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Haunting Images. Iconography from the Past in the Pseudo-Maqrizian Manual for Treasure Hunting

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Abstract

Images carved into caverns, painted upon stone, inscribed on the monuments of the Pharaohs, and preserved within the walls of churches and monasteries never were mere ornament for the medieval Arab treasure hunter. An image, if rightly deciphered, was believed to point at the very spot where an ancient treasure was buried. An image could proclaim the treasure's presence by its very presence, or having the potential of being a talisman guarding hidden riches. This mode of reading the images of past – prehistoric, Pharaonic, or Coptic – in Islamic Egypt finds expression in the pseudo-Maqrizian handbook, *Ḥall al-rumūz wa-fakk al-ṭalāsīm wa-l-kunūz wa al-ḥafīyāt* (*The Interpretation of Symbols and the Uncovering of Talismans, Treasures and Hidden Things*), a guide to Egyptian treasure sites. Preserved in a single manuscript witness (MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532), the text unfolds a vast array of images: wild and domesticated beasts, human figures and mounted horsemen, spirits, and religious motifs. By presenting a critical edition and analysis of the sections devoted to the description of images in this pseudo-epigraphical work attributed to al-Maqrizī, this study seeks to investigate the long afterlife of Egypt's ancient art within the Arabo-Islamic medieval culture of treasure hunting.

Keywords

treasure hunting – Egypto-mania – reception of preislamic art – al-Maqrizī – iconography

1 Introduction

When the late antique alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis (3rd–4th cent. CE) observed the relief of the celestial staircase in the temple of Dendera, though his access to the original meaning was limited, he interpreted its steps as phases of the alchemical process and recorded this in his *Visions*.¹ This particular case opens a research perspective on other instances of later interpretations of ancient images that had become part of the daily landscape. In the later cultural context of reception, the interpretation of the images reflected views and ideas embedded in the new cultural frame of reception.

In medieval Egypt, given the rich and varied cultural stratifications, the possibilities were particularly rich and varied. Pharaonic Egypt was regarded as an age in which its people possessed profound knowledge and magical powers – qualities reflected in their astonishing monumental art and architecture – though this knowledge was believed to have been long lost. Some inspirational images may even antedate Pharaonic Egypt. For instance, figures preserved in rock art and predynastic temples continued to be viewed as crystallizations of encrypted knowledge and wisdom, whose secrets might be recovered through careful scrutiny. This conviction is reflected in a broad corpus of texts that present themselves as decipherments or translations of ancient wisdom encoded in symbols and figures from a distant past.²

As the interpretations of Zosimos, numerous Arabic authors, do not aim at the recovery of an original key but rather to the construction of new meaning. In this way, each act of interpretation endowed such images with renewed vitality, reviving them at every attempt at decipherment. Without indulging in anachronism or exaggeration, it may be suggested that these descriptions, beyond their literary function, were also related to material realities and to features of the familiar landscape that could be observed in daily life. Whether

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1 See Marina Escolano-Poveda, “Zosimos Aigyptiakos. Identifying the Imagery of the “Visions” and Locating Zosimos of Panopolis in His Egyptian Context”, *ARYS. Antigüedad: Religiones y Sociedades*, XX (2022): pp. 77–134.

2 See Moureau, Sébastien and De Callataj, Godefroid, “In Code We Trust: The Concept of *Rumūz* in Andalusī Alchemical Literature and Related Texts”, *Asiatische Studien*, LXXV/2 (2021): pp. 429–47.

contemporaries genuinely believed in these associations, or invoked them primarily to enhance the reliability of a handbook to fool the gullible ones is ultimately of secondary importance. Their wide diffusion and distinctive character render even provisional hypotheses of identification worth exploring.

Fragments of this reception history are preserved within the rich corpus of medieval treasure-hunting manuals, which describe a wide array of images. Such images include also writing systems (hieroglyphic, ancient Greek, Persian, etc.) that could be recognized and associated to a specific cultural context, though the knowledge required for reading them was long lost. In these texts, the remains of various cultures – prehistoric, Pharaonic, Greek, Roman, Persian, and Coptic – are not perceived in a chronological sequence, they rather are flattened together into an undetermined past, absorbed into the blurred epoque of ignorance (*Jāhiliyya*), that is before the Islamic revelation. Their descriptions often show a striking realism, which emerges especially when compared with still extant material evidence. Within this composite tradition, three major strata of pre-Islamic Egyptian art can be discerned. The first is rock art, carved into caves and stones of regions that, during the Holocene Humid Phase, were not desert. The second is the Pharaonic imagery, visible in the monumental and funerary sites scattered all over Egypt. The third is the Graeco-Roman and Coptic visual heritage of Late Antiquity, which introduced the later layers of iconography into the Egyptian landscape of treasure hunting.³ This universe of images was often depicted bearing the signs of the passage of time—broken limbs, structural fragility, faded pigments. Such details became part of the description itself, shaping an antiquarian gaze that merged the original form with the changes and damages provoked by the passing of time.

For the treasure hunter, such images were potential indications of the site of the treasure, provided one possessed the ability to interpret them correctly. Treasure-hunting manuals frequently specify that the direction of a figure's gaze or the gesture of its hands might point to the exact location where treasure lay buried.

Images and statues were otherwise believed to have been created within magical rituals in order to embody spiritual powers (*rūhāniyyāt*) which could repel intruders and guard the treasure from unworthy seekers. Through such properties, images were thought to conjure dangers that could harm the seeker, distract him from his task, and often cause his death. In this context, the image became the focal point of elaborate magical rituals including animal

3 A Coptic influence is detectable also in the names of the months used in the different descriptions of treasures sites.

sacrifices, fumigations, litanies, and prayers to be performed with a propitious astral influence.⁴

This study focuses on the images in one of most extended works of the genre, the *Ḥall al-rumūz wa-fakk al-ṭalāsim wa-l-kunūz wa al-ḥaḥḥiyāt* (*The Interpretation of Symbols and the Uncovering of Talismans, Treasures and Hidden Things*), attributed to Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī (764/1364–845/1442). This article aims to reconstruct the geography of Egyptian treasures and the peculiarities of the sites, along with their iconographic repertoire of themes recorded in the text and their possible material counterparts that might have served as inspiration.

2 Egyptian Treasures in MS Oxford Bodleian Library Huntington 532

The *Kitāb Ḥall al-rumūz wa-fakk al-ṭalāsim wa-l-kunūz wa al-ḥaḥḥiyāt* (*The Interpretation of Symbols and the Uncovering of Talismans, Treasures and Hidden Things*) is preserved in a single manuscript witness: MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532. According to its colophon, the compilation was completed on the 11th of Muḥarram 930/29th November 1523. The work is attributed to al-Maqrīzī, whose authority would cast an aura of reliability and prestige on the text, and possibly motivate the refinement of its style, especially in comparison with other similar compositions.

The manuscript counts two-hundred and seven folia, including some coloured ones—tinted or painted, sometimes only the margins – which represents one of the features that suggest the attempt to produce a luxury manuscript, though not of the first rank. There averagely are twenty lines per page, the writing frame sometimes includes examples of written talismans. The text is occasionally encoded either using a secret alphabet or by detaching the letters of a word and inverting them. The text sports rubrications and rubricated paragraph markers (large dots). It is written in a regular *naskh* (round script), with bowls and tails of the letters under the line particularly elongated and pronounced, the final *lām* is particularly pronounced too, also by means of an elongated and straight ascender; some descenders are enriched by a thuluth-like curl. Ligatures are occasionally irregular and generally rather fluid. To summarize, all features suggest a so-called Ottoman *naskh* for it (Fig. 1).

4 For the various kinds of substances for fumigations, called in Arabic *buḥūr*, I have opted for the general translations ‘incense’, even though the term indicates in this context compound substances, in which incense is one of the possible ingredients, along with other resins and more peculiar substances.



FIGURE 1 Double opening with tinted and coloured paper. University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Huntington 532, f. 89v–90r

Particularly interesting are the title page, the index, and the head piece (*sarlawh*) over the incipit of the text [Figs 2–4]. They share characteristic decorative elements: red, blue and gold are combined with black, rosettes with eight petals and other stylized vegetal elements. The header of the table of contents is in gold and strikes as the imitation of a more refined thuluth header, with some stiffness and uncertainty to it. The *sarlawh* is rather simple though of great effect – the floral motives not particularly refined – with the colours and gold heavily distributed in the coloured areas. The overall impression is that of a combined influence of Mamluk and early Ottoman composite elements.⁵

The attribution of the text to al-Maqrizī, though not categorically impossible, is doubtful, as several considerations speak against its authenticity.

The first argument is a chronological incongruity: in the introduction the author relates that his first encounter with treasure-seeking occurred during his childhood, declaring that he was seven years old on the 11th of Rabiʿ

5 I am grateful to Lucia Raggetti for having discussed with me ideas and possible intuitions about this manuscript.



FIGURE 2 Title page of the Pseudo-Maqrizi's *Ḥall al-rumūz*. University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Huntington 532, f. 4r

فهرست هذا الكتاب

صفحة فتح قاعة الساماني بجمل الرصد عدد 3	صفحة بالحلج عدد 5	صفحة الحاكم بامر الله عدد ورق
صفحة فتح كهف السادة عدد 4	صفحة فتح كنز اوردوبيله احي الملك ابوشاه عدد 5	صفحة مغارة المدخنة بابوشاه عدد 3
صفحة مغارة الزهيق عدد 4	صفحة بالكلية عدد 4	صفحة الطارق عدد 4
صفحة بمنه عقيب باجين عدد 7	صفحة بدر القصير وهو در العفل عدد 4	صفحة بشرويه عدد 4
صفحة بالرجله مغارة سني مغارة العقاب عدد 8	صفحة مغارة دار الفرب بالرجله عدد 8	صفحة مغارة الرجله عدد 8

FIGURE 3 First page of the table of contents of the Pseudo-Maqrīzī's *Hall al-rumūz*, University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Huntington 532, f. 4v



FIGURE 4 Sarlawh over the incipit of the Pseudo-Maqrizī's *Hall al-rumūz*, University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Huntington 532, f. 15r

al-Awwal 687/21st April 1288. The famous al-Maqrizī, however, was born in 766/1364 – nearly eighty years later.

The second argument is the linguistic register: unpolished in style, replete with errors as highlighted by Christopher Braun, furthermore, often employing

a vernacular register that seems unlikely to be part of al-Maqrīzī's genuine prose.⁶ To these observations one may add the author's preference for particularly colloquial or even substandard expressions – at times verging on the ungrammatical – which appear to signal the emergence of an informal register within the text, along with more conventional forms of Arabic to express the same meaning. Among such usages, it is frequent to find *ṭul rūḥak* employed simply to mean “proceed in a given direction”; or idiomatic expressions still common in various forms of vernacular Arabic today, such as *‘alā yadik al-yamīn* – literally “on the direction of your right hand”, instead of the more straightforward *‘alā al-yamīn* “on your right”. Similarly, the text exhibits in multiple spots *‘ulūm* in place of *‘alāmāt* to signify the plural of “sign” or “indication”. One also remarks the frequent colloquial expressions in redundant constructions such as *fawq bi-ẓahr al-jabal* to express “on the slope of the mountain”, Instead of, for instance, the more plain Arabic *fī safḥ al-jabal*.⁷

A third argument is the ostentatious erudition displayed in the introduction, enumerating at length high-sounding works and authors allegedly studied by the author. Such a display seems incongruous with al-Maqrīzī's other works, in particular with *Al-Mawā‘iẓ wa-l-‘tibār bi-ḍikr al-ḥiṭaṭ wa-l-āṭār* (*Book of Exhortations and Useful Lessons in Dealing with Topography and Historical Remains*).

A fourth argument concerns the author's evident sympathy with the policies of marginalization and fanaticism directed against Christians and Jews described in a lengthy section devoted to al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (375/411–985/1021). Moreover, the accompanying account of the Fatimid caliph appears too simplistic to have been composed by al-Maqrīzī given the treatment he gives to this caliph in multiple sections of the *Ḥiṭaṭ*.⁸

Another argument could be the relatively vague form of the attribution. In several passages, the text refers only to the author as “Šayḥ al-Maqrīzī”, without specifying his full name. This strategy may have been intended to allude to the famous al-Maqrīzī and thereby appropriate the prestige associated with his name, while avoiding an explicit attribution that would have exposed the compilers to accusations of forgery. Yet it could be argued against it that in the edited *al-Ḥiṭaṭ* as well, the author does not cite his full name in the introduction

6 Braun, Christopher, *Treasure Hunting and Grave Robbery in Islamic Egypt Textual Evidence and Social Context* (PhD dissertation, The Warburg Institute, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2017): p. 130.

7 MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, ff. 95r, 47r, 94v.

8 See, for instance: Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Maqrīzī Book of Exhortations and Useful Lessons in Dealing with Topography and Historical Remains*, ed. Frédéric Bauden and Almon Clopper, trans. Karl Stowasser (Leiden: Brill, 2022): II, pp.346–47.

3 The Roots of the Pseudo-Maqrīzī

A pseudo-epigraphic attribution, however, has its roots in the genuine corpus and the personal profile of an author. Accounts of treasures were reported in al-Maqrīzī's *Al-Mawā'iz wa-l-i'tibār bi-dīkr al-ḥiṭaṭ wa-l-āṭār* (*Book of Exhortations and Useful Lessons in Dealing with Topography and Historical Remains*, henceforth *Ḥiṭaṭ*).⁹ This vast compendium covers “many aspects of the history of Egypt and its most significant actors from the Islamic conquest to his own time”.¹⁰ Within this historical work, al-Maqrīzī records various stories concerning hidden riches. Al-Maqrīzī seems to embrace the widespread view that treasure hunting was a lawful and acceptable mean of acquiring riches, rather than the chimerical pursuit dismissed by Ibn Ḥaldūn.¹¹ The *Ḥiṭaṭ* offer an anchor to all the historical and technical issues involved in treasure hunting: the treasure historical origin, its locations and the clues leading to it, as well as their supernatural protections and the ways to overcome them.

The entanglement of image and knowledge is recorded by the Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442), who discussed the belief that such images were created to communicate wisdom to those capable of discerning their hidden meaning.¹²

9 Nasser Rabbat presents an alternative title of “the book of moral sermons and Lessons derived from the remembrance of cities’ traces and building remains” reading *bi-dīkr* literally “in the mention” as the source of the lessons derived from the text. See Rabbat, Nasser O., *Writing Egypt: Al-Maqrizi and His Historical Project* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023): p. 2.

10 See Bauden, Frédéric, “Maqriziana xvi: Al-Maqrīzī as a Reader”, in *Authors as Readers in the Mamlūk Period and Beyond*, ed. Élise Franssen (Venice: Fondazione Università Ca’ Foscari, 2022): p. 197.

11 Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History* (Vol. 2), ed. Franz Rosenthal (London: Routledge, 1958): p. 324. The Tunisian celebrated historian also wonders about the logic behind ancient people taking so much troubles in hiding their treasures, and then providing detailed instructions to retrieve them.

12 For the life of al-Maqrīzī and his work see Bauden, Frédéric, “Introductory Essay”, in al-Maqrīzī, *Book of Exhortations and Useful Lessons in Dealing with Topography and Historical Remains*, transl. and annotated by Karl Stowasser, Part 1, Bauden, Frédéric and Almon, Clopper eds. (Brill, 2022): pp. vii–xli. Also see Bauden, Frédéric, “Taḳī Al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī”, in Mallett, Alexander (ed.), *Medieval Muslim Historians and the Franks in the Levant* (Boston: Brill, 2015): pp. 161–200. On the life of al-Maqrīzī and aspect of his historiography on Christians representation see Bauden, Frédéric, “Al-Maqrīzī, Taḳī l-Dīn Abū l-‘Abbās Aḥmad Ibn ‘Alī Ibn ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Maqrīzī”, in Thomas, David and Mallett, Alexander (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History* (Leiden: Brill, 2013): pp. 380–400.

They built these temples [*barābī*] [at Aḥmīm] before the Flood, and in this ancient temple there were images of the kings who ruled Egypt. It was built with alabaster stone, each stone five cubits long and two cubits thick. [...] The walls of these corridors were engraved with images of diverse forms and proportions, in them the symbols of the sciences of the Ancient Egyptians (*qubṭ*): alchemy, natural magic [*sīmīyā*], talismans, medicine, the stars, geometry, and other than that. They deposited in them those images [...] inside it, there are wondrous images and strange pigments, like the forms of birds and human beings and other than that, inside it and outside it [...] It is said that Dū al-Nūn came to know the science of alchemy from them. And this temple remained standing until the year 780.

