

## THE ISSUE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN SALAMA MOUSSA AND CEVAT ŞAKIR KABAĞAÇLI'S ESSAYS

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### Abstract

The role of the ancient cultures in their own cultural identities is one of the major issues in the essays of Salama Moussa and Cevat Şakir Kabağaçlı, the Egyptian and the Turkish writers.

Egyptian writer Salama Moussa, in his essays concerning this issue, underlines the significance of the pharaonic past of Egypt, regards the ancient Egypt as the basis of the civilization and argues that the pharaonic culture must be adopted as the main element of the Egyptian cultural identity.

On the other hand, Cevat Şakir Kabağaçlı, the Turkish writer, emphasizes the role of the ancient Anatolian culture in the contemporary Turkish identity. He argues that the origins of the ancient Greek civilization emerged in Anatolia. And he also expresses that many cultural elements of the ancient Anatolian civilizations surviving in the time being in Turkey.

In the early decades of the twentieth century of Egypt, the issue of cultural identity was a highly discussed topic among intellectuals. Thinkers such as Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Riza, Mustafa Sadik al-Rafii held that Egypt is a part of Islamic unity and that argued Islamic identity. On the other hand, a group of intellectuals, led by Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, such as Muhammad Husain Haikal, Ahmad Dayf, Salama Moussa, advocated the Egyptian nationalism. Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, speaking of the Egyptian unity, called the Syrio-Lebanese, who played a significant role in Egyptian literary life to join this unity and described the Arabs in the Arabian peninsula as some

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kind of strangers, and in an article he wrote about the pharaonic monuments, stressed that every Egyptian is proud and happy when he regards the grandeur of ancient Egypt.<sup>1</sup> Some writers, such as Husain Haikal and Salama Moussa, extended Lutfi's ideas to the literary field. The supporters of this idea argued that the contemporary Egypt is the heritor of the pharaonic Egypt and Egyptians should adopt the pharaonic past as the basis of the Egyptian cultural identity and abandon cultural heritage with Arabs and other muslim groups. Muhammad Husain Haikal, who was one of the supporters of this view, changed his thought from 1930's and began to deal with the autobiographies of Islamic figures in his works and defend the Oriental culture against western culture.<sup>11</sup>

Salama Moussa<sup>111</sup>, a coptic Egyptian writer, known by his essays, is one of the pionnering figures, defended the pharaonic cultural identity.<sup>1v</sup> His efforts to single out Egypt as a unique country out of the Islamic and Arab world, is one of the key elements which form his ideas on pharaonism. His ideas on the Egyptian cultural identity and its historical background can be found in his works such as "Misr Asl al-Hadara" (Egypt, Basis of the Civilisation) and "Muhtarat Salama Moussa" (Selections from Salama Moussa). In his essays, he claimed that Egypt is the place where the human civilisations emerged and the ancient Egyptian culture still in exists in today's Egypt. In his essays he also underlined the ways to preserving and surviving the pharaonic culture.

First, he asserted that the ancient Egypt is the basis of the human civilisation because the transition to the agricultural society first occured in Egypt. According to him, due to the aridity and the overflow of the Nile, a suitable environment for the agriculture took place. And water is the starting point of the civilisation.<sup>v</sup> Due to the agriculture, people felt themselves in a need to define the seasons and this gave the way to astrology. Salama Moussa underlines the significance of Nile as follow: "*The conditions for the emerging of a new civilisation are rarely found, and cannot be seen in all countries, since there is no river as the Nile which teaches and forces to learn the agriculture to the people.*"<sup>vi</sup> And Salama Moussa mentions that the ancient Egypt discovered the significance of the gold in social life and managed to make mummies the first time in the history. Making mummies prepared the way to chemistry and medical sciences.<sup>vii</sup> According to him, blessing the gold first took place in Egypt. Aryans, who immigrated to India, herited blessing of Gold from the Egyptians. He says that the iron age first started in Egypt, processing

copper took place there. According to him, building graves opened the way to the art of construction. On the other hand, navigation started in the ancient Egypt when people travelled to Palestine, Sudan, Syria and Yemen by ships to get resin and bitum.<sup>viii</sup> He also argues that the people of ancient Egypt were the first to began using alphabet and then it had been spreaded to the other parts of the world. Salama Moussa also claims that glass arts and sculpture have been appeared for the first time in ancient Egypt and passed to Greek and India. One of the aspects Salama Moussa emphasizes that the crucial roles of the Egyptian civilisation to be background for the Greek civilisation. He asserts that the civilisation moved from Egypt to ancient Greek and Greek became the second cradel for human civilisation.

