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Revival of Pharaonic Architecture in Synagogues and Masonic Temples: Identity or Inspiration?

The ancient Egyptian architectural elements and motifs had a deep religious philosophy, which is connected to their beliefs in resurrection. This religious philosophy made it difficult to revive those pharaonic architectural symbols, which symbolize ancient Egyptian gods, on the Jewish, Christian, or Islamic places of worship, which have different beliefs than ancient Egyptian religion. For example, we will never find a symbol of an ancient Egyptian god, such as the winged sun disk, which symbolizes the ancient god Horus Behdety, on a synagogue, church, or mosque inside or outside Egypt. But it is surprising that there are ancient Egyptian religious symbols in some Masonic temples, and that prompted me to search for the real motivation that necessitated the presence of such elements on these buildings outside Egypt. The research will discuss the symbolism of ancient Egyptian architectural elements and the

reasons for its revival on the synagogues and Masonic temples.

Keywords:

Ancient Egyptian architecture; synagogues; Masonic temples; symbols; philosophy

1. INTRODUCTION

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, after Napoleon's campaign against Egypt in 1798 and the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone's symbols, architectural Egyptomania increased all over the world (Wischnitzer, 1951, p.61). Synagogues and Masonic temples had the common practice of reviving ancient Egyptian architecture in their places of worship. But the important question here is why these two very different groups both chose to revive ancient Egyptian elements and symbolism? Was it only admiration for an ancient great civilization, or are there other reasons?

Jews over the world gather annually to celebrate the Passover and to remember the exodus of Israelites from slavery in Egypt. One of the Passover celebration rituals for the Jews is to commemorate the exodus and to pass this story to the new generations that didn't participate in it, as it was mentioned twice in the Haggadah, the commandment "And you shall tell thy son" drawn from Exodus 13:8 (Fioscher, 2015, p.195). Hence a question: would Jews outside Egypt build some of their synagogues in ancient Egyptian style to emphasize the memory of their exodus story from Egypt and to follow the instruction of their religion?

It seems paradoxical: if there are memories of a place or people with negative associations, these are often pushed aside in hopes that painful recollections may fade over time, but the creation of synagogues built in the ancient Egyptian style would seem to do precisely the opposite. Some believe that the revival of ancient Egyptian architecture in some synagogues outside Egypt is motivated by a desire to confirm and document the identity of the eastern Jews (Appelbaum, 2012, p. 21) (Hobartsynagogue.org).

Masons also believe that there is a connection between their beliefs and ancient Egyptians beliefs. For example, in Anderson's Constitutions of 1723, it was mentioned that "the Centre of the crafts of architecture was Solomon's temple in Jerusalem and no doubt that the royal art was brought down to Egypt by Mitzraim (second son of Ham) and particularly the pyramids", and some Mason-

ic rites tied to ancient Egyptian rituals started to appear in the same period of Napoleon's campaign against Egypt or afterward (De Poli, 2019, pp. 20-21). The architects C. C. Hook and Willard G. Rogers, who designed the Masonic temple in Charlotte in North Carolina, believed that when they built this temple in the ancient Egyptian architectural style, it symbolizes the origin of the idea of building with stones that arose for the first time in ancient Egypt. According to tradition, this in turn allowed Hebrew tribes to learn building skills because of their work in building the pyramids, which enabled them to build the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem (landmarks-commission.org).

2. SYMBOLISM OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

The philosophy and symbolism of ancient Egyptian designs inspired the entire world. This was especially the case with the formal language of ancient Egyptian temples, that led to the revival of the ancient Egyptian artistic style. This was clearly demonstrated in the nineteenth century, after the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone's symbols, which allowed better understanding of ancient Egyptian civilization. Ancient Egyptians were inspired by nature, and they linked everything in their life with the phenomena of the universe and nature around them. Sunrise and sunset were two of the most important phenomena that affected the religion of ancient Egyptians and inspired them with the idea of immortality, that humans don't perish, but will return to life again after death.