The presence of treasures on Egyptian soil is mentioned in connection with the prophet Yūsuf, which grants it respectability in an Islamic context.¹³

In Egypt [there are] the treasures of Yūsuf – Peace be upon him – and the treasures of the kings before him and [of the] kings after him, for he would accumulate what remained beyond the expenses and the provisions for the calamities of the time. And this is [that which is meant by] the saying of God – Mighty and Exalted: “*And We caused them to come forth from gardens and springs and treasures.*” (Quran 17:57)

Al-Maqrīzī mentions the story of a Pharaoh allegedly buried in a pyramid with all his riches protected by talismans.¹⁴

And after him reigned his son Hargīb, who was, like his father, wise and eminent in the science of magic (*siḥr*) and talismans. He accomplished marvellous works, extracted numerous minerals, made manifest the knowledge of alchemy, built the pyramids of Dahšūr, and transported into them vast riches, precious gems, medicines, and poisons, and he placed over them spiritual entities to guard them. [...] When he died, he was buried in the pyramid together with all his riches and his treasures.

These treasures did not solely consist in riches, they could also take the form of books recording ancient wisdom or alchemical elixirs.¹⁵

13 Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Mawāʿiẓ wa al-iʿtibār fī dīkr al-ḥiṭaṭ wa al-āṭār*, 1: p. 125.

14 Ibid., p. 251.

15 Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-mawāʿiẓ wa al-iʿtibār fī dīkr al-ḥiṭaṭ wa al-āṭār*, 1: p. 244. Among the Arabic text of “treasured” wisdom see Raggetti, Lucia, “The *Treasure of Alexander* – Stories of

Nuqāwuš son of Nuqrāwuš, who was like his father endowed the knowledge of divination (*‘ilm al-kihāna*) and talismans. He was the first to build in Egypt a temple (*haykāl*), in which he placed images of the seven planets; and he wrote upon each planet its benefits and its harmful effects [...] [and he placed] upon every city a number of libraries (lit., treasure-houses of wisdom, *ḥazā’in al-ḥikma*).

Al-Maqrīzī reports that Byzantines had knowledge of innumerable treasures of Egypt, their sites were recorded in books – either composed by the Byzantines themselves or by those who preceded them. The clergy used to distribute single pages of such books to those who had long served the Church, as way to grant them a lavish reward for their faithful service.¹⁶

It was said that the Byzantines, when they departed from Syria and from Egypt, stored up much of their wealth in places prepared for that purpose, and they wrote books with the signs of their sites and the ways to reach them, and they deposited these books in Constantinople; and knowledge of this may be obtained from them. It was also said that the Byzantines did not write [these books], but rather they found books about the places of the treasures belonging to those who had reigned before them, among the Greeks, the Chaldeans, and the Ancient Egyptians; and when they departed from Egypt and Syria, they carried those books with them and placed them in the church. And it was said that nothing of this is given to anyone if not after he had served the church for a certain period, and then a sheet was delivered to him, which constituted his portion.

In the late antique period, also the Christians of Egypt were connected to hidden treasures. A notable example recorded by al-Maqrīzī is, for instance, the Coptic sovereign Manāwš b. Manqāwš, who allegedly concealed numerous treasures in the district of Bahnasa.¹⁷

The *Ḥiṭaṭ* do not refrain from mentioning the magic protecting treasures. The people of Ancient Egypt are said to have employed occult techniques, fashioning talismanic devices and appointing spiritual entities (or simply ‘spirits’, *rūḥāniyyāt*).¹⁸ Al-Maqrīzī mentions a non-better identified Sūrid,

Discovery and Authorship”, in Brinkmann, Stefanie et al. (eds.) *Education Materialised* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021): pp. 279–314.

16 Ibid., p. 125.

17 Ibid., p. 226.

18 According to Isabel Toral-Niehoff and Annette Sundermeyer magic was entangled with the imaginary of Pre-Islamic Egypt by many Arabs and their “*Egyptomania*”, see Toral-Niehoff, Isabel and Sundermeyer, Annette, “Going Egyptian in Medieval Arabic

the alleged builder of all Ancient Egyptian monuments, who entrusted spirits with the protection of treasures of wealth and knowledge in temples and the pyramids.¹⁹

As for the temples, Ibn Waṣīf Shāh relates that Sūrīd, the one who built the pyramids, is the very same who built all the ancient Egyptian monuments (*barābī*). He placed treasures inside them, inscribed the sciences upon them, and appointed spirits over them to guard them from whoever might direct himself toward them.

These spiritual entities are described by al-Maqrīzī as mosters, either terrifying or alluring. These spirits were said to appear at momentous times of the day, notably noon and sunset.²⁰

The Copts (*Qubṭ*) have related in their books that the spirit of the Northern side of the pyramid is a beardless youth, yellowish of skin, naked, with great fangs in his mouth; while the spirit of the Southern side of the pyramid is a naked woman, with her sex exposed, beautiful, with great fangs in her mouth, who seduces the man when he sees her and she smiles at him, until he approaches her, and then she takes his reason away. The spirit of the coloured pyramid is an old man who holds in his hand a brazier like a brazier of the churches, with which he performs fumigations. More than one person has seen these spirits many times, as they circle around the pyramids at noon and at sunset.

In other cases, a spiritual entity (*rūḥāniyya*) could be instilled or aroused within matter, taking the form of a mechanical impediments or a poison.²¹ Often, it is an idol (*ṣanam*) that hosts the spirit, which thereby acquires the

Culture", in El-Bizri, Nader and Orthmann, Eva (eds.), *The Occult Sciences in Pre-Modern Islamic Cultures* (Beirut: Ergon, 2018): p. 249. On the reflection in Arabic literature on the pyramid as an embodiment of the wisdom and magical knowledge of ancient Egypt see Haarmann, Ulrich, "In Quest of the Spectacular: Noble and Learned Visitors to the Pyramids around 1200 A.D.", in Hallaq, Wael B. and Little, Donald P. (ed.), *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams* (Leiden: Brill, 1991): pp. 57–67. Also see Cook, Michael, "Pharaonic History in Medieval Egypt", *StIs*, LXXVII (1983): pp. 67–103. See also, Haarmann, Ulrich, "Die Sphinx. Synkretistische Volksreligiosität im Spätmittelalterlichen Islamischen Ägypten", *Saeculum*, xxix (1978): pp. 367–84.

19 al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Mawā'iz wa al-i'tibār fī ḍikr al-ḥiṭaṭ wa al-āṭār*, 1: p. 117.

20 Ibid., p. 333.

21 Burnett, Charles, "Arabic Magic", in Page, Sophie and Rider, Catherine (eds.), *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic* (London: Routledge, 2019): p. 72.

supernatural ability to move – albeit for just few movements. Al-Maqrīzī mentions objects that could be described as magico-mechanical devices, particular automata drawing on the full range of technical, mechanical, and alchemical knowledge. For instance, al-Maqrīzī recounts the existence of hollow statues filled with sulphur, within which a fiery *rūḥāniyya* was implanted: igniting the sulphur, the combustible substance would blow a great flame from its mouth when an intruder approached the statue.²²

At the border of the land, he placed hollow statues of copper and filled them with sulphur, and he assigned the spirit of fire to them; thus, when someone approached with hostile intent, those statues would cast forth from their mouths a fire that would burn him.²³

Such magico-mechanical devices, as well as talisman and impediments in general, were not conceived as insurmountable obstacles, but rather as selective barriers. Their function, therefore, was to regulate access by conferring legitimacy upon the rightful recipients, who possessed the required knowledge. Al-Maqrīzī did not miss to record that certain idols bore inscriptions detailing the fumigations and sacrifices necessary to neutralize their power and so gain access to the treasure.²⁴

4 Mapping the Treasures and Their Iconography

The pseudo-Maqrīzīan manual, extending over more than two hundred folia, is places itself in continuity with this constellation of beliefs. It enumerates a long series of sites, providing not only the way of reaching them, but also the instruments deemed necessary to overcome the various magical impediments said to protect the treasures – thus combining the observation of ancient monuments and artifacts with phantasmagorical elements [Fig.5].²⁵ The settings of

22 Among the techniques of the charlatans who duped people prospecting them the discovery of great treasures, al-Jawbarī recounts the construction of spectacular fire-spitting devices, see al-Jawbarī, Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥīm, *The Book of Charlatans*, edited by Dengler, Manuela, trans., Davies, Humphrey, Library of Arabic Literature (New York: New York University Press, 2020): p. 90.

23 Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Mawā’iz wa al-i’tibār fī dīkr al-ḥiṭaṭ wa al-āṭār*, 1: p. 368.

24 Ibid., p. 440.

25 For a study of the Arabic manuals in the broader context of a world history of treasure hunting, see Card, Jeb J., *Spooky Archaeology: Myth and the Science of the Past* (Albuquerque NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2018): p. 40; Golia, Maria, *A Short*

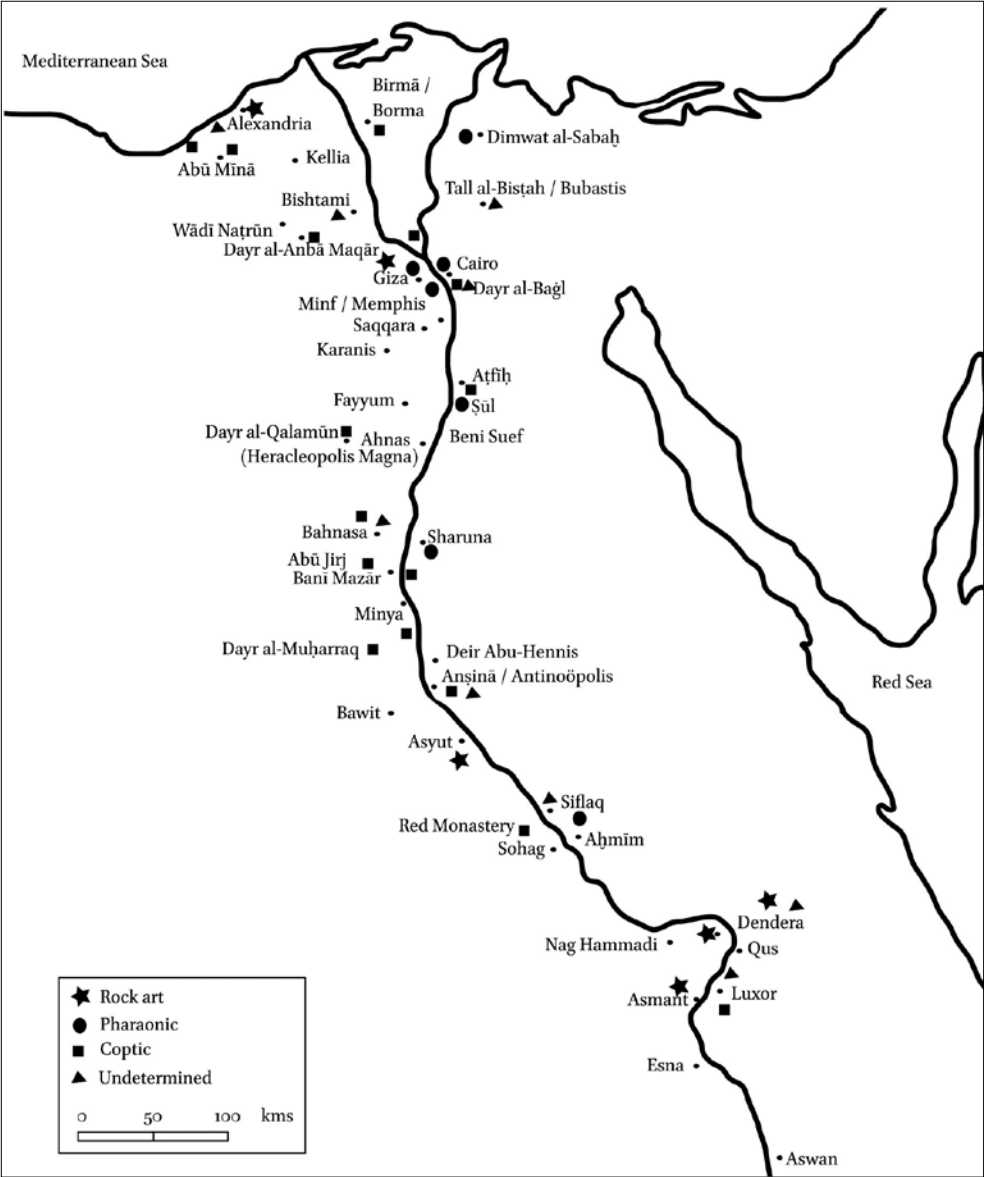


FIGURE 5 Map of the sites of treasures identified in the Pseudo-Maqrīzī's *Hall al-rumūz*
GRAPHIC DESIGN: ANDREA MARIA NEGRI

History of Tomb-Raiding: The Epic Hunt for Egypt's Treasures (London: Reaktion Books, 2022). For a study on premodern treasure hunting in the Mediterranean, see Iafrate, Allegra, *Cercar tesori tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna* (Bari: Laterza, 2021). For a study of treasure hunting and its contextualization in the broader realm of medieval charlatanism

these accounts are diverse: pharaonic ruins, subterranean chambers, monasteries, churches, a considerable number of mosques, and wealthy burial grounds more in general. Yet, for the legitimacy of such accounts to be sustained, the

in Egypt, see Raggetti, Lucia, *Un Coniglio nel turbante: intrattenimento e inganno nella scienza arabo-islamica* (Milano: Editrice Bibliografica, 2021). For a study of the manuscript tradition of treasure hunting in Egypt, see Braun, Christopher, “Equipped with Shovels, Pickaxes, and Books: Treasure Hunters and Grave Robbers in Medieval Egypt”, in Walker, Bethany J. and Al Ghouz, Abdelkader (ed.), *Living with Nature and Things* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2020), pp. 79–102. Also see El-Daly, Okasha, *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium: Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings*. (London: UCL Press, 2005): p. 33. For an edition and translation of a manual of treasure hunting see Ahmad Kamal Bey, *Livre Des Perles Enfouies et Du Mystère Précieux Au Sujet Des Indications Des Cachettes, Des Trouvailles et Des Trésors* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 1907). For a study of the toponymies within this text see Daressy, M., Georges “Indicateur topographique du « Livre des Perles Enfouies et Du Mystère Précieux »”, *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'archéologie Orientale*, XIII (1917): pp. 175–230. For a study of finding treasures through dream vision in Hebrew sources see Harari, Yuval, “Metatron and the Treasure of Gold: Notes on a Dream Inquiry Text From the Cairo Genizah”, in Bohak, Gideon, Harari, Yuval and Shaked, Shaul (ed.), *Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2011): pp. 289–320. See also, Zellmann-Rohrer, Michael, “A Syriac-Arabic Dream-Request and Its Jewish Tradition”, *JNES*, LXXVIII/1 (2019): p. 66. For a study of the culture of treasure hunting and their representation in *The Arabian Nights* see Irwin, Robert, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Penguin Books, 1995): pp. 184–90. For the edition and translation of a treatise (*risāla*) on treasure hunting by al-Kindī, see Burnett, Charles, Yamamoto, Keiji, and Yano, Michio, “Al-Kindī on Finding Buried Treasure”, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* VII/1 (1997): pp. 57–90. Sections on treasure hunting magic and remedies can be found scattered in almost every magic compendium. Among these, see Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥājj al-Tilimsānī al-Maḡribī, *Šumūs al-Anwār wa-Kunūz al-Asrar al-Kubrā* (Cairo: al-Maṭba’a al-Talyaniyya, 1874). On this imaginary of treasure in a Mughal goose game framed as a treasure hunt, see also: Digby, Simon, “*Ganj*: The Game of Treasure from Mughal India”, *South Asian Studies*, XXII/1 (2006): pp. 69–88. On the persistence of a vivid culture of treasure hunting in contemporary Middle-East see Al-Houdalieh, Salah Hussein, “Archaeological Heritage and Spiritual Protection: Looting and the Jinn in Palestine”, *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* XXV/1 (2012): pp. 99–120; Id., “Physical Hazards Encountered by Antiquities Looters: A Case Study from the Palestinian National Territories”, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, CXLV/4 (2013): pp. 320–33; Id., “Tomb Raiding in Western Ramallah Province, Palestine: An Ethnographic Study”, in . Spencer, John R. Mullins, Robert A., and Brody, Aaron J. (eds.) *Material Culture Matters Essays on the Archaeology of the Southern Levant in Honor of Seymour Gitin* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014): pp. 95–109; Id., “Palestinian Antiquities Looters, Their Skill Development, Methodology and Specialised Terminology: An Ethnographic Study”, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, CXLIV/2 (2012): pp. 115–27; Bieberstein, Alice von, “Treasure/Fetish/Gift: Hunting for “Armenian Gold” in Post-Genocide Turkish Kurdistan”, *Subjectivity*, x/2 (2017): pp. 170–89; Roosevelt, Christopher H., and Luke, Christina “Mysterious Shepherds and Hidden Treasures: The Culture of Looting in Lydia, Western Turkey”, *Journal of Field Archaeology*, XXXI/2 (2006): pp. 185–98.

manual presupposes the immutability of the sites themselves, a condition guaranteed by the finder's cooperation. Once the treasure was located and the discoverer had already tapped into it, he was required to restore the place to its exact original condition.

The geographical map is bound to include only the sites that was possible to identify and locate.²⁶ They are distributed across the entire inhabited realm of Egypt. Most of the locations, buildings, and ruins mentioned in the manual are still extant and visitable today.