Salama Moussa claims that many myths , as well as proverbs, originated in Egypt. He says, for example Homer's legends originated from Egypt. He also underlines that moral values and concepts such as conscience and personality first emerged in Egypt. Here he refers to a scholar, namely Brasted, who found the oldest inscription about moral values in Upper Egypt . Salama asserts that first moral rules emerged in Egypt and many additional on moral values are in exist on pyramids. According to him, one of these rules denies the concept of death, and uses the word of death only for enemies and another one pays significant attention to family relations. Another one is about working honestly and through this to reach to the personal happiness. Here Salama Moussa refers to Bu Hoteb, who says that success can not be reached without working hard.<sup>ix</sup>

Salama Moussa claims that many stories , mentioned at Torah have Egyptian origin. He also says that the faith systems of ancient Egypt had effected the old belief traditions of Middle East. The idols of the old Arab religions such as Menat, Lat, Uzza have Egyptian descent. The belief in other world came from ancient Egyptians to the Arabs of al-Jahiliya and this belief was symbolized by a pan scale on the Egyptian scripts and on the walls of the ancient Egyptian graves.<sup>x</sup>

Salama Moussa moved to another topic to claim that the ancient Egypt is alive in the contemporary Egypt in many forms. He concludes his opinions as: *" We are before everything Egyptian . We share the same blood to our ancestors, who lived five thausend years ago. There is a language connection between us and the pharaonic ages. This language is stil in existence at Greek*

*churches, and it has been written in Greek alphabets.*” Salama Moussa indicated, that the ancient Egypt is surviving in current Egypt culturally and biologically. He claims that the ruling classes at the Roman, Byzantine, Arab and Ottoman periods didn't mix with native Egyptians and the Egyptian people, both Muslims and Copts have saved their pharaonic origins. As an evidence he shows the similarity between the appearance of the ancient Egyptian people and the Egyptian people at present. Here, he refers to Elioth Smith, the English scholar, who had a significant effect on his ideas on pharaonic civilisation.<sup>xi</sup> Salama underlines that the customs of the people in the villages of Egypt look like the customs of people in the villages of Egypt today. To support his views he gives us some examples. He says that people in some places in current Egypt dislike killing snakes, because snakes were considered as sacred animals. In today's Egypt, women, who are suffering from infertility, are going to old temples as the people of ancient Egypt done 7000 years ago.<sup>xii</sup> Salama underlines that round breads and dates are consumed in today's Egypt as in ancient Egypt. He also stresses that belief in magic is alive in today's Egypt as in ancient Egypt and making mummies was widely used in pharaonic Egypt and continued until the adopting the Egyptian people Islam. He also claims that necromancy denying death in current Egypt originates in pharaonic Egypt.

Another topic, which Salama Moussa underlined, is about how to preserve the pharaonic culture in Egypt. According to him, the Egyptian people don't show sufficient interest to their pharaonic past. Salama Moussa asserts that at first the history of the ancient Egypt must be studied in details. According to him, by studying the pharaonic Egypt, the hidden genius of the Egyptian people will be uncovered. To reach this goal, Salama suggests to organize commissions in the big cities of Egypt to study pharaohs and purchase books, published on pharaohs in Europe. He also suggests to make films and publish books on pharaohs and the pharaonic Egypt. He summarizes his ideas in this as: “*Studying pharaohs is a propaganda for pharaohs themselves. We want this propaganda, because it completes our historical characters and ascends our honour and enlightens the basis and the principles, which our civilisation, I mean the human civilisation rises over it.*”<sup>xiii</sup>

Similarly trend can be found in Turkey. Some writers emphasize the importance of the ancient civilisations of Anatolia and their places in the contemporary Turkish identity. A leading figure among them is Cevat Şakir Kabağaçlı (1890-1973).<sup>xiv</sup> His ideas have a great impact on writers such as Sabahattin Eyuboglu(1908-1973) and Azra Erhat (1915-1982).