The layout of the ancient Egyptian temple was based on the idea of gradual darkness, which starts from entering the gate of the temple. The darkness gradually falls on the temple and the ceiling gradually lowers until we reach the darkest place in the temple: the sanctuary that represents the eternal mound on which the creator god appeared for the first time.

The main philosophy of the ancient Egyptian temple's design was to be in the form of a micro cos-



Fig. 1 - The Gate of Heaven Synagogue, Cairo. <https://www.gettyimages.dk/detail/news-photo/cairo-egypt-november-29-2014-the-shaar-hashamayim-synagogue-news-photo/543877058>

mos. The façade of the temple was formed as the word "Akhet," which means "Horizon" and was formed as the sunrise between two tops of mountains or hills. This symbolizes the creative power of the god Ra, who is reborn every day and rises to the horizon. At the entrance of the Egyptian temples, the winged sun disk with sacred cobras appears, which represents the God Horus the Behdetite "Hr Bhd.ty". Horus Behdetite represents the union of the god Horus with the sun god Ra to symbolize the new birth of kings, who guard the border between the world of humanity outside the temple and the divine world within (Shonkwiler, 2014, pp. 2-3, 524). At the top of the entrance and above the winged sun, there is a frieze of cobras, which is one of the protective symbols in ancient Egypt. Columns are one of the most important elements of architectural formation, and the column capitals in ancient Egypt were varied, each having its own symbolism. For example, the "Djed Pillar" depicted the god Osiris, lord of the dead, which symbolized the resurrection (Nur eldin, 2010, p. 41). Some columns have capitals in the form of a lotus flower, either open or closed, indicating sunset and sunrise and, by extension, life after death. The lotus is a symbol of resurrection and eternity, because it closes its leaves at night

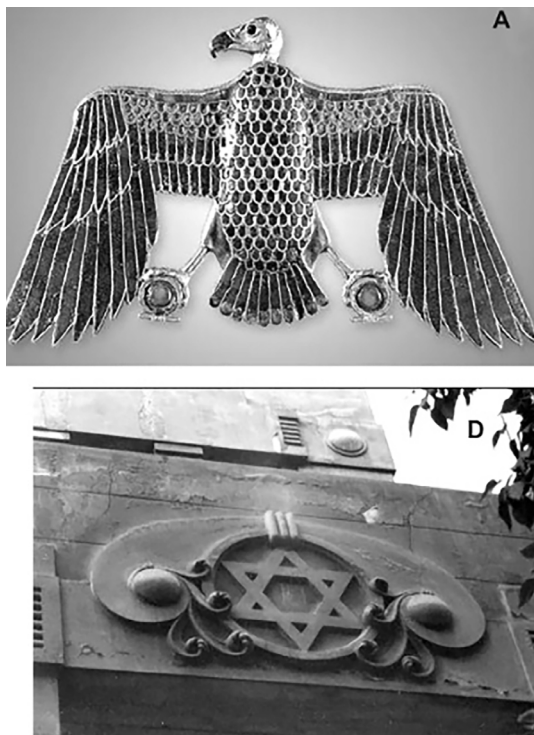


Fig. 2 - A: Pectoral from the tomb of Tutankhamun. B: Bas reliefs with "quasi-pharaonic disks" and Star of David. Hana Taragan: "The Gate of Heaven Synagogue," p.37.

and plunges deep into the water, and when the sun rises from the east, the flower reaches towards the light and rises again on the surface of the water (Abdoh, 2017, p.118). Other columns have capitals in the form of a papyrus, which was a symbol of protection because of the story of Horus when he was hiding in the marshes of the Delta, fearful of the evils of his uncle Set, the god of the desert. The obelisks that were erected in the entrance of temple pylons were a primitive sacred symbol dedicated to the sun god Ra in Heliopolis, to connect the earthly living with the divinity in the sky, and it was developed into a form with a pyramidal top (Nur eldin, 2009, p. 297). The sphinx or Hor-em-akhet is often associated with temples and pyramids, as this name means "Horus in the horizon," which is often depicted with the body of a lion and a human head.