Whitin this spaces the pseudo-Maqrīzī manual abounds in images, encompassing a striking variety of iconographic motifs. Tridimensional and pictorial representations are recurrently invoked – sometimes in passing, sometimes with elaborate description. They include animal figures executed in relief or paint, depictions of Egyptian deities, Christian iconography such as Christ, the Virgin, and demons, as well as human forms and armed horsemen. It is not always possible to pinpoint the precise origin of these images, since the descriptions often lack detail or explicit references. In other cases, for instance that of animals, their presence spans over multiple historical strata of Egyptian history. Those that can be identified, however, appear to derive from three distinct spheres: first, rock art iconography; second, Pharaonic imagery; and third, Coptic Christian iconography.

These iconographic elements are not exclusively related to this particular manual, but they belong to an imaginary about treasure hunting shared by historians, occasional observers, seekers, charlatans, and their gullible victims. Some images described by the Pseudo-Maqrīzī, in fact, appear illustrated in the margins of another book for treasure hunters, though associated with different sets of instructions. This work is the *Kitāb ḡayāt al-ma'rib fī al-manā'ih wa-l-ḥabāyā wa-l-maṭālib* ('Book of the Apogee of the Goal in the Generous Donations, Hidden Things, and Treasure Hunts'), preserved in MS Paris BnF Arabe 2764.

5 Animals

Depictions of animals – whether portrayed in isolation, in the company of human figures, or engaged in hunting scenes – are the primarily focus in rock art, as well monumental reliefs, and iconographic traditions of Pharaonic

26 In the edition and translation of the text, unidentified toponyms are followed by a question mark. They, however, represent a relative minority of the cases.

Egypt, where animals were seen as embodiments of deities and are also well attested as in Christian iconography.

5.1 *Domestic and Farm Animals*

5.1.1 Cat (*qitt*)

Within the *ṣifāt* of the manual, one comes across attestations of cats represented in wall paintings, as mummies, or decorative motifs or shape in jewelry. The presence of the cat is closely associated with the Pharaonic period. The animal was linked both to feline and leonine divinities and particularly in relation to the goddess Bastet. A well-documented tradition attests to the large-scale mummification of cats as votive offerings,²⁷ or for the sake of their being pets, alongside the production of cat-shaped statuettes employed as protective talismans.²⁸ Beyond this ritual dimension, the cat also appears in visual representations – most notably beneath the master's chair – to symbolize the bond between the animal and its owner, often in the company of other domestic creatures, such as dogs and monkeys.²⁹

Cats appear wrapped in a shroud and lay within the wall of a chamber, a setting reminiscent of one of the numerous burial places for mummified pets.³⁰

[Ms University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 138v]

Description at the pyramids of al-Šaddād

Seek the Sphinx, and to its right [you will find] five caves with sealed doors. Head to the fifth of them: you will find inside cats, weasels, and dogs, shrouded. And in it [there is] a lenticular door (*bāb 'adasī*). Work [dig] two and a half statures, and you

صفة بالأهرام الشدادية

اطلب أبو الهول واطلب عن يمينه خمسة
مغاير مسدودة الأبواب اقصد المغارة
الخامسة منهم تجد فيها قططا وعرسا
وكلابا مكفنين وفيها باب عدسي اعمل
قامتين ونصف تجده فكه واتزل إلى

27 Linglin, Marie et al., "Isotopic Systematics Point to Wild Origin of Mummified Birds in Ancient Egypt", *Scientific Reports* x/1, article number: 15463 (2020).

28 McDonald, Angela, "Animals in Egypt", in Lindsay Campbell, Gordon (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classic Thought and Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): p. 390.

29 El-Kilany, Engy and Mahran, Heba, "What Lies Under the Chair! A Study in Ancient Egyptian Private Tomb Scenes, Part 1: Animals", *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, L1/1 (2015): p. 252.

30 For the mummies of animals in Pharaonic Egypt, see Richardin, Pascale, Stéphanie Porcier, Salima Ikram, Gaëtan Louarn, and Didier Berthet, "Cats, Crocodiles, Cattle and More: Initial Steps Toward Establishing a Chronology of Ancient Egyptian Animal Mummies", *Radiocarbon*, LIX/2 (2017): pp. 595–607.

will reach it. Open it, and descend to a domed place: you will find a king turned on his face, on a bed of gold, and at his right four chests, and at his left four chests filled with wealth. Take your provision, and do not approach the dead. The incense is frankincense (*kundur*), sandalwood (*sandarūs*), *mī'a*, and ladanum (*lādan*) at the Moon Cyperus (*su'd al-qamar*) and [every ingredient] should be conserved separately.

In another version: remove the cats, the weasels, and the dog, and you will meet a lenticular door. Open it and work beneath it two and a half statures. You will find a slab: loosen it with fire and descend. You will find the desired [treasure].

مكان قبة تجد ملكا مقلوبا على وجهه
على سرير من ذهب وعلى يمينه أربع
صناديق وعلى شماله أربع صناديق ملاءى
ملا فخذ رزقك ولا تقرب الميت.
والبخور كندر وسندروس وميعة ولادن
في سعد القمر والرفعة بالفرد في نسخة
ثانية نظف القطط والعرس والكلب
تلقى بابا عدسيا فكه واعمل تحته قامتين
ونصف تجد بلاطة فكها بالنار واتزل
تجد المطلوب

Cats are depicted in colour in a mountain cave near Aḥmīm [Fig. 6]. Inside the cave, cats also appear as hollow vessels intended as receptacles for elixirs. The presence of jewellery and containers in feline form is attested as early as 1900–1790 BCE, exemplified by a cat-shaped vessel now preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.³¹



FIGURE 6 Felines of different colours depicted in the 'Cave of the Cats', MS Paris BnF Arabe 2674, f. 45r (detail)

SOURCE: BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE

³¹ See Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York object No. 1990.59.1.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 130v]

On top of the back of the 'Cave of the Cat' in the Mount of Aḥmīm

When you arrive in the city of Aḥmīm, seek a yellow dust and leave it behind your back. Go East until, on the top of the back, you will find three caves a bit to the east. Cross the middle one with your light, and you will find cats depicted at the top in different colours. Strengthen your light and go to the centre. You will find a bench made of stone. Remove all of them, then clean and dig beneath it to the measure of a fathom; you will find a black stone that obstructs it. Remove it and let your incense rise. Wait until the smoke dissipates. Then descend five steps, and you will reach a hall. In it, there are rows of platforms like shelves, upon which there are many sitting cats, made of gold and silver and depicted, all of them hollow and filled with elixir. They are one thousand cats. And in the middle of the hall, there is a great fountain filled with Byzantine golden dinars.

فوق ظهر مغارة الققط بجبل أحميم
إذا وصلت إلى مدينة أحميم اطلب الرملة
الصفراء ودعها خلف ظهرك وسر
منها إلى الشرق إلى العلو فوق الظهر
تجد هناك مغارة للشرق قليلاً تجد ٣
مغاير اعبر الوسطانية بنورك تجد قططاً
مصورين فيها على رفوف ألوان مختلفة
قو نورك واعبرها إلى صدرها تجد فيه
مكائناً في صدرها مسطبة مبنية بالحجارة
هرها كلها ثم نظفها واحفر تحتها قامة
تجد حجراً أسود لقيماً فكّه وبخورك عمال
واصبر إلى أن ينصرف البخار وانزل
في ٣ درج تصل إلى قاعة فيها صفة
مساطب كالرفوف وعليهم قطط كثيرة
قعود وهم ذهب وفضة مصورون كلهم
مخوفون ملائكة إكسيراً وهم ألف قط وفي
وسط القاعة فسقية كبيرة ملائكة دنانير
ذهب رومية

5.1.2 Dog (*kalb*)

Dogs guarding funerary spaces are present in the pseudo-Maqrizī. The dog as a domesticated companion is well attested in Pharaonic art. Dogs occupied a significant place in daily life, serving also as guard animals – alongside monkeys³² – as well as indispensable auxiliaries in the royal hunts.³³ For this

32 El-Kilany and Mahran, "What Lies Under the Chair! A Study in Ancient Egyptian Private Tomb Scenes, Part 1": p. 249.

33 Wegner, Jennifer Houser, "Companions and Guardians: Dogs and Jackals in Ancient Egypt", *Glencairn Museum News*, x (2023) available at <https://www.glencairnmuseum.org>

strong relation with the master,³⁴ dogs are frequently depicted beneath the master's chair, particularly in their more distinguished breeds, such as the Saluki or the Tesem.³⁵ Dog mummies could also often be found in the master's grave.³⁶ At the same time, the dog held a sacred dimension: temples were dedicated to it, and in many instances it is iconographically indistinguishable from the jackal.³⁷ Within the religious sphere, the dog assumed a central role in connection with Anubis, the god of embalming and cemeteries, guardian of the necropolis and the realm of the dead.³⁸ Another canine divinity, Wepwawet, functioned as a protective deity accompanying the king in the hunt and was also a protector of the dead.³⁹ Another one was similarly Khenty-Amentiu another jackal-headed god worshiped at Abydos in Upper Egypt, likewise presided over necropolises. In a site outside Giza, a man is described as standing guard among the ruins, accompanied by a dog whose presence reinforces the protective function of the human figure.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 139r]

Description

Seek the Sphynx and leave it on your right. Seek at its West. Proceed to your left for three miles which is the distance between Ṭurā and ancient Cairo, until you will have crossed all the heaps, keep going until you reach the 'Road of the radish'. Go into it in the direction of the qibla [South] until you find on your right a construction of ten big stones scattered around. When you will have

صفة

اطلب أبو الهول ودعه على يمينك اطلب
غريبه وسر منحرف على يسارك ثلاثة
أميال وهو قدر ما بين طرا ومصر
القديمة إلى أن تقطع الأكوام كلها وسير
إلى أن تأتي إلى طريق الفجل سير فيها
وأنت مقبل إلى أن تجد على شمالك
ابني عشر حجر كبار مطروحة فإذا قطعت

/newsletter/2023/10/25/companions-and-guardians-dogs-and-jackals-in-ancient-egypt (accessed 23 November 2025).

34 McDonald, "Animals in Egypt": p. 393.

35 El-Kilany and Mahran, "What Lies Under the Chair! A Study in Ancient Egyptian Private Tomb Scenes, Part 1": p. 244.

36 Wegner, "Companions and Guardians: Dogs and Jackals in Ancient Egypt".

37 For a study on dogs in ancient Egypt, see Youssri, Abdelwahed, "More than Pets: Dogs in Graeco-Roman Egypt", *Journal of Faculty of Tourism and Hotels*, 1 (2017): pp. 1–22.

38 Houlihan, Patrick F., *The Animal World of the Pharaohs* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996): p. 44.

39 Arnold Dorothea, "An Egyptian Bestiary", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, VII/4 (1995): p. 16.

crossed all the stones, look from your right toward the East: you will see a flat raised surface, go on it from the East. You will see a guardian standing with legs less than two [?], of clay artificially made of marble and *zanād* stone [?] empty inside, and before the guardian [there is] a dog. Seek between the guardian and the dog, and work between them evenly [for the depth of] half a fathom: you will find a stone at the door of a cave, in which there are seventy loads of money.

الأحجار كلها انظر إلى شمالك للشرق
تجد سطح عالي اعد إلى فوقه من
الشرق تنظر حارس واقف على صفات
[؟مقات بطيخ] برقاب أقل من مذارين
[؟] مصنوع طيناً من الرخام وحجر الزناد
مخوفين وقدام الحارس كلبا واطلب بين
الحارس والكلب واعمل بينهم بالسوية
نصف قامة تجد حجرا على باب مغارة
فيها ٧٠ حملا مالا

5.1.3 Cow (*baqara*)

Images of cows are abundant in the Pseudo-Maqrīzī, either depicted or engraved. Cattle ranks among the most frequently represented animals in pre-Islamic Egypt. Its image is abundantly attested in rock art from as early as ca. 1400 BCE,⁴⁰ and it continued to occupy a prominent place throughout Pharaonic visual and religious culture. Cattle also appear in scenes of daily life, reflecting their centrality to Egypt's agrarian economy and social life.⁴¹ The cattle was also a sacred animal, veneration of which is attested as early as the Dynasty I, in association with the sacred bull Apis in the temple of Ptah at Memphis.

The Pseudo-Maqrīzī seems to describe rock art, describing yellow calve suckling from a red cow depicted within caverns on a mountain near Šarūna. The observation that these images have not changed colour over time is rather striking, and possibly hinting at the durability of the pigments. The text prescribes an incubation under specific astrological circumstances.

40 Morrow, Maggie, Cherry, Pete and Wilkinson, Toby A.H. (eds.), *Desert RATS: Rock Art Topographical Survey in Egypt's Eastern Desert; Site Catalogue*, Fully rev. 2nd ed. (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 2010): p. 17.

41 Houlihan, *The Animal World of the Pharaohs*: p. 143.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 47r]

Description at Šarūna

Well East of the blessed Nile, proceed Eastward from there toward the elevated palace. Spend the night there on a Sunday, when the moon is in its exaltation. At daybreak, set out from that place and walk toward a high spot for half the range of a bowshot. Look then to your left, toward the mountain slope: you will see an opening in the mountain, like an entrance that does not go through. [...]

Cross it, and at its far end, to your right inside the mountain, you will find a second cave. Upon its entrance, you will see the image of a red cow with its calf suckling from it, and its colour is yellow. All this is made with paints that do not change with the passing of time.

صفة بشرونة

بئر الشرق من النيل المبارك سير منها مشرق نحو الجوسق العالي تبات فيه ليلة الأحد والقمر في سعده وقوم منه بكرة سير مشرق نصف رمية سلاح نشاب وانظر على يدك الشمال في سند الجبل ترى دخلة في الجبل تشبه ولجة وهي غير نافذة [...]

اعبر فيها تجد في صدرها على يدك اليمين في الجبل مغارة ثانية وترى على بابها صورة بقرة حمرة وعجلها يرضع فيها ولونه أصفر كلها عملوها بالدهانات ليس يتغير بطول الزمان

In another description, the cow occurs at the entrance of some caves, though the text does not specify whether it is painted or engraved.⁴²

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 48v]

Description at Asyut

Seek the Western door by the bridge which is at its West. Stop [there] and look toward the mountain that overlooks it: you will see three caves, similar to one another. In front of the middle one, you will find a hermitage built of gypsum (*jibs*), and upon its door there is the image of a cow. Enter it.

صفة بأسسوط

اطلع من بابها الغربي في القنطرة الذي غريبها بالباب سوي اقف وانظر نحو الجبل المطل عليها ترى ٣ مغاير شبه بعضهم البعض تجد قدام الوسطانية منهم صومعة مبنية بجبس وعلى بابها صورة بقرة اعبر لها

42 The same description, with minor variants, can be found in another passage of the Pseudo-Maqrizian text, see MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 179v.

5.1.4 Ram (*kabš*)

In the pseudo-Maqrizian text, the ram emerges as a recurring motif, represented in various forms, possibly echoing reception of pharaonic images. It is possible that also other animals, such as the gazelle or the ibex, could possibly appear as rams to an observer unfamiliar with savannah fauna, given the stylization of such figures.⁴³ Within the Pharaonic world, rams are frequently depicted in pastoral contexts. Beyond their role in herding, the ram was object of veneration and acquired particular theological significance as the personification of the creator god Khnum. The ram was also sacralised through its association with the god Amun, who attained the status of supreme divinity during the New Kingdom.⁴⁴ Rams and sheep further feature in Coptic iconography, as in a sixth–seventh-century painting fragment from the monastery of St. Jeremiah at Saqqara, which portrays a meek ram standing beside Abraham.⁴⁵

In the following passage, after an extensive journey through subterranean tunnels, the seeker is said to encounter the image of a ram in front of a door – described here in prostration before an idol.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 94v–95r]

Description of the ram in the area of al-Zāhir in Cairo

Seek the ram similarly as you were searching for the mosque of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn. On your right, you will find a circular well. It is called the ‘Well of gold’ and it is man made. There are trapdoors from ancient times which are at the limit of the mountain which rises above the practicable main road. Descend in with the cistern from which the water flows in the month of Paoni or Epip is taken; there you will find two corridors, one on the right and the other on the left, both leading to a single place. Take the right corridor, which is wide, you will find a corridor forty cubits

صفة علوم الكباش بظاهر القاهرة

اطلب الكباش كأنك طالب جامع أحمد
ابن طولون تجد على شمالك بئراً مدوّرة
يُقال لها بئر الذهب وهي قُطعت
بالحديد وكان عليها طوابق من زمان
قديم وهي على حافة الجبل المطل على
الطريق المسلوكة الواضحة انزلها في أوّانٍ
نُشر فيه الماء في شهر بؤونة أو أيّيب
تجد بها سربين سرب يمين وسرب شمال
وهما يلتقيان في مكان واحد اعبر في
السرب اليمين وهو الواسع تجد سرباً طوله
أربعون ذراعاً وعرضه مثلها ملآن زئبقاً

43 Morrow, Cherry, and Wilkinson, *Desert RATS*: p. 33.

44 Arnold, *An Egyptian Bestiary*: p. 56.

45 Evans, Linda, “Animals in Coptic Art”, *Göttinger Miszellen*, CCXXXII (2012): p. 267.

long and with the same width, full of mercury, on one side there is the soil of the mountain and a thin dust: when you step on it, you will plunge in mercury and die, as 'Abd Allāh al-Andalusī died drowning, as he did not know it.