We can summarize Cevat Şakir Kabağaçlı's opinions on the cultural identity in two aspects. One of them is about the innovations , emerged for the first time in Anatolia. For an example he, claims that the first census was made in Anatolia during the time of August II. According to him, at that time Anatolia was the richest and the most enlightened part of the world. He also claims that for the first time banking system emerged in Anatolia in the V. Century B.C. in Ephesus and in the II. and III. centuries this action moved to Bandırma and Sinop provinces.<sup>xv</sup> He also holds that money for the first time has been used in Anatolia in Sardis, capital of Lydia. He argues that horses have been domesticated first in Anatolia by Hittites and they were the first riders. Kabağaçlı, who argues that Anatolia is one of the cradles of human civilisation, also claims that free scientific thinking has been appeared for the first time in Anatolia. Anatolian thinkers used to call themselves as "fusiologes" and not as "thinkers". According to Kabağaçlı, Heraclitus anticipated the time and space theory of Einstein by saying that the reality is now and here. Sokrates and Plato ignored the reality of now and here and considered the reflections of the present as temporary views of the world.

Another point, stressed by Cevat Şakir Kabağaçlı, is that Anatolia was the first place the natural sciences emerged. According to him, the mankind, who felt himself free could be able to make a naturalistic and physical interpretation of the universe. According to him, in the 6. century B.C. Thales calculated the solar eclipse and invented the solar time. He argues that Thales and his followers had more advanced ideas than Lavasier, and Heraclitus from Ephesus was at the same intellectual level to modern nuclear scientists.<sup>xvi</sup> He holds that there wasn't mysticism in Anatolia at all. According to him, Anatolia was the source of inspirations for Hellenic consciousness.<sup>xvii</sup> In the middle ages the western world could not show a development because of the great impacts of Sokrates, Plato and Aristotle's views on Christianity. Kabağaçlı also claims that all the educated women of the antiquity lived in Anatolia. Kabağaçlı argues that in ancient Greek, women considered as slaves and didn't receive

education. But in Anatolia, there was a matriarchal system and women had not been despised. This is why the first female admirals, Artemis I and II lived in Anatolia and they won two significant naval battles.<sup>xviii</sup>

Kabağaçlı also claims that the scientific urbanism had begun in Anatolia. In the 5. century B.C. Hippodamos of Miletos initiated city planning, which is considered the source of modern city planning. Afterwards, in small town Priene with five thousand inhabitants at Menderes valley, the scientific urbanization had been planned and came into effect. According to Kabağaçlı, while the Anatolian towns were in progress with the modern urbanization, nobody interested in city planning in Athen. As an evidence for this, he says that even today the ancient Anatolian towns are in good position.<sup>xix</sup>

He also underlines that Homeros, Herodot of Halikarnasos and Hippocrat of Kos, the pioneers of poetry, history and medicine were from Anatolia. According to him, Herodot was also the first traveller of the world and besides Anatolia, he had visited Greece, Egypt, Arabia and Sicillia. For example, Aisopos, the father of the fables was from Bandırma and his fables had been translated into all languages and become the source of humour and almost all tales of La Fontaine originates in Aisopos' fables.<sup>xx</sup> Kabağaçlı also claims that herbal drugs had been used for the first time in Anatolia and wine was known in Anatolia before Hittites.<sup>xxi</sup>

As Salama Moussa did in the case of Egypt, Cevat Şakir Kabağaçlı also talked about the impact of the old Anatolian culture on the present Turkish culture. As an evidence, Kabağaçlı refers to some elements that didn't exist among other Turkic groups except Anatolia. For example, according to Kabağaçlı, "Ahi" (Brotherhood) organisations, primitive forms of workers unions are similar to "phratia" and "phyle" forms which existed in ancient Anatolia.<sup>xxii</sup> He also claims that "zeybek" culture of today's Anatolia emerged in ancient times in Anatolia and has a dionisiac origine. Kabağaçlı argues that the old beliefs of Anatolia are alive today. For example, in "Tahtacı" groups of Anatolia women and men come together in a day in every week and drink. He claims that these are dionisiac organisations<sup>xxiii</sup>. One of his arguments is that many words which is assumed to be Turkish, originated in Greek and other old Anatolian languages and Turks adopted many words to their languages, which they encountered in Anatolia. He gives us some examples: the words of "Baba" and "Çocuk" have Hittitian origine. The words such as "Dam", "Temel",