Usually, when architects revive ancient Egyptian architecture, they use these architectural elements in their designs in a complete simulation, without any alterations or with a modern formulation. In this regards, I have some doubts that some of those architects are aware of the symbolism of the pharaonic architectural elements.



Fig. 3 - Moussa Dar'l Synagogue, Cairo, Egypt. <https://egypttours36.com/2020/09/22/lost-1000-year-old-hebrew-bible-found-on-dusty-cairo-synagogue-shelf/>

3. THE REVIVAL OF PHARAONIC ARCHITECTURE IN EGYPTIAN SYNAGOGUES

In this discussion of the motivation of the revival of the ancient Egyptian architectural style in synagogues and Masonic temples, we include some examples of this revival in Egyptian synagogues, the land of ancient Egyptian civilization.

In the nineteenth century, Egypt was under the throes of two empires, the British and the Ottoman. In addition to the long architectural Egyptian history, all these elements together produced the medieval Cairo (Sanders, 2008, p. 19), and this long history is represented in different schools of architecture, such as pharaonic, Greek, Roman, Coptic, Islamic (Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mamluk, Etc.), etc. "Belle Époque" architecture in Egypt is representing the ancient history of Egypt in addition to the medieval, modern and contemporary history in Egypt. Because of the absence of art history departments at that time in Egyptian universities, and since it was a contemporary architecture, the majority of which is "Belle Époque", the architecture which was built in Egypt between 1850 and 1950 was classified as Islamic architecture in Egyptian universities, although it's "Belle Époque" (Volait, 2013).

Synagogues in Egypt have different styles, but the majorities are in the basilica architectural type. The oldest synagogue with that design found in Egypt is Ben Ezra Synagogue in the Coptic section, Old Cairo area (Hemeda, 2019, pp. 1-2). Eliyahu Hanavi Synagogue in Nabi Daniel Street, Alexandria, was built in 1881, in the basilica layout. The Maimonides Synagogue in Harat el-Yahud, Cairo is also in this style (antiquities.gov.eg). And some other synagogues were influenced by pharaonic architectural style, such as the Meir Enayim Synagogue, Moses Dari Synagogue, and Sha'ar Hashamayim Synagogue.

3.1 THE GATE OF HEAVEN SYNAGOGUE (SHA'AR HASHAMAYIM), EGYPT

Sha'ar Hashamayim Synagogue is located in Adly Street, Cairo, Egypt. It was designed by the architects Maurice Cattau and Eduard Matasek in



Fig. 4 - Moussa Dar'i façade, Cairo, Egypt. <https://egypttours36.com/2020/09/22/lost-1000-year-old-hebrew-bible-found-on-dusty-cairo-synagogue-shelf/>

1899, and was completed in 1904 (hsje.org) (Fig. 1). Recent restoration was accomplished by the Supreme Council of Antiquities in 2007 (Standards-ica.com). It was built in Basilica layout (antiquities.gov.eg). The façade is representing the word “Akhet” with the solar disk at its center, inspired by ancient Egyptian temples façades. The façade also has bas reliefs of palm trees, which is a sacred plant in Judaism, as it was in ancient Egypt. According to one of the studies, by Hana Taragan, a professor at Tel Aviv University, that dealt with the analysis of this building it is one of several buildings built during the period of British rule in Egypt, and it combines various artistic styles—

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neo-pharaonic, Art Deco and neo-baroque—to express the history and culture of Egyptian Jews. But Taragan described a bas-relief curved shape centered on the Star of David and bearing “two quasi-pharaonic disks” as a solar winged falcon with two solar disks (Fig. 2). She suggested that this represents the god Horus as a symbol to protect The Gate of Heaven Synagogue and people who enter (Taragan, 2009, pp.31-37). In fact, it’s not the falcon god Horus, but the vulture goddess Nekhbet, protective goddess of Upper Egypt, and she is not grasping a pair of solar disks, but a pair of shen signs, a circular symbol of eternity and eternal protection. Perhaps Tara-

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Fig. 5 - Meir Enayim synagogue façade, Cairo, Egypt. <http://archive.diarna.org/site/detail/public/221/>

gan’s erroneous interpretation stemmed from an attempt to connect the architectural formation elements of the synagogue with its name, the Gate of Heaven. I have a doubt that the origin of that shape was an ancient Egyptian goddess, as I doubt too that the architects designed that to protect a house of worship, because it is unsuited for a religion that does not worship this deity. Therefore I suggest that this shape is just a decorative curved element contains the David star.