When you [...] find the trapdoor beneath it: remove it and descend into a passageway, upon whose entrance there is the image of a ram. Do not fear it – ride it and go inside. You will find the doorway to a hall; cross it to its middle, and you will see carvings of the mountain, you will also find the figure of a column, on top of which you will find a golden plate and three golden lamps on top of it, each lamp holds a gem that shines like a lamp in that place. There, you will find a bed, upon which rests a golden idol, which the ram was worshipped instead of God.

وعلى جهة تراب الجبل وغبار الطلع فإذا
دست فوقه تغرق في الرثيق تموت كما
مات في عبد الله الأندلسي وغرق فيه
بغير علم

فإذا أنت [...] تجد الطابق تحتها شُله
وانزل إلى سرب على بابه صورة كبش
فلا تخف منه واركبه واعبر إلى جوار تجد
باب قاعة فاعبرها إلى صدرها تجدها
على أعمدة منحوتة من الجبل تجد صفة
عامود قائم وعلى رأسه طبق من ذهب
وفيه ثلاثة قناديل ذهب في كل قنديل
جوهرة تضيء كالمصباح في ذلك المكان
وتجد هناك سريراً عليه صنم من ذهب
كان الكبش يعبده دون الله

In another passage, there is a ram made of an unclear 'Chaldean' stone.⁴⁶ This stone, if take and crushed together with natron, oil, and another unidentified substance, is said to become an alchemical elixir that yield gold. The site itself is presented as the remains of artisanal workshops and gold can be extracted from the soap bar-like semifinished lumps.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 115v]

Description of the 'Soap Cave' in the Valley of al-Barnabal [?]

Walk eastward from it until you reach a valley, which has a white

صفة بمغارة الصابون بوادي البرنبل
سرمناها إلى الشرق حتى تصل إلى وادي
وهو أرض بيضاء ومن علامته أن فيه

⁴⁶ Considering the alchemical use prospected for the Chaldean stone, it could be interpreted as a mineral that enters in the preparation of the so-called 'divine water', an alchemical preparation that changes the colour of metals, see Martelli, Matteo, " 'Divine water' in the Alchemical Writings of Pseudo-Democritus", *Ambix*, LVI/1 (2009): pp. 5–22.

soil. Among its signs is that inside it there is a spring of water, and next to it there is a cultivated land, and a cave with a fine door. Enter it with your light: you will find it resembling a series of workshops, filled with stones resembling bars of soap. Among its [distinctive] signs is that, inside it, there is the image of a ram made of Chaldean stone. Take some of these stones, crush them with oil, natron, and *dnkr* [?], and melt them: from each bar six ounces of pure gold will come out.

عين ماء وعنده نابتة ومغارة بابها لطيف
ادخلها بنورك نجدها شبه الدكاكين وهي
ملانة حجارة كألواح الصابون ومن أمارتها
أن فيها صورة كبش من حجر الكلدان خذ
من هذه الحجارة اسحقهم بزيت ونظرون
ودنكار وسبكهم يخرج من كل لوح ستة
أواق ذهب إبريزاً

Two butting rams are depicted at the entrance to an underground chamber [Fig. 7]. Comparable images of fighting bulls and cattle are attested pastoral scenes where herdsmen identified the winning animal as the best for breeding.⁴⁷ The treasure seeker is instructed to smear their horns with a specific ointment, thereby voiding temporary talismanic power of the images. The treasure to find includes a great variety of objects, reminiscent of a funeral furnishings.



FIGURE 7 Butting rams, MS Paris BnF Arabe 2674, f. 63r (detail)

SOURCE: BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE
DE FRANCE

⁴⁷ Arnold, *An Egyptian Bestiary*: p. 52.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 102v–103r]

Description of the 'Balsam Well' in the district of al-Maṭariyya

Seek there a well known as the 'Well of Māris al-Madani', and among the characteristics of this well is that it is built entirely of red bricks, from its opening it has three rings of white stone and Pharaonic bricks, its water is green as chard, it has a foul smell which does not diminish neither in winter nor in summer, and it is an ancient well. When you recognize it, engrave this seal on copper tablet or on a new unbaked shard, when the Moon is in Pisces, making an aspect with Mars or Saturn, and none of your companion should be with you and you must be alone; fumigate the place with pitch and throw it in the well and all its water will seep away on the spot.

Then descend into it: there you will find a door; lean your back against it, and it will open. Enter, and you will come upon a corridor paved with marble, leading to a great arched door covered with gold leaf, upon which is the image of two rams butting heads, barring your way. Slaughter a black young goat, take some of its blood, and smear it on the rams' horns; when you move them, their movement will cease. Pass through, while your incense is working, and open the door. You will find yourself in a vast hall with three *liwāns*: two filled with piles of riches, the third containing chests – three of them full of jewels, metals,

صفة بئر البسّم بناحية المطرية

اطلب بها بئراً تُعرف ببئر مارس المدني ومن علاماتها أنّ هذه البئر مبنية بالطوب الأحمر كلّها ومن فيها ثلاثة أطواق بالحجر الأبيض وطوبها فرعوني وماؤها لونه أخضر كورق السلق منتن الرائحة لا ينقص شتاء ولا صيفاً وهي بئر واسعة العمر إذا عرفتها فانقش لها هذا الخاتم على لوح نحاس أو شقفة نية جديدة والقمر في الحوت والناظر إليه المريح أو زحل ولا تزايل أحداً من رفقاءك وكن وحدك وبجرها بزفت وترميها في البئر فإنّ ماءها يغور لوقته

ثم ازل إليها تجد فيها باباً اتكى عليه بظهورك يفتح أدخل تلقى دهليزاً مفروشاً بالرخام وتلقى باباً مقنطراً كبيراً مصقّقاً بالذهب وعليه صفة كبشين يناطحان يمتعانك الدخول فاذهب جدياً أسود وخُذ من دمه وادهن قرون الكبش فإنّ حركتهما تبطل واعبر وبجورك عمّال وافتح الباب تلقى قاعة عظيمة لها ثلاثة لوانين اثنين ملاّنين مالاّ صبيّاً والثالث فيه صناديق ثلاثة فيها جواهر ومعادن وهرمان وماس وذخائر ملوكة يعجز عنها الوصف وسلاح وآلة حرب جميعها وحلى وأوان من ذهب وفضة

garnets, diamonds, and royal treasures beyond description, along with weapons and instruments of war of every kind, ornaments, and vessels of gold and silver.

5.1.5 Camel (*jamal*)

Within the manual attributed to al-Maqrīzī, an image of a camel is reported in the vicinity of the Monastery of Qalamūn. The presence of dromedary and camel images is remarkably frequent in rock art, where numerous depictions are carved on stones and caves.⁴⁸ The camel appears as a ride as early as ca. 250 AC in Egypt's Eastern Desert.⁴⁹ A considerable number of camel-shaped objects are attested from both the Pharaonic and Roman periods.⁵⁰ Within the domain of Coptic Christian iconography, numerous saints are also represented in association with camels.⁵¹

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 55v]

Description in the monastery of Qalamūn

[...] Seek there the image of a camel; dig beneath it to a depth of a fathom and a half, and you will find two flasks filled with elixir.

صفة بدير القلمون

[...] واطلب به صورة جمل احفر تحته
قامة ونصف تجد ققمين ملائين اكسير

Similarly, in another passage, the camel is connected with Christian iconography, where it appears as a statue whose entire head has been severed.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 121r]

Description at al-Jaras [?]

From it, look for the monastery of Luḡmān [?]. Enter it from the East, and there you will find a camel with its head and neck severed, and next to it a crocodile of stone.

صفة بالجرس

اطلب منه دير لغمان ادخل منه إلى
الشرق تجد فيها جمل مقطوع الرأس
والرقة وجانبه تمساح من حجر

48 Morrow, Cherry, and Wilkinson, *Desert RATS*: p. 44.

49 Ibid., p. 17.

50 Saber, A.S., "The Camel in Ancient Egypt", *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting for Animal Production Under Arid Conditions*, 1 (1998): p. 210.

51 Evans, "Animals in Coptic Art": p. 167.

In this passage, two statues of camel appear, one with a pierced ear, the other a she-camel depicted in the act of grazing. The position of these animals would serve to indicate the precise location where the excavation should take place.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 87v]

Description at Siflāq from the East

Look for a camel with a pierced ear, a short neck, and its head turned backward, facing a she-camel – also made of stone, in the same manner – with its mouth directed toward the ground. When you see it, dig beneath the she-camel's two legs into the earth for half a fathom [i.e., 6 feet ca.], and you will find plaster (*jīṣṣa*). Break it, and you will find a basin full of riches.

صفة بسفلاق من الشرق
اطلب بها جملاً أقطر الأذن قصير
الرقة ملتفتاً إلى خلفه ينظر إلى ناقة
وهي من حجر مثالها وفيها في الأرض فإذا
رأيت ذلك فاحفر تحت رجلي الناقة في
الأرض نصف قامة تجد جصة أكرها
تجد فسقية مملوءة مالاً

5.2 Birds

The designation of hieroglyphic script as *qalam al-tayr*, “the script of birds”, embodies the notion that birds occupied an exceptionally prominent place in the magical-religious imagination of the Pharaonic world. Birds’ figures occur, both within hieroglyphics themselves – where numerous species are represented – and within later Coptic writings.⁵² Egyptian Pharaohs are likewise depicted in association with birds in a wide range of iconographic contexts.⁵³

In Egyptian tradition, birds carried profound religious significance, with multiple temples dedicated and also shown by the recovery of millions of mummified specimens, predominantly ibises, from archaeological sites along the Nile Valley.⁵⁴

52 Gaudard, François, “Birds in the Ancient Egyptian and Coptic Alphabets”, in Bailleul-LeSuer, Rozenn (ed.), *Between Heaven and Earth: Birds in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012): p. 65.

53 See Houlihan, Patrick F., *The Birds of Ancient Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1986). Also see Bailleul-LeSuer, Rozenn (ed.), *Between Heaven and Earth: Birds in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012).

54 Linglin et al., “Isotopic Systematics Point to Wild Origin of Mummified Birds in Ancient Egypt”.

5.2.1 Eagle or Vulture (*ʿuqāb*)

Among the ornithological figures encountered by the treasure seeker is the bird called in Arabic *ʿuqāb*, a word that may mean either eagle or vulture. These birds appear both in pictorial form and as three-dimensional sculptures. Various passages describe their wings in distinctive postures – with bent or even ‘broken’ wings. This and the direction of the gaze, irrespectively of their original iconographic meaning, are interpreted in the manual as indicators pointing the way to hidden treasure.⁵⁵ The historical layers seem to overlap in this site: the treasure is Umayyad and there is an inscription in Greek next to the vulture.

In ancient Egyptian iconography, the vulture represented the goddess Nekhbet, either with outstretched or folded wings; later an arabophone observers may have associated this image with the potentially ambiguous term *ʿuqāb*, rather than with *nasr* or *raḥma* (vulture).⁵⁶

[Ms University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 129r]

Description at Mariyūt

Seek a wide surface in the earth and go out from there, seeking the monastery of Abū Maqār. There, you will find stone and artificial caves. On every bridge, there will be two columns, one black and the other red, and there will be treasures of the Umayyads. He said: “Then look among the piled-up stones; there is a great red stone, upon which there is the image of an eagle with its right wing broken and its left wing folded. On top of it, there are lines written in Greek. Dig beneath it, and you will find a slab covering the entrance to a cave; lift it and descend, and there you will find a lot of riches.

صفة مربوط

اطلب في الأرض فسحة كبيرة اخرج
منها طالب دير أبو مقار وفيه حجارة
ومغاير مبنية على كل جسر عامودين
الواحد أسود والآخر أحمر فيهم ودائع
لبنى أمية قال ثم انظر في الحجارة المقاه
جركبير أحمر عليه صورة عقاب مكسور
الجناح الأيمن مضموم الجناح الأيسر
عليه سطور مكتوبة يوناني احفر تحته تجد
طابقا على فم مغارة اقلعه وانزل تجد فيها
ملا كثيرا

55 In Ms University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 133r, the image of an eagle standing upon its talons decorates a fountain. However, the bird, conceals a mechanism that activates a crossbow, triggered by one of the fountain's steps.

56 Arnold, *An Egyptian Bestiary*: p. 46.

In the following passage, the image of an eagle indicates a hidden space that contains a set of keys, which will enable the seeker to open the subterranean treasure chambers. The marble slab on which the eagle is depicted needs to be smashed in order to access the shrine.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 115r]

Description in Šul as well

To its East, there is a mountain near a cemetery of thirty tombs. Go East of them to a cave known as the 'Cave of the Noble Woman', upon its door, there is the image of a marble eagle. Break it with an iron axe, and inside it you will find iron keys; take them and enter the cave, dig in its middle, in an even way. You will find a slab; lift it and descend. You will come upon underground chambers, where there are two cupboards, one on the right and one on the left; open them with the keys, and you will find the riches divided in five heaps.

صفة بصول أيضا

بشرقها جبل بقربه مقبرة وقبر اقصد إلى
شرقهم مغارة تُعرف بمغارة العريقة وعلى
بابها صورة عقاب من رخام أكسره
بالفأس الحديد تجد في جوفه مفاتيح من
حديد خُذها وأدخل المغارة واحفر في
وسطها سواء تجد طبقاً ارفعه وانزل
تجد رقائقاً فيه خزانتان يمين وشمال افتح
بالمفاتيح تجد مال خمسة عرم

In yet another passage, the eagle appears as a mint motive on the coins that constitute the treasure. Ptolemaic Egyptian coinage is also reported to bear the image of eagles accompanied by hieroglyphic inscriptions. Egyptian coinage was first struck during the Ptolemaic kingdom, around the year 360 BC, as Egyptian golden staters were used to pay the salaries of Greek mercenaries in the service of the Pharaoh Teos. The design followed that of Greek currencies and therefore bear Greek inscriptions; hieroglyphs seem to have been a rare occurrence. A typical design consists of an eagle standing on a thunderbolt.⁵⁷

57 See Fulinska, Agnieszka, "Iconography of the Ptolemaic queens on coins: Greek style, Egyptian ideas?", *Studies in Ancient Art and Civilization*, XIV (2010): pp. 73–92; see also Mørkholm, Otto, *Early Hellenistic Coinage from the Accession of Alexander to the Peace of Apamea (336–188 BC)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 142r]

Description at Abū Šīr al-Šidr.

Set out from the small pyramid towards the West, and measure at whatever point you arrive; you will find a mound of baked bricks. Dig into it, and you will find silver dirhams bearing the image of an eagle and hieroglyphics [*hurūf birbāwī*].

صفة بأبو صير الصدر

سر من الهرم الصغير للغرب وقيس في
أي مكان كان تجد كوم ابلز احفر فيه
تجد دراهم فضة وعليهم صفة عقاب
وحروف برباوي

5.2.2 Kite (*ḥidāya*)

On the ceiling of a chamber adorned with engraved Greek inscriptions, and possibly connected to Saint George, there is the refiguration of a kite, whose beak points to an additional treasure stashed there. Entering the well pointed at by the image of the kite, the treasure hunter must carry with him a vulture to be sacrificed, and its blood should be used to write incantations of impediment on special shards.⁵⁸

Looking for a possible inspiration for this image, in the pharaonic iconography black kites represent the twin goddesses Isis and Nephthys, prominent in the imagery of funerary rites concerned with death and resurrection.⁵⁹

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 94r]

Description at the 'Castle of the gathering'

Ask there for the house of the sage Jurjis and among its marks is that it has a black engraved doorsill below, while the upper one as well engraved with an inscription in ancient Greek script: it is the history of the house when it was built. When you recognize these signs, know that there are

صفة بقصر الجمع

أسل عن دار الحكيم جرجس ومن
أمارتها أن لها عتبة سوداء تحتانية
منقوشة وعتبة فوقانية والنقش بالقلم
اليوناني وهو تاريخ الدار من حين عُمِرت
فإذا صحت لك هذه الأمانة فاعلم أن
تحت العتبة السوداء ثلاث براني في

⁵⁸ For a study of blood as an ink in Greek magical papyri see Blanco Cesteros, Miriam, "Written in Blood? Decoding Some Red Inks of the Greek Magical Papyri", in Raggetti, Lucia (ed.), *Traces of Ink: Experiences of Philology and Replication*, (Leiden: Brill, 2021): pp. 33–56. For a study of inks within the pseudo-Maqrizian manual for treasure hunters see Negri, Andrea Maria, "Writing and Inks in the Pseudo-Maqrizī's Manual for Treasure Hunters", in Blanco Cesteros, Miriam (ed.) *InkQuiry* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

⁵⁹ Houlihan, *The Birds of Ancient Egypt*: p. 37.

three barrels under the black door-sill and in every barrel there are ten thousand dinars, [and] there is no impediment nor repellent [...]. If you are not satisfied with what is in these treasures, look to the ceiling of the *liwān* and you will see there the painted image of a kite with outstretched wings, looking downward. Dig directly where its beak points to exactly one fathom of depth, and you will find a slab of red marble with three lines: two red and one black. Uncover it, and beneath it you will find a well with forty-three steps. Intensify your light and your incense, descend in it, and step onto one of the steps; in your hand, there should be an Egyptian vulture: slaughter it, and write with its blood these impediments on twelve new unbaked shards from two jugs, and cast them into the water.