“Avlu” , “Anahtar” ,”Kilit”, “Bulgur”, “Evlek” came from the Ionian language. He also claims that many customs of current Anatolia have old Anatolian origin. For example he says that people in Anatolia gives helva ( a kind of sweet) to their relatives and neighbours when somebody dies. According to Kabağaçlı, this is a dionisiac custom and sweet symbolizes the abundance.<sup>xxiv</sup> He claims that many present customs of Anatolia originates in the Bakkhos culture of Anatolia and he also underlines that the folkloric costumes of modern Anatolia shows a similarity to the costumes of ancient Anatolia. He says that Turkoman brides wear three dresses and this shows a similarity with Goddess Artemisia.

According to Kabağaçlı, what the Turks of Anatolia have to do in terms of cultural identity, is not to be confined to small Turkish circle, on the contrary they have to adopt all civilisations which existed in Anatolia. He says if they deal only with Turkish heroes and sultans, they become within an infertile circle.<sup>xxv</sup>

As a result, we can say that Salama Moussa regarded the ancient Egypt as the basis of the human civilisation. As opposed to this idea, Cevat Şakir Kabağaçlı argues that Anatolia became the Pioneer of many elements of civilisation. A common point, which shared by both authors is that the ancient civilisations have a great impact on cultural identities of their societies. While Kabağaçlı holds that the ancient Anatolian culture , including all the civilisations emerged there, are necessary for Turks to adopt them. On the other hand, Salama Moussa claimed that the pharaonic culture must be adopted as the main and the only element of the Egyptian cultural identity.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See, Brugman,J, *an Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt*, Leiden, E.J.Brill,1984, p.341,342.
- <sup>2</sup> See Rahmi Er, *Modern Mısır Romanı (1914-1944)* , Ankara 1997, p.38-39.
- <sup>3</sup> For Salama Moussa, see Brugman, J, *Ibid*, p.392-402.
- <sup>4</sup> See Bedrettin Aytaç, *Modern Mısır Edebiyatında Kültürel Kimlik Arayışına Bir Örnek; Selâme Mûsâ, Birinci Orta Doğu Semineri(Kavramlar Kaynaklar ve Metodoloji)* , *Bildiriler*, T.C. Fırat Üniversitesi Orta-Doğu Araştırmaları Merkezi, Elazığ 2004, p.201-207.

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- <sup>5</sup> See Salama Moussa, *Mısr Asl al-Hadara* , Cairo 1947, p. 22.
- <sup>6</sup> See Ibid, p. 103.
- <sup>7</sup> See Ibid, p.27,61.
- <sup>8</sup> See Ibid, p.63.
- <sup>9</sup> See Ibid, p. 128.
- <sup>10</sup> See Ibid, p. 150-152.
- <sup>11</sup> See Ibid, p.7-9.
- <sup>12</sup> See Salama Moussa, *Muhtarat Salama Moussa*,Maktaba al-Maaref, Beirut 1980, p. 110.
- <sup>13</sup> *Mısr Asl al-Hadara*, p.13.
- <sup>14</sup> See Mustafa Özcan, *Halikarnas Balıkcısı'nın Hikâye ve Romanları Üzerinde Bir Araştırma* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis), Selçuk Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, Konya 1985, p.7-14.
- <sup>15</sup> See Halikarnas Balıkcısı Bütün Eserleri 4 , *Merhaba Anadolu* (Prepared by Şadan Gökova), Bilgi Yayınevi, Ankara 2002,p.39.
- <sup>16</sup> Halikarnas Balıkcısı Bütün Eserleri 6 *Düşün Yazıları* (Yayıma Hazırlayan :Azra Erhat) Bilgi Yayınevi, Mayıs 2002 p.72.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.44.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid,p.66, *Hey Koca Yurt*, p.286.
- <sup>19</sup> See *Hey Koca Yurt*, p.108-110.
- <sup>20</sup> *Merhaba Anadolu*, p.155-156.
- <sup>21</sup> *Hey Koca Yurt*, p.188,189.
- <sup>22</sup> See *Düşün Yazıları*, p. 40,41.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid, 55,56.
- <sup>24</sup> See Ibid, 55-61.
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