3.2 KARAITE SYNAGOGUE (MOSES DARI), EGYPT
The construction of this synagogue was completed in 1933 (archive.diarna.org). It is located in

Sabil Al-Khizindar, Abbasiyya, Cairo, and it was named Moses Dari in 1934 (Yeshaya, 2010, p.142). The façade of the temple represents the word "Akhet," as does The Gate of Heaven Synagogue, but it is topped by a Star of David instead of the solar disk (Fig. 3). In the entrance there is a pair of small obelisks, and the capitals of the columns are formed in the lotus flower shape (Fig. 4), influenced by the architectural elements in ancient Egyptian temples.



Fig. 6 - Meir Enayim torah ark. <http://archive.diarna.org/site/detail/public/221/>

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3.3 THE MEIR ENAYIM SYNAGOGUE, EGYPT

The Meir Enayim or Meyr Biton synagogue is located in Maadi, Cairo, Egypt. It was created by Meyr Yehuda Biton in 1934 (archive.diarna.org). The façade of the synagogue does not have any pharaonic architectural elements (Fig. 5), but inside the building, the Torah ark was built in pharaonic style (Fig. 6). It is formed in a trapezoidal shape, and it reminds us of ancient Egyptian chambers in the temples. It is decorated with Hebrew inscriptions on top, a Star of David above the wooden door, and two palm Candelabra on both sides, but it has no pharaonic motifs in the decorations.

4. THE REVIVAL OF PHARAONIC ARCHITECTURE IN SYNAGOGUES OUTSIDE EGYPT

In 1870, Judaism had no cohesive architectural style in Britain, so the synagogues were built in neo-pharaonic or neo-Romanesque styles (Fenster, 2018, p. 5) and at this time, Jews in Europe were granted more civil rights than before, especially in England (Kadish, 2002, p. 386).

4.1 HOBART SYNAGOGUE, AUSTRALIA

This synagogue is located in Argyle Street, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, and is the oldest synagogue in southern Tasmania. It was designed by the architect James Thomson and built in 1845. The building was created in the style of ancient Egyptian architecture to convey Judaism's ancient roots in Egypt (hobartsynagogue.org). The facade, the windows, and the outer frame of the door are trapezoidal in shape, surrounded by a frame topped by a cornice (Fig. 7), such as ancient Egyptian chambers in the temples. The levels of two windows on the sides are higher than the level of the door, to indicate the word "Akhet," which means horizon. There are two columns on either side of the entrance whose capitals are inspired by the lotus flower, which is sacred to the ancient Egyptians, but has here been reformulated in a modern manner. The winged solar disk is missing from all of the cornices; it seems that the architect realized that including it would express the ancient belief that the sun god was on the horizon and consequently omitted it.



Fig. 7 - Hobart Synagogue façade, Australia. <https://www.hobartsynagogue.org/photos/synagoguephotos/>

Fig. 8 - Launceston Synagogue façade, Australia. http://ttnotes.com/launceston-synagogue.html#gal_post_21172_launceston-synagogue-launceston.jpg



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4.2 LAUNCESTON SYNAGOGUE, AUSTRALIA
Launceston Synagogue is located in St. John's Street, Launceston, Tasmania, Australia and is the second oldest synagogue in Australia. It was built in 1846 with the assistance of Christians' donations (Rutland, 2006, p.20), using the neo-pharaonic style, and was designed by Richard Peter (Jewish.net.au). The synagogue is one of the few structures built in pharaonic architectural style still existing in Australia [staging.nationaltrust.org.au]. The façade of the synagogue and the window have the Egyptian trapezoidal form in the middle, protruding from a square façade, and the outer wall has a pair of small obelisks decorated by Stars of David (Fig. 8). The design of the building was inspired by ancient Egyptian elements but executed in a modern manner.