كل برنية عشرة آلاف دينار لا دافع
ولا مانع [...] فإن لم تقتنع بما في هذه
الخرائن فاطلب سقف الليوان وانظر فيه
إلى صفة حداية فيه منشورة الجناحين
بالدهان وهي ناظرة إلى أسفل فاحفر
قبالة منبارها سواء قامة بالعمل تجد رخامة
حمراء فيها ثلاثة خطوط خطان أحمران
وخط أسود أكشفها تجد تحتها بئراً ولها
ثلاث وأربعون درجة قو نورك وبخورك
وانزلها وانزل على إحدى الدرج ويدك
رخمة صغيرة اذبحها واكتب بدمها هذه
الأبطال على اثنتي عشرة شققة نية من
كوزين وارمهم في الماء

5.2.3 Falcon (*saqr*)

In the pseudo-Maqrizian text, a falcon appears in a cave near Alexandria, among other birds and various animals, though the falcon is the sign that points at underground passage to the treasure. This opens on an ancient Byzantine burial site, where the dead rest in gilded coffins. This may allude to two distinct practices: either mummies sheathed in gold leaf or encased within solid gold inner sarcophagi, or, alternatively, Graeco-Roman mummies adorned with gilded wooden or *cartonnage* masks.⁶⁰ Numerous falcons can also be found in rupestrian art.⁶¹ In pharaonic Egypt, the falcon was regarded

60 See Cooney, Kathlyn M., "Coffins, Cartonnage, and Sarcophagi", in Hartwig, Melinda K. (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art* (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015): p. 285. Also see Sahra Gard, Faramarz et al., "Application of Surface Science Techniques to Study a Gilded Egyptian Funerary Mask: A Multi-analytical Approach", *Surface and Interface Analysis*, LI/10 (2019): p. 1002.

61 Morrow, Cherry, and Wilkinson, *Desert RATS*: p. 165.

as the incarnation of the sky god Horus, and countless representations of the bird in Egyptian art served to signify this deity.⁶²

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 111r]

In Alexandria

Go out from there, seeking in the direction of the West until you reach the bridge of Mariyūt and keep going on the road. Then ask about the 'Cave of Apostasy', known as 'the Cave of Images'. When you have recognized it, descend into it: there, you will find many images and carvings, and among them you will see the figure of an engraved falcon. Fumigate there and dig for a fathom into the ground: you will find a dead man; move him from his place and work beneath him, and you will find an entrance to a place where there are three tombs. In one of them you will see the king of the Byzantines in antiquity, his body gilded and, next to him, many jewels and a basin full of riches.

بإسكندرية

اطلع منها وسير طالب إلى الغرب
إلى قنطرة مربوط وسير في الطريق
ثم اسأل عن المغارة المروقة وتعرف
بمغارة التصاوير فإذا عرفت فأنزلها تجد
فيها تصاوير كثيرة ونقوش وترى فيهم
صورة سقر نقش بحر عنده واحفر قامة
في الأرض تجد ميت شله عن مكانه
واعمل تحته تجد مدخلا لمكان فيه ثلاثة
قبور وترى أحدهما ملك الروم قديما على
بدنه المذهبة عنده مصاغ كثير وحوض
فيه مال

5.2.4 Crane (*kurki*)

The crane appears to mark the Eastern tombs of a burial site, that includes mas-taba tombs and tumuli, which suggests the setting of an ancient necropolis.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 55v]

Description at Dimawa al-Sibāh

which has two doors, one to the North and one to the South, Seek the Northern corner and leave it behind you, going in the direction of the West. Go for a mile until you find a

صفة بدموة السباح

ولها بابان بحري وقلي اقصد ركن المدينة
البحري بغرب دعه خلف ظهره وسر
ميلاً تجد حاجرًا بحريًا قليلًا اقطعه

62 Arnold, *An Egyptian Bestiary*: p. 45.

high wall oriented in the direction north-south – cross it while going West, you will find a fortress built with yellow clay of wisdom. On it, there is a square trapdoor. There, you will find two graves. The graves of the West are mastaba tombs built in the earth. Work in the middle of every grave for the measure of a Byzantine fathom. You will find a lot of riches; the work is easy and is not a lot. As for the Eastern tombs, they are like heaps of black debris, and you will see a golden marcasite upon them. These are mounds, and each tomb has the image of a crane depicted upon it.

وأنت مغرب سائر تجد محرساً مبنياً
بطين الحكمة أصفر عليه بلاطة مربعة
وتجد عنده قطعتين قبوراً قطعاً غربية
مساطب مبنية على الأرض اعمل في
وسط كل قبر كان قامه رومية تجد مالا
كثيراً والعل هين ليس هو بكثير وأما
القبور الشرقية فإنها كبّ مزابل سود
وترى عليهم مرقشية ذهبية وهم كيان
وكل قبر صورة كركي مصور

5.2.5 Crow (*ḡurāb*)

The engraved figure of a crow coloured in red marks a trapdoor that leads to the treasure. The image of the crow reacts to the fumigation, but also needs to be smeared with the blood of a sacrificed crow: a white spot will then appear on its chest, which corresponds to a black spot on the ground. The crow also releases the keys to an opening that is revealed by this ritual, which includes the recitation of a Quranic verse.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 59v]

Description in one of villages [close to] al-Bahnasā which is called Ašrūna

[...] Look in front of the place for a slab upon which a crow is engraved, its colour is red, and you will see it with its wings outstretched. Fumigate it, and fix your gaze upon its breast, and you will see a white feather. Then look in the opposite direction on the ground, and you will see a black spot. Fumigate it with the incense, and slaughter the crow upon it. [...]

صفة بقرية من البهنسا يقال لها أشرونة
[...] وانظر في صدر المكان بلاطة عليها
غراب منقوش ولونه أحمر وتراه قد نشر
اجنحته فبخر عنده وحقق بنطرك في
صدره تنظر ريشه بيضة فانظر قبالتها
في الأرض تراها شامة سوداء فبخرها
بالبخور واذبح الغراب فوقها [...]

Seek it with all its blood, for it will widen, and there will remain an opening [?] pass through it to the limit. When it [the opening] has widened, then take the key from beneath the right wing of the crow, pass through the opening, and rub it to the right while you say: *"The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished; indeed, falsehood is ever vanishing"* [Quran 17:81]. Then the door will open for you. Intensify your fumigation in front of it and pass through it.

واطلبها بدمه كله فإنها تتسع وتبقى
بخش تعبر فيه إلى حد فإذا هي اتسعت
فخذ المفتاح من تحت باط الغراب الأيمن
عبره من النخش وافركه يمين وأنت تقول
جاء الحق وزهق الباطل ان الباطل كان
زهوفاً فإن الباب يفتح لك قوي بخورك
عنده واعبر منه

The image of the crow also appears in a cave, marking two altars (*madbah*) of what can be interpreted as a rock church, in which the treasure is hidden. The instructions for the excavations are more articulated than usual, as they require a calculation based on the distance between the two altars.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 126v]

Description at Ṭahnah al-Bhāsh [?]

Seek there for a church that has two doors. Enter through the Northern door and exit through the Southern one, following the road that passes between two mountains. Observe the mountain to your right: you will see three caves. One of them has two figures upon its door – one holding a tambourine and the other holding a flute. Enter it, and you will find inside the form of two opposite altars, and upon each one of them, there is the depiction of a crow. When you see this depiction, measure the distance between the two altars, double the measurement, and dig for two cubits; you will find a slab, remove it and descend the steps. You will come upon a closed door, whose key

صفة بطنه البحاسه [?]

اطلب بها كنيسة لها بابان ادخل من
الباب البحري واخرج من الباب القبلي
مع الطريق الذي تمر بك بين جبلين
انظر الجبل الذي على يمينك تنظر ٣
مغار مغارة على بابها شخصين واحد في
يده طار والثاني في يده مزمار ادخلها
تجد فيها شكل مذبحين متقابلين وعلى
كل واحد صفة غراب فإذا رأيت هذه
الصفة قيس بين المذبحين واثنى القياس
واحفر ذراعين تجد طابقاً اقلعه وانزل في
درج تلقى باباً مقفولاً ومفتاحه فيه افتح
وادخل تجد كنيسة فيها مال وسلاح

is there. Open it and enter: you will find a church containing riches and weapons.

5.2.6 Duck (*baṭṭa*)

In the pseudo-Maqrīzī account, a depiction of a duck is described within a cave, seemingly pointing to a necropolis distinguished by multiple rock-cut chambers. Ancient Egyptian art features numerous depictions of ducks and geese; these birds were frequently represented not only as a source of food but also as animals used in sacrificial rituals.⁶³

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 182r]

Description of the passage of the 'Cave of the Duck', within the 'Caves of the Israelites'

Look for the monk who is at the gate of the 'Valley of the Sheep', and leave him to your left, then turn back from him towards the South for six caves, and cross the seventh cave, upon whose door there is a depicted duck. Intensify your light and enter it.

صفة مساق مغارة البطة في مغاير بني إسرائيل

اطلب الراهب الذي على باب وادي الغنم ودعه على شمالك وعد منه لقبة ستة مغاير واعبر المغارة السابعة وعلى بابه بطة مصورة قونورك واعبرها

5.2.7 Rooster (*dik*)

The rooster appears in a concise passage as a symbol on the door of the tomb that should be excavated for the treasure. The rooster is a recurrent presence in pharaonic images, often depicted as an offering.⁶⁴ In antiquity, the rooster was a solar symbol, later associated with resurrection in Christian context.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 127r]

A description at Asyut again

Seek the valley of Dazika [?] in front of it is a well-known as the 'Well of the Byzantines'. You will find two

صفة بأسبوط أيضا

اطلب وادي دزيكة قبالة بئر يعرف بئر الروم وتجد مغارتين عند مطلع

63 El-Kilany and Mahran, "What Lies Under the Chair! A Study in Ancient Egyptian Private Tomb Scenes, Part 1": p. 252.

64 Magdy Khalil, Heba, "Representation of the Rooster in Ancient Egyptian Art", *Publications of The Archaeological Society of Alexandria*, xv (2014): pp. 5–28.

caves at the rising of the sun. Go toward the cave upon whose door there is the image of a carved rooster; dig beneath it.

الشمس اقصد منهم المغارة التي على
بابها صورة ديك مصور احفر تحته

5.3 *Wild, Ferocious, and Harmful Animals*

Ferocious animals appear in a variety of forms, both as statues and as painted or carved representations. Among them, there are the quintessential beasts of prey – lions, panthers, tigers, and bears – alongside reptiles, such as serpents and crocodiles, and scorpions. In a comparably unsettling register, the depictions of monkeys may also be situated in the same group, sharing with the wild beasts a similarly disquieting character. At times, the sources merely allude to the presence of an undetermined ferocious animal (*sibāʿ*), without offering further specification as to the species or the precise nature of the predatory creature involved.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 88r]

Seek the city of Luxor, known as Old Luxor, and it is also called Madīnat al-Mamsūh

There you will find the image of a human idol pointing to the inside of its palace with his hand, and in his hand there is something with form of a book – do not approach it! On his right, you will find the form of some beasts of prey, and the same on his left. Walk between them, and you will find a great gate.

اطلب مدينة الأقصر تعرف بالأقصر
القديم وتسمى مدينة المسوح
تجد فيها صفة رجل صنم يشير بيده الى
داخل قصرها وتجد في يده صفة كتاب
فلا تقربه وتجد عن يمينه صفة سباع
وعن شماله ايضا سر بينهم تجد باب
عظمى

5.3.1 *Lion (asad)*

In the pseudo-Maqrizian manual, the lion appears both in stone carvings and in painted representations; mediaeval treasure hunters had numerous possible occasions to come across lions and let themselves be impressed. In the Egyptian landscape, the lion appears occasionally in rock inscriptions, though it is not especially widespread, if compared with other animals. In the pharaonic imaginary, however, it occupies a central place, particularly in hunting scenes where the Pharaoh is shown spearing the beast. As a sign of strength, the lion also came to embody the king himself. The goddess Sekhmet, deity of war and pestilence, was portrayed with the head of a lioness encircled by a

mane.⁶⁵ In the Graeco-Roman period, lions appear frequently in tombs and other significant spaces, a function that continued into early Christianity with lion figures carved in limestone, as well as in bronze vessels, bowls, candelabra, censers, and in a wide range of textiles, all designed “to avert evil”.⁶⁶ In Christian traditions, the lion embodies the same ambivalence. It could represent strength in its positive sense – as a just king, or even as a figure of Christ himself – but also as a negative force, the “personification of the powers of hell”, against whom biblical heroes such as David, Samson, and the prophet Daniel are depicted in combat. At the same time, hagiographic traditions tell of lions serving the hermits of Egyptian desert, making the animal an emblem of both peril and sanctity.⁶⁷ In funerary contexts, lions also assumed an apotropaic role.

In the middle of the open country, the treasure-seeker may encounter the statue of a lion, sitting upon a large stone pedestal. This time, it is the animal's shadow that indicates where to dig, in order to find a royal tomb.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 67r]

**Description near the Monastery of
Abū al-Sirī [?]**

Leave its Eastern corner behind you and proceed towards the mountain, until you see the image of a lion seated upon a slab; and you will see the shadow of upper part cast towards the lower one – it is a slab of Chaldean stone. Lift the slabs that are beneath the lion's shadow, and you will find a cave in which there are three suits of armour. Descend through it until you reach a door, with its key above it; open it and pass into a place where there is a sleeping king, and above him a net of pearls.

صفة بدير أبو السري

واترك ركنه الشرقي خلف ظهرك
وسير قاصد الجبل حتى ترى صفة أسد
جالس عليها بلاطة وترى ظل الفوقانية
إلى التحتانية وهي بلاطة كلدان فك
البلاطين الذي هما تحت ظل الأسد
تجد مغارة فيها ٣ درع انزل فيهم إلى
باب ومفتاحه عليه افتحه واعبر لمكان
فيه ملكا نائم وعليه شبكه لوؤؤ

65 Arnold, *An Egyptian Bestiary*: p. 16., 18.

66 Ibid.: p. 97.

67 Olga Osharina, “The Image of the Lion in Coptic Art”, *Journal of Coptic Studies*, xv (2013): p. 96.

5.3.2 Crocodile (*timsāḥ*)

Fearsome talismanic crocodiles recur with notable frequency in the pseudo-Maqrizian text. The crocodile was frequently associated with magic, and numerous crocodile-shaped talismans have been recovered from pharaonic contexts [Fig. 8]. There are many crocodiles in stylized form in various caves and rocks.⁶⁸ The cult of sacred crocodiles, ritually fed within temple precincts, was especially prominent in the Fayyum region.⁶⁹

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 87v–88r]

Description at Siflāq in the East

[...] Seek East of the she-camel for the figure of a yellow crocodile, facing East, with its tail upon its back and its leg extended. Work beneath it to a depth of a fathom and a half, and you will find three vases full of riches.

صفة بسفلاق
[...] واطلب من شرقي الناقة صفة
تمساح أصفر نحو الشرق وذنبه على ظهره
ويده ممدودة اعمل تحته قامة ونصف
تجد ٣ أمطار ملائمة مال

In another site, the crocodile functions as a talisman and automaton both: once fumigated, it opens its mouth, thereby revealing the hidden passage. The text also prescribes the means by which the talisman must be reactivated once the treasure has been secured.



FIGURE 8 Crocodile and tortoise, MS Paris BnF Arabe 2674, f. 9r (detail)
SOURCE: BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE

68 Morrow, Cherry, and Wilkinson, *Desert RATS*: p. 52.
69 McDonald, “Animals in Egypt”: p. 389.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 27v]

Description in the city of Asyut and the route of the 'Crocodile Passage'

Beneath it, look for those upper caves that are near the 'Monastery of the Subterraneans'; they are seven caves in a single row. Take from the first to the seventh cave, whose distinguishing sign is that there is a pond in front of it. Cross it to its far end, and you will find a frieze (*ifrīz*) resembling a staircase. Climb upon it, and you will find a shelf, and upon it a sleeping crocodile made of stone. Light your incense in its proximity: it will open its mouth. Pass quickly through, and do not cease to use your incense for a full hour. You will find a hall full of riches: take from it what you wish, quickly, and ascend immediately.

