to their locations in the module.

How to use the reference section in your university's library (Section 4.1.1: How to Use the Reference Section)

How to locate a collection of resource materials in the stacks by targeting a specific work in your library's catalog (Targeting a Resource in Reference, p. 57)

Using Regional Encyclopedias (Regional Encyclopedia, p. 64), Political Dictionaries (Political Dictionary, p. 67), Regional Dictionaries (Regional Dictionary, p. 79), locating General Histories in your library's catalog (Searching the catalog for general histories, p. 83) and Using General Histories (General History Books, p. 82) and Using Historical Dictionaries (Historical Dictionary, p. 90).

How to put a face to a name using online search engines (Hunting for the face with the name, p. 68)

How to locate biographical information in Who's Who (Who's Who, p. 75)

or the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, p. 76)

What is the Cambridge University Press (Cambridge University Press, p. 85)

Then we provide a list of the identities of every portrait (Naming our portraited figures, p. 91) along with the periods of their prominence in the regions they are associated with through the flags they are coupled with in the silk. Then we further narrow the period of our study (p. 91) with the application of this information.

### **The Symbols**

The Souvenir of Egypt contains seven images that compose a scene in the center of the silk that we refer here as the symbols. We use a variety of resources to determine what the symbols are intended to represent. Below is a list of the methods and resources we have used along with links to their locations in the module. When you have selected a link, wait for the target page to load completely and then place the cursor after the text in your browser's address bar, then hit enter.

What to do when you are faced with a research topic with which you have absolutely no familiarity. (Where to begin? Finding help with researching unfamiliar topics., p. 99)

Utilizing Your Advisor (Ask your advisor for suggestions, p. 99)

Using the Reference desk at your university library (Visit the reference desk in the library, p. 99)

How to locate a faculty member with a background in the subject you are researching. (Locating a Faculty member with a background in the subject you are researching, p. 100)

What is the protocol for contacting experts. (The Protocol of Contacting Experts, p. 100)

We demonstrate this protocol through an extensive exchange with a variety of experts at Rice University. Then, we then provide a breakdown of our exchange with the experts (Our exchange with the experts, p. 101) as it pertains to our research project.

How to follow a subject thread through your library's catalog. (Following a subject thread online through your library's catalog, p. 101)

A consideration of how we view symbols and what we might take for granted (p. 103)

Using particular aspects of a symbol to ascertain its possible meanings (A deeper reading, p. 104)

How to locate and use reference materials that deal with the symbolic meaning of your subject. (Section 5.1.2: Symbol 2)

Researching symbolic themes in art such as nature, natural objects or the ornamental motifs of a specific period. (Section 5.1.2: Symbol 2)

How to identify the symbols in an image by locating and comparing similar images. (Section 5.1.3: Symbol 3)

How to identify the genre of your images by looking for its recurrence as a motif. (Section 5.1.5: Symbols 5, 6 and 7)

Using the Oxford Reference Online Core in defining such terms as "orientalism" (p. 120)

### **Taking the "Souvenir of Egypt" Research Project to the Next Level**

Now that we've gathered information about the different components of the "Souvenir," we explore how to take your project to the next level (Chapter 6) and build a convincing historical narrative. We discuss the brainstorming process and look at two possible directions for a project on the "Souvenir of Egypt," one focused on material culture, one on political history.



## Chapter 2

# Analyzing Literary and Cultural References: Identifying the Texts in the Souvenir of Egypt<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The Souvenir of Egypt<sup>2</sup>, a decorative silk that is part of the Travelers in the Middle East Archive (TIMEA)<sup>3</sup>, makes a number of visual and cultural references. It includes seven flags, six portraits, a landscape scene, and four sections of text. In this module, we will track down the origin and significance of the texts in this souvenir. In the upper left hand corner is a phrase in foreign characters, possibly Arabic. The upper right corner includes the phrase "God Save the King," while what appears to be poem is centered at the bottom of the silk: "Heaven's light our guide/ Rule Britannia/ Evil be to him who evil thinks/ God Save the King." The final bit of text, which we take to be the name of the silk, appears in the lower right in large cursive letters: "Souvenir of Egypt." The texts seem to set up some sort of implicit relationship between "Britannia" and Egypt, but what are we to make of it? Why is "God Save the King" repeated? As we categorize, identify, and historically locate the bits of text included in the Souvenir of Egypt, we will also introduce you to a variety of research techniques and resources. We hope that you will learn as much about the process of research as you will about the object we will be examining.