4.3 OLD SYNAGOGUE, ENGLAND

This synagogue, built in 1847 by the architect Hezekiah Marshall, is located in King Street, Canterbury, Kent, England, and it was the first to be built in the ancient Egyptian style in Canterbury [canterbury-archaeology.org.uk]. The façade of the synagogue has a trapezoidal shape (Fig. 9), and in the middle of it there is a pair of columns with a closed-lotus capital. The top of the façade is decorated with a repeated geometric shape that reminds us of the uraeus, the divine cobra that adorns the façades of ancient Egyptian temples for protection. However, the architect replaced the uraeus with the geometric shapes because of his awareness of the connection of the uraeus with the ancient Egyptian religion, which wouldn't suit the purpose of a Jewish place of worship. The material of the outer walls and columns of the synagogue was selected to simulate ancient Egyptian temple stones, but the inner façade of the portico is a modern material, which is gray glass.

5. THE REVIVAL OF PHARAONIC ARCHITECTURE IN FREEMASONS TEMPLES OUTSIDE EGYPT

As far as I know there are no Masonic lodges in Egypt, so the discussion of the revival of pharaonic architecture in Masonic temples must be confined to areas outside Egypt.

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Fig. 9 - Old Synagogue façade, England.

<http://www.canterbury-archaeology.org.uk/synagogue/4590809562>

In the nineteenth century Egyptian influence on Freemasonry was strongest, especially after the fading of the anti-Masonic movement of the 1820s-1830s (Rich & Merchant, 2001, p.3). The beliefs tales of the Masons dated the organization back to the building of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem and sometimes to Adam himself (Moore, 1995, p.35).

It catches the eye that some Masonic lodges emulated directly and deliberately the ancient Egyptian architecture on pretenses backed by no historical or scientific evidence. Freemasons claim that the ancient Egyptian architect, Imhotep, history's first known architect and the designer of King Djoser's funerary complex at Saqqara, played a major role in the construction of the Temple of Solomon [Marcianoartfoundation.org], [Queenannemason-iclodge.com]. By associating these claims with the history of Freemasonry, whose members view God as the architect of all creation, architectural expressions that imply ancient Egyptian roots become understandable.

5.1 FREEMASONS' HALL, ENGLAND

The Freemasons' Hall is located in Main Ridge, Lincolnshire, Boston, and was built from 1860-1863 (Fig. 10). On the façade a written sentence in hieroglyphs says: "In the 23rd year of the reign of

her majesty the royal daughter Victoria, lady most gracious, this building was erected." The temple was built as a replica of Dandour temple [historiengland.org.uk], which today is preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The façade of the temple is formed in a trapezoidal shape, topped by a cornice containing a relief of the winged sun with two uraei, symbolizing the god Horus Behdety, a protective god in ancient Egypt. There is a pair of palm columns decorated with hieroglyphic writings. The outer frame of the door of the temple is also formed in a trapezoidal shape, topped with a cornice containing a winged sun, but smaller than the one on the main facade.

5.2 GREATER JOHNSTOWN LODGE, PENNSYLVANIA, USA

Johnstown Lodge No. 538 was constituted in June 1875, in downtown Johnstown, Pennsylvania [johnstownlodge538.org]. The façade of the temple has the same concept of the design of ancient Egyptian temple façades, as it contains three stone components, the highest two on the sides and the lowest part in the middle, to suggest the "Akhet" word, but in this building façade the designer changed the plan, so that the highest part of the façade was the one in the middle, which formed a trapezoid (Fig. 11). Above the three doors of the building is a modern formulation to recreate the enclosure wall of the complex of King Djoser in Saqqara, which consists of inside and outside buttresses. It is known that the Djoser complex was a turning point in the history of architecture, as it was the first construction built in the world by using pre-cut stones with right angles and equal measurements. It is clear that the temple is influenced by ancient Egyptian architecture, outside and inside. There is a hall decorated in ancient Egyptian style, full of pharaonic paintings (Fig. 12), and there is a lectern influenced by pharaonic furniture. The table is decorated with lotus flowers and is surrounded by a trapezoidal frame that has a cornice decorated with a colorful winged sun disk, surrounded by another trapezoidal frame and two lotus columns with pharaonic paintings (Fig. 13).