صفة بمدينة أسيوط ومساق معبرة التساح

اطلب تحتها تلك المغاير الفوقانية التي
عند دير الخبايا وهم سبع مغاير على صف
واحد فخذ من الأول إلى المغارة السابعة
وعلامتها أن قدامها بركة اعبرها إلى
صدرها تجد إفريز مثل السلم اطلع فوقه
تجد رفرف وفوقه تمساح جرنائم أطلق
عنده بخورك فإنه يفتح لك فاه اعبر فيه
سريعاً وبخورك لا تقتر عنه ساعة واحدة
تجد قاعة ملائمة مال فاحمل منه ما تريد
سرعة واطلع عاجلاً

5.3.3 Bear, Panther, and Cheetah (*dubb, nimr, fahd*)

In a cave, amidst depictions of ferocious beasts, the treasure hunter is faced with a strikingly complex scene: a fight between a bear and a panther. The image is presented with clear talismanic implications, as the seeker is instructed to approach it only after performing fumigations with incense. This dynamic tableau, charged with movement and tension, stands out as one of the most elaborate descriptions in the entire series of images. This representation may refer to courtly spectacles, specifically to scenes of animal combats. Bears are not part of the native fauna of Egypt, whose climate was never suitable for this animal. The presence of bears in Egypt is otherwise unattested in the repertories of petroglyphs.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ There is evidence of the importation of bears from Syria for the court, and one is depicted in an Egyptian wall painting from the tomb-chapel of the vizier Rekhmire (no. 100) at Thebes. See Houlihan, Patrick F., *The Animal World of the Pharaohs* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996): p. 100. For a study on the representation of bears in ancient Egypt see Dalia, Mohamed Soliman Abdel Meguid Omar, "Bears in Ancient Egypt", *Majallat kulliyat al-siyāḥa wa-l-fanādiq jāmi'at al-Manṣūra*, x1/4 (2022): pp. 237–75.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 51r]

Description in the cavern of the bear and the cheetah in the valley of Ṭahā, in front of Asmant

Aim at that mountain in the East of Asmant and you will see in front of you a vessel like a second dome and go from there to the East for two miles: you will find a depression. Go down it, you will soon find some trapdoors. Proceed for two miles, you will find in front of you a nice mountain blocking the way from the North to the South. Seek there, intensifying your incense. On the side of this mountain, seek a cavern in which there are columns which are taken from the mountain. Cross it from these columns, it will lead you to a road to a nice valley. Inside it, look to your left, and you will see the entrance of a great and huge cave, while you fumigate with Indian aloe wood, hair of a male bear, hair of a male tiger, a red lock, and sandarac, all finely pounded, and fumigate with this. Then look: you will see in it a white carved façade, upon which a cheetah has been depicted, in front of it a bear turning toward the cheetah, and in front of the bear a panther, as if circling and about to leap upon the bear in order to devour it. When you see these signs, intensify your incense and your light, and pass through it: you will see the riches within, heaped up in mounds. If you take something from it and come back wishing to leave with it, the door will close upon you. Then look

صفة مغارة الدب والفهد والنمر بوادي طحا قبالة أسمنت

اقصد إلى ذلك الجبل الشرقي من أسمنت ترى قدامك ركوة شبه قبة ثانية اطلبها وسير منها مشرق قدر ميلين تجد هبطة أزلها تجد فيها طوابق العجل سير فيها ميلين تجد أمامك جبل لطيف متعرض من بحري إلى قبلة اطلب وقوي بخورك واطلب في لحف هذا الجبل ولجة وعليها عمود وقد نحت من الجبل ومستخرج أعبرها من هذه عند هذه العامود يسلك بك للطريق أرض وادي لطيف انظر فيه على شمالك ترى باب مغارة كبير هائل وأنت تجز بعود هندي وشعر دب ذكر وشعر نمر ذكر وقفل أحمر وصندروس يدقوا ناعما وتجز به وانظر ترى فيها واجهة بيضاء منحوتة قد صور فيها فهد وقدامه دب ملتفت إلى الفهد وقدام الدب نمر كأنه يدير ويوتب على الدب يفترسه بهذه شاهدت هذه الامارات قو بخورك ونورك واعبرها ترى الأموال فيها مكمومة عرم فإن حملت منه شيئا وجئت تخرج به استد عليك الباب فاطلب صدره تجد فيه صورة هلال مصور أبيض وترى على أطرافه كغابة اطبع فوقها بشمع بكر تمسه

for its front, and you will find the image of a white crescent upon it, and you will see some writing on its edges. Seal it with virgin wax, touch it with fire, and fumigate it with your incense; then the door will open, and you may ascend.

نار وارمه [؟ هحيه] بخورك فإن الباب
ينفتح فاطلع

5.3.4 Monkey (*qird*)

Within the pseudo-graphical text of al-Maqrīzī, a monkey is presented with a bird clasped in its hand and about to devour it. If the figure is fumigated, a talismanic mechanism will be put in motion and the vulture will detach from the monkey; then, the hidden treasure will emerge from the belly of the monkey. The proximity of such a figure to that of a bird is not unrealistic, and the act of devouring it might be an interpretation of a composition in which the two animals were juxtaposed.

As for monkeys in Egypt, one species of monkeys persisted until the Middle Kingdom, yet monkeys were consistently imported from Ethiopia and Somalia, primarily as pets.⁷¹ Their function as guardians is also attested, with depictions of monkeys employed in roles analogous to guard dogs. Monkeys occupied a highly prominent place in ancient Egyptian culture,⁷² ranking second only to dogs in the Old Kingdom representation, and rising to the first during the New Kingdom.⁷³ A frequent figure of Egyptian iconography that might have been described as a monkey is the baboon, animal sacred to Thoth, god of wisdom and knowledge.⁷⁴ The veneration of the baboon stemmed from the belief that these animals worshipped the sun at dawn.⁷⁵

71 Monkeys are often represented in proximity to female figures Arnold, *An Egyptian Bestiary*: p. 58.

72 Houlihan, *The Animal World of the Pharaohs*: p. 95.

73 El-Kilany and Mahran, "What Lies Under the Chair! A Study in Ancient Egyptian Private Tomb Scenes, Part 1": p. 250.

74 In the Old Kingdom, most portrayals show monkeys kept on leashes, such as those visible in the tomb of Inumin at Saqqara. See Houlihan, *The Animal World of the Pharaohs*: p. 105.

75 As monkeys were observed raising their arms skyward and standing upright on their haunches, a posture immortalized in numerous sculptures produced during the reign of Amenhotep III (ca. 1390–1353 BCE). See Arnold, *An Egyptian Bestiary*: p. 60.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 79v]

Description at Tall Baṣṭa

Look in it for the image of a monkey standing on its legs, in whose mouth there is a vulture as if it wished to swallow it. When you find it, my son, fumigate it and say to it: "Lay down the vulture, for it will be safe, and lay down what is in your belly, for you are in disgrace, and I have come to you on behalf of your father". Then, the vulture will fall from its mouth, and you will see for yourself all the riches in its belly: it is a *wayba* [i.e., 33 kg ca.] and a half of gold. Its incense is hair of monkey, vulture's feather, and male frankincense.

صفة بتل بسطة

اطلب بها صورة قرد واقف على رجليه
في فيه رخمة كأنها يريد يبلعها فإذا ظفرت
به يا ابني فبخره وقل له حط الرخمة فإنها
سالمة وحط ما في بطنك فأنت مسخوط
عليك وأنا أئيتك من عند أبوك فإن
الرخمة تسقط من فيه وترى لك كلها في
بطنه من المال وهو وية ونصف ذهب
وبخوره رع ش [شعر] قرد وريش رخمه
ولبان ذكر

5.3.5 Serpent, Snake & Scorpion (*ta'bān, ḥaya, 'aqrab*)

Within the manual attributed to al-Maqrīzī, several images of snakes are described, carved into the rock and functioning as protective talismans guarding trapdoors leading to hidden subterranean chambers. Within Pharaonic imagery, serpents of any kind – particularly the cobra – occupied a position of great prominence, most famously embodied in the *uraeus* (as termed in Greek), which adorned the foreheads of Pharaohs as a symbol of divine kingship and protection. The same figure was also represented as guarding the roofs of sacred shrines with awe-inspiring ferocity.⁷⁶

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 74r]

Description at Asyut, as well

Look to its West for a well with a waterwheel, upon which there are two hard stones. Intensify your incense, and turn your back to the well, facing West, while your incense is working, garlic peel with the fangs of serpents – [...] ground it,

صفة بأسبوط أيضا

اطلب غريبها بئر ساقية عليها حجرين
مصلبين قو بخورك ودير ظهرك إلى
البئر واستقبل بوجهك إلى الغرب
وبخورك عماك قشر ثوم مع نياب ثعابين

⁷⁶ Arnold, *An Egyptian Bestiary*: p. 43.

and fumigate with it. Look inside it: you will see an opening suspended three cubits above the water; ascend through it, and inside it, there is the image of a serpent in the centre of that opening. Seal it with hot wax, and put place it using your incense.

[...] يدق ويخز به وانظر فيها ترى طاقة
معلقة فوق الماء بثلاث أذرع. فومنه
وفيهما صورة حية في وسط تلك الطاقة
فاختم عليها بشمع سخن وضعه مع
بخورك

A coiled serpent decorating a trapdoor is said to come to life and move its tongue, when a coin is tossed at it. The Pseudo-Maqrīzī reassures his reader, specifying that the snake is a human-made device.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 95r]

**Description of the signs of the ram
in Zāhir [in] Cairo**

[...] When you arrive at this wide place, stop in front of it and look to your right: you will find an arched opening. Pass through it, and – go ahead – you will find before you a well covered with a trapdoor, upon which there is a coiled serpent; throw a [coin of the weight of a] mithqal to it, and its tongue will move. Do not fear it, for it is designed and crafted. Remove it from its place, and beneath it you will find the trapdoor. Lift it and descend into a corridor, on top its door, there is the image of a ram.

صفة علوم الكبش بظاهر القاهرة
[...] فإذا أنت وصلت إلى هذا المكان
الواسع قف دونه وانظر على يمينك تجد
طاقة اعبرها وطول روحك تجد قدامك
بر عليها طابق فوقها حية مكوعة ارمها
مثقال ولسانها يلعب فلا تخاف منها
فإنها مصورة مصنوعة شلها من مكانها
تجد الطابق تحتها شله وانزل إلى سرب
على بابه صورة كبش

As for the scorpion, the following passage describes a scorpion minted on silver coins, alongside an inscription in ancient Greek. This very combination is actually attested in Hellenistic coins, such as in the drachma of Antiochus IV Epiphanes of Commagene [Fig. 9].⁷⁷

77 Burnett, Andrew, Amandry, Michel and Ripollès, Pere Pau, "Roman provincial coinage, Vol. I, From the death of Caesar to the death of Vitellius (44 BC–AD 69)", (London/Paris: British Museum Press/Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1992): no. 3857; also available at <<https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coins/1/3857>> (last accessed 19 September 2025).



FIGURE 9

Silver drachma of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, with scorpion and Greek inscription.

SOURCE: *RPC ONLINE* ([HTTPS://RPC.ASHMUS.OX.AC.UK](https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk))

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 116v]

Description at Bištāmī

Proceed North for a distance of half a mile, and there will find you a canal, at the Northern side of which there are seven [structures] of plaster. Fumigate near them with olibanum and benzoin, and look at the Westernmost one, the largest. Work next to it, on the Western side, descending to a depth of a fathom and a half, in a soil of debris and silt soil, and you will find a basin full of silver [coins] similar to *dirhams*, bearing the image of a scorpion and Greek letters.

صفة ببشتامي

سير بحريها قدر نصف ميل تجد هناك
خليجا على جنبه سبعة جصص من
بحري بجز عندهم بكندر وميعة وانظر
الغربية اكبرهم اعمل جنبها الغربي وانت
نازل قامة ونصف في مؤنة وطن ابلز
تجد حوضا ملاّن فضة مثل الدراهم
عليهم صورة عقرب وحروف يونانية

The following passage mentions the snake and the scorpion both. If the snake serves as a seal for the door – which has not been opened if the snake appears intact – the copper scorpion on a green whetstone, which has to be rubbed seven times in a precise direction, in order to open a passage

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 96r–96v]

Also, seek the ram and proceed to the bridge extending between two corners; walk along it to its end, facing the South. Look for the ram and keep it on your left as you head Westwards, with the foot of the mountain at your side. Continue for about fifty *kassabah* [i.e., 3,5 meters ca.], until you find a well along the practicable road, called the 'Well of the Steps'. It is dark, awe-inspiring, and revered.

وأیضا اطلب الكبش واقصد الجسر
المستطیل بین ركنین وامش علیه إلى
آخره مستقبل القبلة واطلب الكبش
واجعله على شمالك وانت مغرب مع
ذیل الجبل وانت تمشي قدر خمسين قصبة
تجد بئراً على الطريق السالكة يُقال لها
بئر الدرج وهي غلسة لها هبة وحرمة

Descend along its steps, until you reach the water, in the month of Epip. Stand on the last step, facing its interior, and you will find a arched opening in the well. At its entrance, there are three large bricks, and the image of a serpent is engraved on the middle brick. If the serpent remains intact, then the place is untouched and no one has yet entered it; but if it has been removed, then others have already gained access. Devise a way to pass through the opening after having removed the middle brick, and cross it. Walk twenty-one steps and you will find an arched opening and on top of its entrance lies a green whetstone. On it, there is a copper scorpion: rub it to the right seven times, and the door will open. Enter without fear. You will, then, find a whetstone door with two shutters, one open and the other closed. [...] Cross into a hall containing four *liwāns*; in each *liwān*, there are a thousand golden crosses, each weighing a *qintār* of gold. There also are six heaps of gold. Around the chamber, golden lamps are hanging, each containing a jewel that shines like the sun. In the middle of the hall stands a column, upon which is a cup filled with a thousand rings once worn by kings. Whoever wears one of these rings gains the obedience of the spirits.

اتزلها على الدرج إلى الماء في شهر أييب
وقف على الدرجة الأخيرة ووجهك
إلى صدرها تجد طاقة في البئر وعلى
بابها ثلاث طوبات كبار وعلى الطوبة
الوسطانية صورة حية منقوشة فإن
كانت باقية فالمكان بكر لم يطرقه طارق
وإن كانت قُلت فالمكان طرقة الوارد
فاحتل في العبور في الطاقة بعد أن تفكّ
الطوبة الوسطانية واعر وامش إحدى
وعشرين خطوة تجد طاقة وعلى بابها
جراً مستأً أخضر وفيه عقرب من نحاس
افركه على اليمين سبع فركات فإن الباب
ينفتح اعبره ولا تخف تجد باب حجر
مسنّ بدرفتين فردة مفتوحة وفردة
مغلوقة [...] اعبر إلى قاعة فيها أربعة
لواوين في كلّ ليوان ألف صليب من
ذهب وكلّ صليب وزنه قنطار ذهب
وفيها ستة عشر عرمة ذهب وبدائرها
قناديل من ذهب في كلّ قنديل جوهرة
تضيء كالشمس وتجد في وسط القاعة
عاموداً على رأسه طاسة فيها ألف خاتم
مستخدمين من الملوك كلّ من لبس
خاتماً طاعته الأعوان

6 Human Figures

The human figures depicted at treasure sites are numerous and belong predominantly to Christian iconography, though at times they draw upon other tradition.

6.1 *Horsemen (fāris)*

The figure of the mounted warrior – an armed knight on horseback – is strikingly recurrent within the Pseudo-Maqrīzī. Its Christian connotation is often explicit, as he appears holding a cross in his hand. The details of the mounted horseman (red garments, chestnut horse, pointy weapon) are reminiscent of one of the most widely attested images across Egyptian visual tradition. Representations of horsemen appear in rock art as early as ca. 250 BCE,⁷⁸ and assume a particularly prominent role in Coptic art. In the Coptic imaginary, the horseman “loomed larger than life on the horizons of the imagination”. His visual power endured in the Nile Valley throughout the centuries, and “following the eclipse of the heroic horseman in the imagery of the late empire elsewhere, the Coptic horseman pursued an exuberant career in Egyptian art from the late fourth century onward”.⁷⁹ The horse functions as a signifier of status, while the act of riding signifies elevated social rank. The military saints are especially associated with equestrian imagery. Among them, St. Menas,⁸⁰ Phoibammon, Victor, Theodore Stratelates, St. Merkourios and, from the Syrian-Palestinian sphere, Sergios and Leontios.⁸¹ These images consistently depict a youthful rider, often an adolescent with short, curly hair, never bearded and at times almost androgynous in appearance. He is frequently shown with one arm raised aloft – brandishing a spear, bow, or sword, or gesturing with an open hand.⁸² The horse tramples over a variety of animals: ducks, dogs, lions, hares, and panthers – motifs that recall hunting scenes.⁸³

The mention of writing upon the horseman's forehead seems to mark the image's magical and talismanic nature, possibly reinterpreting inscriptions on

78 Morrow, Cherry, and Wilkinson, *Desert RATS*: p. 17.

79 Lewis, Suzanne “The Iconography of the Coptic Horseman in Byzantine Egypt”, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, x (1973): p. 27, 34, 38.

80 Alf Zekry, Nader, “The Iconography of St. Menas in the Coptic Art”, *Journal of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels-University of Sadat City*, 1/2 (2017): p. 48.