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m13016/1.9/>>.

<sup>2</sup><http://hdl.handle.net/1911/9886>

<sup>3</sup><http://timea.rice.edu>



**Figure 2.1:** Souvenir of Egypt<sup>4</sup>. From the collection of Dr. Paula Sanders, Rice University. Available online through the Travelers in the Middle East Archive (TIMEA)<sup>5</sup>.

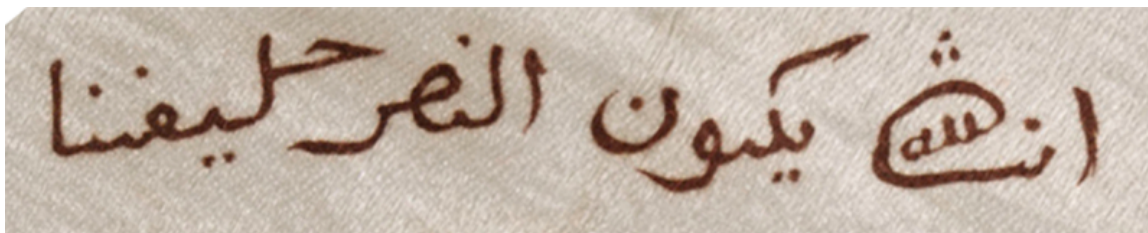
## 2.1 The Texts of the Souvenir of Egypt

There are four bits of text on the silk. We will begin by collecting as much information about them as we can: the language they are written in, their sources if they are quotes, and the identification of what is referenced by them. Since there are only four examples, let's separate and number them. Select the captions beneath

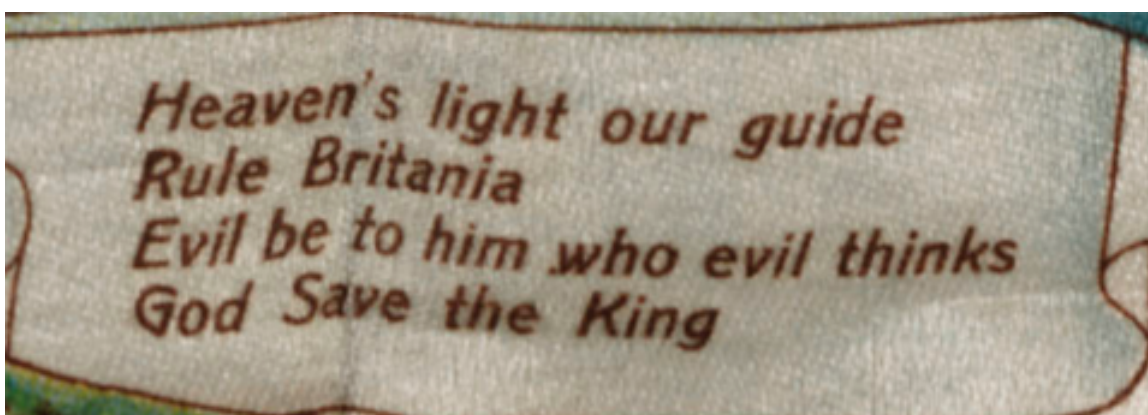
<sup>4</sup><http://hdl.handle.net/1911/9886>

<sup>5</sup><http://timea.rice.edu>

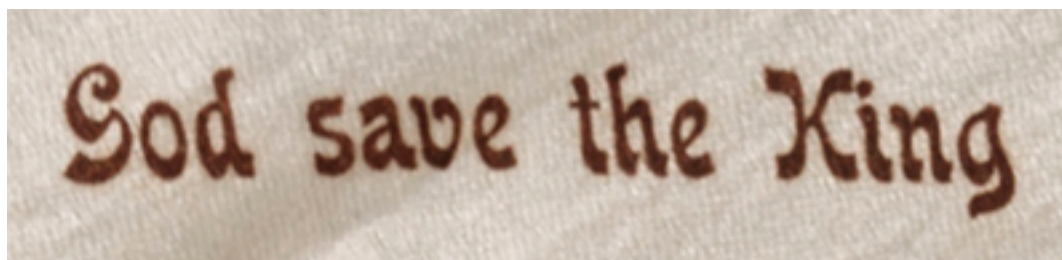
the images to go directly to our discussion of each text. You can also select the link in the discussions of each text below to return to these images later.



