



Mohamed Ali Mosque

Education in Ancient Egypt

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 tion took place in modest schools annexed to temples or in places belonging to the teacher. Secondly, there was an advanced collective stage: an inscription presumably dating back to the Ahnassi Period indicates that pupils attended regular schools, which survived and proliferated until the time of the New Kingdom. The third stage was one of professional training. Copybooks of pupils being trained in the time of the Ramesside Kings show that this stage was associated with government offices and departments; and it is possible that

responsibility for this stage by government departments dates back to the Old Kingdom. The fourth stage, an educational and cultural course in the palaces of the Pharaohs, was taught by the royal princes and involved groups of aristocratic youth and educated people.

This kind of education can be traced from the Old Kingdom to the New Kingdom. The fifth stage was education in higher culture at one of the higher institutes, or "houses of life"; and the sixth stage involved learning in the different schools of various cities and major temples.



Candlesticks and Muslim Tradition

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 The traditional Ramadan lantern, an enclosed candlestick, is always produced in great quantity for the nights of Ramadan. During the Fatimid era craftsmen made small coloured lanterns to be carried by the mussahar, the man who wakes people with his drum in the early hours of the morning so that they can eat their final meal before beginning fasting. Nowadays such lamps are carried by children, who go from house to house with them. Dr Osman Khairat writes: "The mussahar may be he who invented i.e. idea of the Ramadan lantern. This custom was transferred to the youngsters, who could be given small ornamented multi-coloured lanterns."

The lantern frame is made of tin, which makes it light and portable. The tin is decorated with tiny openings and small panes of coloured glass are set in it. A little handle at the top is attached to a small dome, usually made of pieces of tin skillfully joined together from which many long ribbons may hang. The candle is introduced either through a door that can be opened and shut or through a removable bottom.

The smallest Ramadan lanterns called biz teat may be no taller than ten centimeters. The largest kinds are a cube with a small lantern on each of

its four top corners and dodecahedron. Other Ramadan lantern shapes include hexagons, octagons, and varieties called "Abu Loz", "Abu Hyab", "Abu Irik", muqarnass, "melon glice", and "umbrella wit a handle".

The Mamluk period has left us a number of implements connected with candles. Candlesticks, of high artistic value, rich in design and form. The glory of that epoch in particular are the most famous of them, called the Kutbugha Candlestick, is now in the Islamic museum where it is one of the most important masterpieces. Its neck and candle socket holder are decorated with two lines of inscription. The lower line reads, "Consolation, long life and victory over enemies be to the prince." The Consolation was offered to Prince Kutbugha for the murder of the Sultan Ashraf, whom Kutbugha avenged, but the reference is obscure and the inscription defied explanation until it was deciphered and explained by Dr Hassan El-Basha. One reason it was so hard to read is that the alphabet in the inscription is composed of living things. The A's and the L's are human beings and the rest of the letters are shaped like heads of animals or birds. These forms seem full of strength and solidity, of extreme vitality and ex-

"For thousands of years this awe-inspiring temple stood engraved in the side of a mountain — until construction of the Aswan dam began and the Nile threatened to flood it. A mind-boggling removal scheme saved the monument: proof that modern-day nations truly treasure the ancient cultures and together are capable of working miracles."