81 Xanthopoulou, Maria, “Martyrs, Monks, and Musicians: Two Enigmatic Coptic Vases in the Benaki Museum and Their Parallels”, *Μουσείο Μπενάκη*, x (2010): p. 28.

82 See Lewis, “The Iconography of the Coptic Horseman in Byzantine Egypt”: p. 39.

83 Ibid.: pp. 29–30.

the icons. The choice of the substance for fumigations is driven by the location, and, in fact, the text mentions the incense used in Christian churches.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 83v]

Look for the Palace of the Jinn in the city of Qīnā.

Climb to its summit and look Eastward: you will see a high mountain. Descend and make your way toward it; climb to its top, and you will see beneath it a wilderness, which is a valley. Descend and look in it for the church of Ṭāhir of someone [?]; pass through it by its door, which opens towards the *qibla* [South], and look at the Northern wall: you will see the image of a horseman holding a cross, and upon his forehead something is written. Dig beneath the feet of the horseman, and you will find a jar containing *dīnārs*, the hole must be two cubits deep. The incense to be used is the incense for the churches.

اطلب قصر الجن بمدينة قنا

اطلع أعلاه وانظر إلى الشرق ترى جبل عالي انزل واقصده واصعد أعلاه ترى تحته فلاة وهو وادي انزل واطلب فيه كنيسة طاهر للملكة [؟] أحد عبرها من بابها وهو يفتح لقلعة وانظر الحائط البحري ترى صفة فارس في يده صليب ومكتوب في جبهة احفر تحت رجلين الفارس تجد قدرة فيها دنانير والحفرة ذراعين والبخور بخور الكائس

In another passage, the treasure hunter is faced with an armed knight riding a chestnut horse, positioned near the ruins of an ancient temple with hieroglyphic inscriptions. The figure must be fumigated, and beneath it a series of litanies have to be recited.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 131v]

Description in the city of Aḥmīm

When you arrive there, there is a temple in ruin. Inside it, you will find the image of a man, a horseman on a chestnut horse, holding in his hand a sword, a lance, and a cuirass. There are names written in hieroglyphics upon it. Fumigate beneath him with male frankincense mixed with the

صفة بمدينة أحميم

إذا جئت إليها بها برة تجد فيها صورة رجل فارس على فرس راكب أشهب ويده سيف ورمح وطارقة وفيها أسماء مكتوبة بالبرباوي فبخر تحته بلبان ذكر معجون بدم عبد أسود أجعد الشعر

blood of a black slave with curly hair, and recite with these names, saying: “Oh Yāh Yūhāl āl, Lord of the angels and the spirit, and this for the sake Book that has power over all the creation. *al-wakhā*, open, open. Then the door will open for you.

واتكلم بهذه الأسماء تقول يا ياه يوهال
ال رب الملائكة والروح وإنه لكتاب
عزيز على الخلق اجمعين الوخا افتح افتح
فإنه يفتح لك الباب

Inside another church in the monastic complex of Abū Mīnā, there is the depiction a horseman clad in red – though other descriptions mention a cap painted with lapis lazuli as well – serving as a guidepost toward a cross beneath which the seeker is instructed to dig.⁸⁴

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 194r]

Description at the Church of Abū Mīnā

When you pass from through its door, you will see a large wooden cross that is not distant, upon which a wall is built. Above its top you will find the image of a horseman dressed in red, and there is nothing else in that spot. Look beneath the cross for a treasure box and a bag,

صفة بكنيسة أبو مينا
إذا عبرت من بابها ترى صليب كبير
خشب لا يزح ومبني عليه في الحيطه
وتجد فوق رأسه صورة راكب فرس
لباس أحمر وليس في البقعة سواه
اطلب تحت الصليب خزانة وكيس

Another treasure site is marked by a horseman riding a tawny horse, beneath which a raven is depicted pecking. The raven's beak itself marks the precise location of the treasure.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 47v]

Description at Ahnās

Look in it for the Church of Mary, which has two doors. Enter it through the small door, and on your left you will find the image of a horseman on

صفة بأهناس
اطلب بها كنيسة مارية ولها باين ابرها
من الباب الصغير تجد على يدك الشمال

84 For alternative descriptions of the horseman, see MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532: f. 105r.

a tawny horse, holding a sword in his hand. Look beneath the belly of his horse, as there is the image of a black crow that looks as if it is pecking at it. Work in its beak until you are at a level with a brick, and you will find a pot containing three hundred Byzantine *dīnārs*.

صورة فارس على فرس أحمر وفي يده
سيف انظر إلى تحت بطن فرسه
وصورة غراب أسود كأنه ينقر فيها عمل
في منقارة سواء طوبة تجد قدرة فيها
ثلاثمائة دينار رومية

6.2 Monk (*rāhib*)

The image of a monk carrying a censer – or, alternatively, a staff – is frequent in the Pseudo-Maqrizī. Monks are frequently depicted in Coptic churches and monasteries but, to the eyes of Muslim treasure hunters, the representations of apostles, saints, and other figures associated with ecclesiastical imagery might have arguably fallen within this same category. A significant number of these images portray men engaged in fumigation.⁸⁵ Incense and the censer formed a fundamental part of Coptic ritual. The Coptic censer is prominently represented in the murals of numerous monasteries – shown either suspended or placed upon a column. The ritual use of incense has antecedents in ancient Egypt. In tomb and temple reliefs, Pharaohs and priests are depicted fumigating offerings of myrrh or censuring the statues of deities⁸⁶ – gestures that visually resonate with later Coptic practice.

The image of a monk carrying censer and staff is associated with the so-called ‘Cave of the Forty Sages, located in a site near Giza.’⁸⁷

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 83v]

Description at Muḥarraqa

Go from it to the West for a mile, and you will find a high mountain, at its summit there is the ‘Cave of the Forty Sages’, which is a large cave.

صفة بالحرقة

اطلب منها للغرب ميل تجد جبل عالي
وفي أعلاه مغارة الحكماء الأربعين وهي

85 Mahmoud Abd El-Hamid, “The Iconography of Coptic Incense Burner on the Murals of Monasteries”, p. 1. The silhouette of a monk mounted on a tortoise was used to play a slightly disquieting trick to friends at dinner parties; see Raggetti, Lucia, *Un coniglio nel turbante. Intrattenimento e inganno nella scienza arabo-islamica* (Milano: Editrice Bibliografica, 2021): p. 90. The figure of a monk carrying a censer appears among the illustrations of another manual for treasure hunting, MS Paris, BnF, arabe 2764, f. 55v, 62r, 86r.

86 Abd El-Hamid: p. 3.

87 The same passage, with minor variants, is attested twice in the Pseudo-Maqrizian text, see MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 182r.

Pass through it, and inside you will find the image of a depicted monk, a censer in one hand and a staff in the other. Some names are inscribed in front of him; when you recognise all of these signs, rejoice in what you hope for from your Lord. Work beneath his feet to the depth of a fathom and a half, and you will find a trapdoor with a golden ring around it, remove it.

مغارة كبيرة ابر تجد فيها صورة راهب
مصورة في يده مبخرة وفي الثانية عكاز
بين يديه اسماء منقوشة فإذا صحت لك
هذه الأمانة كلها فابشر بما ترجوه من
ربك واعمل تحت رجله قامة ونصف
تجد طابقة محلقة ذهب شلها

The underground crypt of a monastery hosts a group of seven statues of hooded monks, with the figure in the middle holding a ceramic censer.⁸⁸

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 128v]

Description of a journey from the watchtower of Moses to the monastery of the mule

[...]. And enter into a spacious corridor, and in this corridor, there are seven monks: four on one side and three on the other side, wearing black cowls. All of them carry staffs, except for one of them, who has in his hand [a vessel] of ceramic. So, order your companion to place burning coals in it, and to place the incense and copper beside it, and let him persist with the incense and not slacken from it until you come out of the place.

صفة سير من مرقد موسى لدير البغل
[...] وادخل لدليز متسع وفي هذا
الدلهيز سبعة رهبان أربعة ناحية
وثلاثة ناحية لابسين قلسوات سود وفي
أحدهم عكاز ما خلا واحد منهم في
يده من صيني فأمر رفيقك يوضع جمر
نار فيها ويوضع البخور ونحاس بجانبه
ويواظب بالبخور ولا يفتر عنه إلى أن
تخرج من المكان

88 Another monk with a censer made of clay of wisdom is described in another passage, see (MS Bodelian library, Huntington 532, f. 128), while another passage describes a monk with a stick in his hand and a black man next to him (MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 48r).



FIGURE 10
Monk holding a staff, MS Paris BnF Arabe 2674, f. 55v
(detail).

SOURCE: BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE

6.3 *Male Figure*

Male human figures represent various characters, saints or kings, usually pointing at the place where to dig.

In the village of Abū Jirj, from where a variety of martyrs and saints stems, treasure hunters could see the image of the apparently eponymous saint. In this case, however, both names are Arabic transliterations of two different Coptic names – the village of Pagjerjē and the fourth century martyr Apa Panesnēy – that converge in a single form. The similarity between the names, the resemblance to a kunya, and the accidents of the manuscript transmission may have all played a role in this.⁸⁹

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 69r]

Description at Nāy

Look near the Church of Abū Jirj. Pass through it, and on your left you will find a fine well, beneath the image of Abū Jirj. Empty the well, and you will find in it a round stone, which is an

صفة بناي
اطلب بجا كنيسة أبو جرج اعبرها تجد
على يدك الشمال بئر لطيف وهي تحت
صورة أبو جرج ازل ابئر تجد فيه حجر

⁸⁹ Timm, Stefan, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1984): pp. 420–21.

obstruction; remove it, and behind it you will find a passage. Strengthen your light and pass through it into a treasure chamber full of riches.

مدور فهو لقيم فكه تجد خلفه سرب قو
نورك واعبر فيه إلى خزانة ملائمة مال

Near Memphis, possibly in a Pharaonic site with the remains of a monumental gate, a male human figure points at the exact point where a passage to the treasure is hidden, covered by a stone marked by the image of another man.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 30v]

Description at Memphis

Ask about the Western gate of the king, go out through it, and walk straight Westward. You will find the image of a man on a stone, pointing with his hand underneath the image, and there is nothing else in the wilderness. Dig directly beneath it, and you will find stones and columns cut from stone, twice a man's height deep; you will find a flat stone, and upon it the image of a man. Burn it with fire, sprinkle it with vinegar, and cover it with a cloth, for it will all disappear.

صفة بمنف

اسأل باب الملك الغربي واطلع منه وسر
مستقيماً إلى الغرب تجد صفة صورة
إنسان على حجر وهو يشير بيده إلى تحت
الصورة وليس في البرية غيره احفر تحتها
سواء تجد حجارة وعمد مقطعة بالحجارة
قامتين تجد حجراً فرشاً وعليه صورة إنسان
احرقه بالنار ورشه بالخل وأطرته بالغطاء
فإنه ينكر كله

Two mirroring figures, gazing and pointing at each other, reveal once more the location of a treasure. One of them is said to have only one eye, which may be a way to describe a figure portrayed in profile, rather than a damage. The passage alludes to the celebrated figure of the “false caliph” al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh, whose name is inextricably linked, within popular imagination, to legends of treasure discovery.⁹⁰ In the introduction of the *Ḥall al-rumūz*, an extensive section is devoted to this legend recounting a series of treasures unearthed by this ruler. Their locations are recorded in a poem allegedly composed by the

90 Lenora, Antje, *Der Gefälschte Kalif Eine Einführung in Die Sīrat al-Ḥākim bi-Amrillāh* (PhD dissertation: Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 2011): p. 26.

Fatimid Caliph. A much longer version of this poem is preserved in another treasure-hunting manual.⁹¹

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 156r]

Description at the 'Caves of the Snakes'

Al-Ḥākim said: "Cross the great bridge that faces Ṭrā [?], and travel Eastward until you reach a cave on your left, there are many beads upon its door. Inside it, you will see a pillar in the middle, and upon it the image of two persons: one pointing to the other with his hand, the other gesturing with his finger, and one has one eye. When you see these signs, give thanks to God the Highest, and take the path on your left, and walk along it to your left, and you will reach two doors.

صفة بمغارة الحيات

قال الحاكم اركب الجسر الأعظم الذي
قبلة طرا وسر على شرق إلى أن يوصلك
إلى مغارة على شمالك وعلى بابها حبات
كثيرة ترى فيها ركيزة في الوسط وعليها
صورة شخصين احدهما يشير إلى الآخر
بيده والآخر يشير بإصبعه وأحدهما
يفرد عينه فإذا رأيت هذه العلامات
فاشكر الله تعالى واقصد الطريق الذي
على شمالك وامش فيها على شمالك تصل
إلى باين

The following description presents the statue (*ṣanam*) of a child tied by the feet and hanging upside down, a posture presented as an inverted crucifixion.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 167v]

Description

Seek al-Muḥarraqa, go Westward at your pace for three miles, and you will find stones of the extreme limit [...]

Description: go Westward from these stones for two miles, you will find the surface of a mountain, upon which you will see a cave opening to

صفة

اطلب المحرقة وسير منها للغرب إلى
تقدر في مسيرك على ٣ أميال تجد حجارة
القصارى [...]

صفة وسير من هذه الحجارة مغرب
ميلين تجد سطح جبل ترى فيه مغارة

⁹¹ For the underlying popular narration about al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh, see Lenora, *Der Gefälschte Kalif Eine Einführung in Die Sīrat Al-Ḥākim Bi-Amrillāh*. The other version of the poem attributed to al-Ḥākim is preserved in the MS Erfurt, Gotha Forschungsbibliothek, MS orient. A. 1299.

the East. Pass through it, and on its door, you will find a depicted idol in the form of a boy hanging by his feet, like an inverted crucifixion. Intensify your incense and work beneath the boy's head to the depth of one fathom in the ground, and you will find a trapdoor, remove it.

يفتح إلى الشرق اعبرها تجد عليها
بابها صنم مصور وعلى صورة صبي
معلق برجله كالمصلوب منكوس قو
بخورك واعمل تحت رأس الصبي قامة
في الأرض تجد طابق شله

The image of a Pharaoh, explicitly identified as the first one, appears in a bowl full of pharaonic treasures.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 148r]

In the Pharaonic [district] as well

Ask for the "Great Bridge". Go to its Western side and you will find three plastered structures of bricks and gypsum. Their sign is that the Southern mound among them is round in shape, and in its centre you will see a cavity resembling a basin, containing six loads of Pharaonic wealth. Upon it is the image of the first Pharaoh.

أيضا بالفرعونية
اطلب الجسر الأعظم واقصد غريبه
تجد ثلاث جصص طوب وجس ومن
علامتهم أن الجصة القبلية منهم تجدها
مدورة وترى في وسطها جوزه كالحوض
سته أحمال مال فرعوني وعليه صورة
فرعون الأول

6.4 Female Figure

Various kinds of female figures animate the imaginary of treasure hunters. Their description may be reminiscent of the Pharaonic times, such as in the locality of Dendera, where the figures of women might have been inspired by the decorations of the temple of Hathor.⁹²

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 18or]

Description in the city of Dendera

Go outside its gate, and you will find its walls [decorated with] women, painted or drawn in black and

صفة بمدينة دندرة
اعبر بابها تجد حيطانها نساء مصورين
واو[؟] دهم وتجد في البرية صور كثيرة

92 Sylvie Cauville, "Dendera," in Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt, ed. Kathryn A. Bard (New York: Routledge, 2005): p. 299.

among them you will find many images in the open country. Leave them behind, look in that country for the Upper country, for it adjoins the Lower country. In it, you will find a painted image, and outside, near it, a staircase.

[...] Then the image will open for you; pass through it as there are rarities in it, and you will find piled up riches. Take what suffices you from the riches, make haste, and leave it. Know that the owner of the country is [buried] there, and with him there are jewels, rarities, and treasures.

اطلب فيها البرية فوقانية فإنها تنطح
بالبرية التحتانية تجد فيها صورة مدهونة
وبرا عندها درج قف عندها و

فإن الصورة يفتح لك فاعبر فيها تحف
تجد الأموال مكومة فخذ من المال كفايتك
وعجل واطلع منها واعلم إن صاحب البرية
هناك وعنده جواهر وتحف وذخائر

6.5 Ghoul (ghūl)

The ghoul is a sort of ogre that originates when monstrous traits meet the human figure.⁹³ This pre-Islamic terrifying figure is said to usually dwell in graveyards and deserted place, ensnaring and devouring travellers. In the outskirts of Cairo, the treasure hunter is faced with a representation of the ghoul, characterized by a naked head and provided with swords.⁹⁴

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 85r]

The description of the course of the kings in the district

Seek the Dijla of the Ancient temples [?]; go on your right, and ascend to the upper surface that is on your right from the side of the steep road. Then, you will see a stone like a ten-oared ship on your left and, after it, a paved ground; in it, you will find mounds, and you will find a royal fissure near

صفة مساق الملوك بالناحية

اطلب الدجلة البرباوية وسير على يمينك
واطلع إلى السطح الأعلى الذي على
يمينك من العقبة فإنك ترى على يسارك
جر كأنه مركب عشاري وبعده أرض
مبلطة وتجد فيه تلال وتجد عندها
شق ملوكي واسع الوسط ضيق الطرفين

93 MacDonald, D.B., and Ch. Pellat. "Ghūl". In P. Bearman (ed.), *EP²*, (Brill, 2012) doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2511.