**Figure 2.2:** Text 1: Arabic (?) characters (Section 2.1.1.1: Text 1: Arabic (?) text)



**Figure 2.3:** Text 2: "Heaven's light our guide/ Rule Britania/ Evil be to him who evil thinks/ God Save the King." (Section 2.1.2: Text 2: "Heaven's light our guide/ Rule Britannia/ Evil be to him who evil thinks/ God Save the King.")



**Figure 2.4:** Text 3: "God Save the King." (Section 2.1.3: Text 3: God save the King)

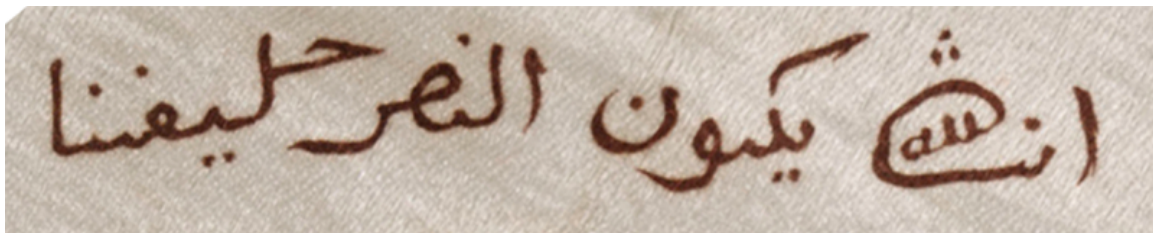




**Figure 2.5:** Text 4: "Souvenir of Egypt" (Section 2.1.4: Text 4: Souvenir of Egypt)

## 2.1.1 The Texts

### 2.1.1.1 Text 1: Arabic (?) text



**Figure 2.6:** Arabic (?) text

Text 1 is clearly not in English. Based on our limited knowledge as well as our assumption that the silk must have something to do with Egypt, we assume that it is in Arabic. This means that we must translate it. If you have the skills to do this yourself, then you are already ahead of the game. If you do not, then we must find assistance from someone who does. Most universities will have departments of language instruction, which can also be valuable resources for researchers. We'll try to find someone who would be willing to translate this brief text for us. Since we are at Rice University, we will search for an expert here, but the same process should work at other institutions.

We'll do a search for language at the university's home page. It seems we have a center dedicated to our needs: the Language Resource Center



**Language Resource Center - Rice University**  
 ... 11AM - 3PM Su: 3PM - 9PM. Rice University **Language Resource Center**, (713) 348-6157, [lrc@rice.edu](mailto:lrc@rice.edu),  
[www.ruf.rice.edu/~lrc/index\\_flash.html](http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~lrc/index_flash.html) - 9k - 2005-05-25 - Cached  
 [ More results from [www.ruf.rice.edu/~lrc/](http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~lrc/) ]

**Figure 2.7:** Language Resource Center

Select the link to their homepage and you will find the center's hours and a list of resources we can explore. What we need is someone who can tell us what language this is and what the words mean. Visiting the center is an excellent option. But we can also browse or search for a specific academic department devoted to Arabic. We find that Arabic is indeed one of the many languages taught at the university, so we decide to contact the instructor. It is important to remember that a big part of the learning process at any university is asking for help. Fortunately, the university is home to a wide variety of professionals, all of whom are outstanding in their fields, completely approachable, and generally very enthusiastic about students willing to go to the trouble of seeking out their expertise. Before you do so, however, you may wish to visit the section of this module entitled Locating a Faculty member with a background in the subject you are researching (Locating a Faculty member with a background in the subject you are researching, p. 100), paying particular attention to the section on the protocol of contacting experts (The Protocol of Contacting Experts, p. 100). We shouldn't expect someone to translate a large portion of text for us—at least not for free—but he or she might be able to point us to relevant resources. We could also try to cobble together our own translation by using an English-to-Arabic dictionary (there are several online<sup>6</sup>), but such a translation would be inelegant at best.

Having contacted several faculty members with a working knowledge of the Arabic language, we have determined that the translation of Text 1 should read "May God make victory our ally." Although there may be other, equally acceptable, ways of translating this text that a more extensive research project would require, this translation is perfectly acceptable for our needs here, so let's move on.

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<sup>6</sup><http://qamoose.arabeyes.org/>

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