Nagib Mahfuz, Nobel prize-winner for literature, Abu Simbel, Egypt



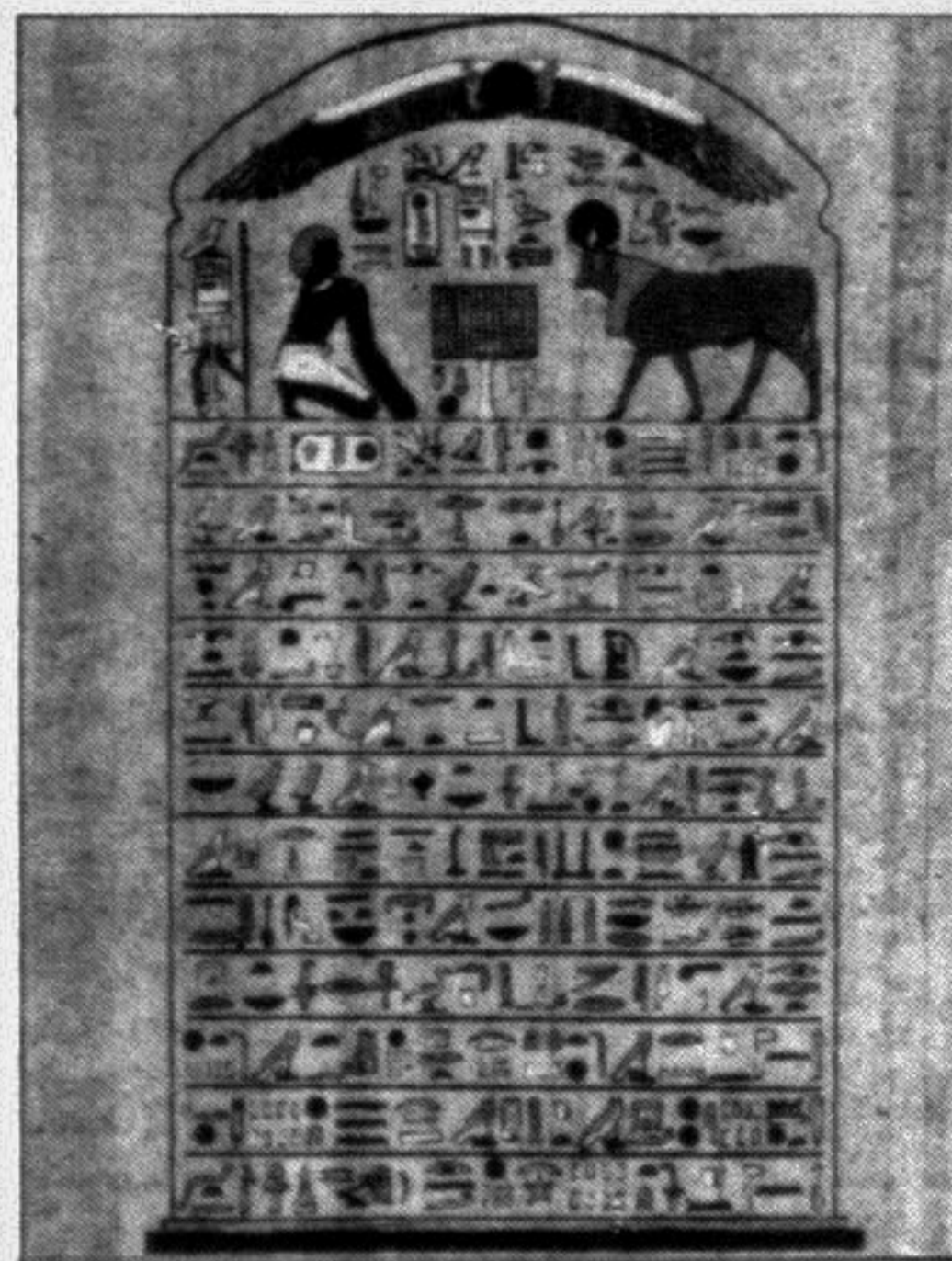
pressiveness, though they are highly abstract.

Egypt saw the flourishing of the technique of plating ordinary metal products, like candlesticks with silver or gold. The fifteenth century historian Makrizi refers to the technique in his description of Cairo.

"There is a plate market. Plated pots are in every house. Plates, pitchers and candlesticks are plated with silver. They were in every house. It is the custom of Egyptians when they celebrate the wedding of one of their girls to include brass plated with silver in her trousseau.



Tutankhamun's funerary mask



Stele of Apis dedicated to an Apis

"The Most Beautiful Painting in the World"

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 of Sheba Adoring the Wood to be Used for the Holy Cross" followed by "The Encounter of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon". We were interested in their Orientalist themes, of course, but also because they best exemplify the master's stylistic character. Even though the theme

could have given way to a mere reproduction of social life, Piero della Francesca developed a perspective whereby, through setting the viewpoint in a very low point on the canvas, the viewer's eye is focused far in the distance. In the foreground, faces are displayed in groups. An overwhelming impression of serenity emanates from lines concentrated in a gigantic geometrical arrangement and a quasi three-dimensional architectural disposition causing the painting to transcend its legendary theme. The focus turns to the interior, away from a sense of time and contingencies.

During the Renaissance, Italian artists, gifted with colourful imaginations, discovered Man, then enthusiastically elaborated his greatness in religion. His dignity, his power, his place at the centre of the universe were equally exalted. In this aesthetic and intellectual movement, however, Piero della Francesca enjoyed an exceptional status. The artist, ending the early Renaissance cycle, gathered the sum of all previous trends in his art. While all these elements were already more or less in evidence, merit for their synthesis can only be attributed to him. He was also the initiator of many trends that followed. However, the artist's greatness, his highly influential personality, singled him out. Picasso, Seurat, and Cezanne are among the masters who were influenced by this prodigious artist. Moreover, surveys conducted in the USA pertaining to the field of reproductions such as prints, cards, etc, revealed the artist's undisputable preeminence. British novelist Aldous Huxley saw in Piero della Francesca's "Resurrection" "The most beautiful painting in the world". He discovered in Piero's work certain characteristics of pharaonic art dating back to the Old Kingdom: a similar sense of mass, architectural balance, three-dimensional space, and faces that seem sculpted in stone so dense that it seems impossible to have chiseled details or to have shaped wrinkles caused by time. Figures in his paintings and frescoes, says Huxley, are pharaonic demigods, their headdresses are "pechents", while their draped costumes have the consistency of granite. The pride of the Italian "quattrocento" man emanates proudly in this art form that revived the classic ideals with great mastery.

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