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Fig. 10 - Freemasons' Hall, England.

<https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/2277236>

5.3 HIJOS DEL TRABAJO MASONIC LODGE, ARGENTINA

The lodge is located at 814 San Antoni Street, Buenos Aires, Argentina, and was built in 1882 and designed by the architect Francisco Cabot, but the current façade of the lodge was designed by the architect Cabot in 1919 in pharaonic style (Fig. 14), as demanded by the lodge members (hijosdeltrabajo.com), (Ruth& Ferrari, 2017, pp. 74-75). The façade has a prominent trapezoidal frame that contains three lotus columns, topped by a frieze has the name of the lodge, in turn topped by a cornice that has a relief of the winged sun with two cobras. The door of the lodge is at the side, topped by two sphinxes, over which is a frieze containing another winged sun, topped by two small obelisks. Here the obelisks are above the door but in ancient Egyptian temples they were in front of the entrance.

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Fig. 11 - Johnstown Lodge façade, USA.

<https://www.facebook.com/johnstownmasonictemple/photos/p.3600210230003059/3600210230003059/?type=1&theater>

6. CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing and studying several synagogues inside and outside Egypt and Masonic temples, which revive ancient Egyptian architecture, I found that the main reason behind the motivation of reviving the pharaonic style in both synagogues and Masonic temples was similar: to represent the identity of those using those places for worshipping, and their belief in an ancestral connection between ancient Egypt and their own rituals. For Jews who built their synagogues according to the ancient Egyptian architectural style to emphasize their identity and to demonstrate that the Jewish community belonged to Egypt and had ancient Egyptian roots, they succeeded in choosing the appropriate elements of pharaonic architecture to emulate it in their synagogues, and this is

evidenced by excluding any elements symbolizing ancient Egyptian deities.

For Masons who built their synagogues in the pharaonic style, to try to prove an alleged connection with ancient Egypt, it was completely different, because Masons had no real relationship or connection with ancient Egypt. They were trying to falsely root their beliefs and rituals in Egypt. A story that they concocted, about the connection between them and pharaonic Egypt, which is related to the architect Imhotep and Solomon's temple, has no scientific basis at all, and there is no mention of the idea of "Masons" in Egyptian history, even if they documented it later in their books. But Jews lived in Egypt and are part of its history, and there is much historical evidence to prove that. Ancient Egyptian civilization has conquered the hearts of the entire world with its deep philosophy.

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Fig. 12 - Pharaonic style inside the temple. <https://johnstownlodge538.org/history/>

Therefore, I encourage the revival of the pharaonic style, but only by choosing carefully the pharaonic elements. If it will be revived on the houses of worship of another religion or belief, it must be done with great awareness because of the close link between the symbolism of those elements and the religious faith and gods of the ancient Egyptians. Researchers, such as art historians and authors, must ensure accuracy when they are analyzing pharaonic or neo-pharaonic architectural style and its philosophy, so that future researchers, when using them as references, don't base their opinions on erroneous opinions. This causes scientific confusion in the understanding of ancient Egyptian civilization.



Fig. 13 - Part of a room shows the revival of Egyptian style. https://www.tribdem.com/johnstown_magazine/masonic-temple-there-s-nothing-secret-about-it/article_bd97c4b4-ff19-11e9-8124-073b7c38325c.html

Fig. 14 - Hijos del Trabajo masonic lodge, Argentina. <http://www.hijosdeltrabajo.com.ar/2015/04/origenes-de-la-masoneria-en-nuestro-pais.html>



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