94 Dijla does not refer here to the Arabic name of the Tigris rives in Mesopotamia, but to a district to the south of Cairo, today Wādī Dijla.

them, wide in the middle, narrow at the two ends. So, mention the name of God and descend into it; you will find something like a ledge there, and it ends outside. Stand upon it but do not climb above it, and you will find a span long arched opening. Work in it, and you will find a door behind it; descend the staircase, and there are three steps in it. Be cautious, with the utmost caution, and descend. You will find the likeness of a ghoul, a very terrifying figure, with its head uncovered and swords in front of him. So, fumigate before him and do not fear: you will find a paving stone on his left; remove it, and descend to a place in which the riches are, in iron vessels, and they are two cases of gold, each case contains a hundred *mithqāl*.

فتسمى باسم الله وانزل فيه تجد فيه شبه
رف وهو افر براقف فوقه ولا تسعداه
فإنك تجد طاقة طولها شبر اعمل فيها
تجد باب خلفها انزل إلى درج وفيها
درجة ثلاثة فاحترس غاية الاحتراس
وانزل تجد صفة غول صورة مفزعة
جدا وهو مكشوف الراس ويجد قدماه
سيوف فبخر قدماه ولا تخاف وتجد من
على يساره طابق شله وانزل الى مكان
فيه المال في فساقى حديد وهي قرابتين
ذهب كل قربانه مائة مثقال

7 Religious Icons

7.1 *Idol* (ṣanam)

Statues are particularly widespread elements in the Egyptian landscape and may serve a double function for treasure hunters: a marker indicating the site and a protective force guarding it [Fig. 11]. Often, statues are characterized by an object they carry (jar, trumpet, book).

In the following passage, the statue's looming presence is to be appeased using the sacrificial blood of a dog.⁹⁵

95 In MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 169v stands the statue of a man, positioned atop a column, bearing a gem at its summit.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 131r–131v]

Description in al-Sāḥira, in the outskirts of Aḥmīm [Panopolis]

It is an idol of stone, standing [and looking] Eastward toward the blessed Nile. When you come upon it, measure from its front to its back a cubit and a half toward the East, and you will find a landing. Beneath it, there is an iron door. [...] Open the door, with your incense burning, and you will find a corridor, from which you will reach a great wide hall, in which there are a hundred rooms filled with riches and jewels. In the middle of the hall, you will see an idol standing and looking at those riches. Fumigate in front of it, and slaughter the dog in front of it, while you say: "Oh inhabitants of this place, this is your offering and your incense which you have received from us". Smear the face of the idol that stands among the treasures with the dog's blood, and [smear also] the face of the idol above it which is on top of the door of the place, with the blood. Then depart from them and carry away the riches and jewels that you desire, and return everything to its place.

صفة بالساحرة بضواحي أحميم
وهي صنم من حجر قائم شرق على النيل
المبارك إذا وقعت عليه قيس من قدام
إلى قبالة ذراعا ونصفا من الشرق تجد
بسطة تحتها باب من الحديد [...] افتح
الباب وبخورك عمال تجد دهليزا تصل
منه إلى قاعة كبيرة واسعة فيها مائة غرفة
ملآين مالا ومصاغا وترى في وسط
القاعة صنما واقفا وهي ناظرة إلى تلك
الأموال فبخر قدامها واذبح الكلب
قدامها وأنت تقول يا عمار هذه المكان
هذه قربانكم وبخورك الذي تعهدوه منا
واطلي بدمه وجه الصنمة الذي هي قائمة
بين الأموال ووجه الصنم الفوقاني الذي
على باب المكان بالدم وارمهم واحمل
من المال والمصاغ كل ما طلبت ورد كل
شيء مكانه

The damages produced by the passing of centuries and the fragility of the artifacts become part of the characterizing features that help identifying a statue as a pointer to the treasure.



FIGURE 11
Representation of an idol, MS Paris BnF
Arabe 2764, f. 40v (detail).
SOURCE: BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE
FRANCE

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 23v]

Seek al-Ṭāriq which is situated in front of Mallawī, Est of the South of the city of Anṣinā.

Seek there some caves which are close one another from the South. Seek there the cave in which there is a great image on your right. Cross it and you will find the statues; among them, there is an idol whose leg is cut off, but it is graceful. Measure from it outward 3 large cubits and dig. You will find yellow earth.

واطلب الطارق الذي قبالة ملوي
مشرق على ملوي قبلية مدينة أنصنا
اطلب هناك مغاير وهم قريبان من البحر
اطلب منهم مغارة فيها صورة كبيرة
على شمالك وأنت عابرها تجد الأصنام
فيهم صنم رجله مقطوعة وهو لطيف
قيس منه إلى برا ٣ أذرع الكبير واحفر
تجد تراب أصفر

In another passage, however, a statue is described as holding a jar – possibly in a gesture of votive offering – while in another instance a figure carries a trumpet from which dangerous smoke issues forth, unless properly neutralized [Fig. 12].



FIGURE 12

Human figure blowing a trumpet, MS Paris BnF Arabe 6764, f. 76r (detail).

SOURCE: BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 88r]

Description at Siflāq in the East.

[...] Then, seek to the South of the crocodile, there is an idol standing, on the shoulder of which there is the image of a jar, and the idol is holding the jar with its hands. Dig beneath the idol's legs for half fathom, and you will encounter ten jars full of riches. Then, seek to the North of the idol, there is the image of wide basins. Seek the Western one among them; open it with an iron toll and descend seven steps; you will find a passage, and you will find a fine door and beside it, a statue with a trumpet in its mouth. When it spots you, it will blow into that trumpet, and from it a mighty smoke will issue. Fumigate the blessed incense.

صفة بسفلاق من الشرق

[...] ثم اطلب من قبلي التماسح صنم قائم على كفه صفة جرة والصنم ماسك الجرة بأيديه احفر تحت رجلين الصنم نصف قامة تلتقي عشرة جرر ملائين مال ثم اطلب من بحري الصنم صفة احواض متسعة اطلب الغربي بينهم اخشفه بالحديد واتزل في ٧ درجات تجد سرب وتجد باب لطيف وعنده صنم وفي فيه بوق إذا نظرك ينفخ في ذلك البوق يخرج منه دخان عظيم اطلق البخور المبارك

The manual warns the seeker against the statue of a man holding a book.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 74v]

Description in Qūṣ also

Seek there to the East and to the West of it: there is an idol standing on its hands [?], it is pointing at you with its hands towards the inside of the palace, and in its hand there is a book. Do not approach it.

صفة بقوص أيضا
اطلب بها الشرق بغيره صنم قائم على
يديه وهو يشير لك بيديه إلى داخل
القصر وفي يده كتاب لا تقربه

7.2 A Man with the head of a bird

The Ḥall al-rumūz describes the treasure stashed away by the Israelites when leaving Egypt (exodus), out of fear of losing them. In order to reach the entrance to the treasure chamber, one has to pass through a series of buildings and a complex historical stratification. The sign on the surface is mound that marks the mint of Qārūn, to be possibly identified with the Quranic figure of Qārūn b. Yaṣhura, who is presented in the Quran as a man of immense wealth but also of disbelief and ingratitude towards God. Next to this, the seeker should look for a church, under the altar of which a mastaba tomb of a wealthy man can be reached digging. Inside the mastaba, a trapdoor opens on the burial chamber of Persian and Byzantine kings. The figure of a bird-headed man that dominates these mighty halls strongly reminds of a representation of the ancient Egyptian deity Horus, portrayed with a human body surmounted by the head of a bird.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 82r]

Description

Seek a heap with soft earth and the keys of Qārūn and his mint house. Seek there a Byzantine church. Go there and measure r three cubits from the altar and dig for the height of one person: you will find a mastaba. It is a tomb in which there is a dead man in a golden coffin, upon him a inlaid garment, and studied with jewels. Dig a for a fathom beneath it, and you will find at your

صفة
اطلب كوم بلينه ومفاتيح قارون ودار
ضربه اطلب بها كنيسة رومانية طول
روحك وقيس من المذبح ٣ أذرع واحفر
قامة تجد مسطبة وهي قبر فيه ميت في
تابوت ذهب عليه حلة مرصعة وهي
مكحلة بالجواهر احفر قامة تحته تجد فيه
على يمينك سرب تدخل منه إلى قاعات

right a passageway, from which you enter into the halls of the Persian and Byzantine kings; there are many hoards in it, and you will see them; there on its door, there is the image of a man whose head is the head of a bird, and in his hand [there is] a staff. Dig beneath it: you will find a slab; descend from it, and you will find the hoards of the Israelites, in the time in which they were in the wilderness, and they feared for their wealth, so they placed it there. So, take what God has provided you with and be grateful.

الملوك الفرس والروم فيه ودائع كثير
وترى منهم فيه على بابها صورة إنسان
ورأسته رأس طائر وفي يده عكاز احفر
تحتة تجد طابق انزل منه تجد ودائع بني
إسرائيل لما كانوا بالبرية فخافوا على أموالهم
فوضعوه هناك فخذ ما رزقك الله وكن
من الشاكرين

7.3 *The Messiah (Masīḥ)*

The Church of Daniel in Lower Egypt – possibly Daniel of Scetis, a fourth century Egyptian monk – hides a treasure in the crypt where the patron of the church is buried. The figure of the Messiah marks the precise place where to dig.⁹⁶

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 133v]

Description around Birmā

Ask there about the Church of Daniel, the sign of which is that it has two doors – an Eastern one and a Northern one – and it is all made of red bricks. Cross it, and seek the image of the Messiah in it, and work beneath it in the ground [for] a fathom; you will find a green slab upon which there is a Byzantine inscription. Remove it, and descend seven steps into a square hall, in

صفة بناحية برما
اسأل بها عن كنيسة دانيال ومن علامتها
ان لها باين شرقي وبحري وهي كلها
طوب أحمر اعبرها واطلب بها صورة
المسيح واعمل تحتها في الأرض قامة
تجد بلاطة خضرة عليها كتابة رومية فكها
وانزل في سبع درج إلى قاعة مربعة فيها
سرير وعليه ميت وعنده مالا كثيرا فخذ

⁹⁶ See Vivian, Tim, ed., *Witness to holiness : Abba Daniel of Scetis* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2008).

which there is a bed, and a dead man upon it, and with him much wealth. Take from it what is sufficient for you and beware, my son, of approaching him, for he is the patron of the church. Take the riches that [may compensate] your effort, depart from the church, put its affairs in order, and return it as it was. Your incense [should be] olibanum.

منه كفايتك وإياك ان تقربه يا ابني فهو
صاحب الكنيسة فخذ من المال جهدا
واقعد الكنيسة وقوم باودها ورده كما
كان بخورك كندر

In another passage, the image of Jesus is to be found in a niche (*tāqa*) and the text instructs the treasure hunter to dig between the altar and this very niche, the place where the deacon (*šammās*) stands, showing a certain familiarity with Christian rituals.

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 125r]

Description at Aṭṭīḥ al-ḥimār [?]

Seek there the ruins of the temple, in front of it you will see idols and images [?] [...] there, seek also the monastery on the side of the valley; in front of its door, there is a heap in which are stones and pebbles, small and large. Pass through its door, enter the church, and go towards the altar; look in it [for] an Eastern niche in which the image of the Messiah is depicted. Work between the image and the altar, in the place of the deacon, [to the depth of] a fathom and a half in height: you will descend into a square room, in which there are forty loads of gold and one of silver. Work under the altar [to the depth of] a fathom: you will find the hide of a cow full of riches; and your incense [should be] the incense of the churches.

صفة بأطفيح الحمار [?]

اطلب البربا قبلها ترا فيها تماثيل وصور
مرقوة [?] [...] وأيضاً اطلب بها الدير
الذي جانب الوادي وعلى بابه كوم عليه
حجارة وزلط كبار وصغار اعبر من بابه
وادخل الكنيسة واقصد المذبح وانظر فيه
طاقة شرقية مصور فيها صورة المسيح
اعمل بين الصورة والمذبح في موقف
الشماس قائمة ونصف تنزل إلى بيت مربع
فيه أربعين حملا ذهباً وفيهم واحد فضة
واعمل تحت المذبح قائمة تجد جلد بقرة
ملان مال وبخورك بخور الكائس

7.4 *The Lady (Sayyida)*

The image of the Virgin Mary occurs only once in the *Ḥall al-rumūz*, and her depiction is to be found in the Red Monastery, such a well-known site that no need was felt to mention a specific location. In the Northern semi-dome of the triconch sanctuary of the Church of Pshoi, within the complex of the Red Monastery, in fact, there is a secco painting of the Virgin *Galaktotrophousa* (the Virgin nursing the Christ Child) dating to late antiquity, possibly sixth-seventh century.⁹⁷ The text mentions the possibility that the painting might not be clearly seen due to the injuries of time. This eventuality seems confirmed by the recent restoration, which revealed many layers of painting, meant to refresh the vividness of its colours.⁹⁸

[MS University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington 532, f. 130r]

Description in a city, from the side of the western well

[...]Look for it – it is the Red Monastery. Look within it for the image of the Lady. If it has disappeared due to the passing of time, look beneath it for a round slab similar to a shield, upon which lines are inscribed. Remove it, and work beneath it to the depth of a fathom and you will find some stones. Clean them, and you will find sand. Remove all the sand, and you will find a basin, beneath which is full of riches. And peace be upon you.

صفة بمدينة هومن البئر الغربي

[...] واطلب وهو الدير الأحمر واطلب فيها صورة السيدة فإن كانت قد عدت لطول الزمان اطلب تحتها بلاطة مدورة كالترس مكتوب عليها أسطر فكها واعمل تحتها قامة تجد حجارة نظفهم تجد رملا نظفه كله تجد حوضا تحته ملانا مالا والسلام

97 For a study of the images of the Red Monastery and the nursing Virgin see Bolman, Elizabeth, "Late Antique Aesthetics, Chromophobia and the Red Monastery, Sohag, Egypt", *Eastern Christian Art*, 111 (2006): p. 2. Also see Severin, Hans-Georg, "On the Architectural Decoration and Dating of the Church of Dayr Anbā Bīšūy ('Red Monastery') near Sūhāḡ in Upper Egypt", *DOP*, LXII (2008): pp. 75–112. Also see Dilley, Paul, "Dipinti in Late Antiquity and Shenoute's Monastic Federation: Text and Image in the Paintings of the Red Monastery", *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, CLXV (2008): pp. 111–28.

98 On the recent restoration of the images at the Red Monastery see Yale Monastic Archaeology Project South (Sohag), <<https://egyptology.yale.edu/expeditions/current-expeditions/yale-monastic-archaeology-project-southsohag/atripe>> (last accessed 10 September 2025).

8 Concluding Notes

The iconographic corpus attested in Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī's pseudepigraphical *Ḥall al-rumūz wa-fakk al-ṭalāsīm wa-l-kunūz* (*The Interpretation of Symbols and the Uncovering of Talismans and Treasures*), shows traits of a "second Islamic life" of ancient visual traces. These figures were to be found throughout the Nile Valley and its bordering deserts, carved or painted on rocks, in caves and pharaonic monuments, as well as on the walls of churches and monasteries. These images are at once real and fantastic: real, insofar as they persist within the Egyptian landscape; fantastic, insofar as they evoke cultural perceptions by being seen as part of an imagination shaped by deep beliefs and by culturally oriented conceptions of pre-Islamic history. The remarkable proximity between the images described in the text and the archaeological sites that might have inspired them – many of which are still extant today – shows a remarkable continuity with between text and material reality. It also suggests that the compiler, or compilers, of these materials took great care in anchoring their descriptions to the landscape of Egypt. Such topographical precision arguably enhanced the credibility of the manual, since the seeker of treasures could indeed encounter what is depicted in the text.

Severed from their original significations, these images are resemanticized within a framework that endows them with a spectral, "haunting" aura. This magical quality of images was also based on their material features as, for instance, the use of pigments said to remain unaltered by the passage of time.

The Pseudo-Maqrīzī frames this iconography in a catalogue of architectural elements: one recurrently encounters walls (*hīt*) and wells (*bi'r*); niches (*ṭāqa*) – a term that may also denote vaulted arcades or ceiling; or recesses within altars (*maḍbaḥ*). Several elements related to water are attested as well: basin or fountains (*hawḍ, fasqiyya*), and ponds (*birka*). Likewise, inscriptions appear upon the doorpost (*ʿatab*) or on the very façade of the doorway (*wajh al-bāb*). With particular frequency, they are found on trapdoors and stone slabs (*ṭābiq*) or mere tiles (*bilāṭa*) that conceal hidden passages (*sarāb, dihlīz*), giving access to treasure chambers (*hizāna*) or reception halls (*liwān*).

This work and its imagery do not stand as an isolated production; rather, it is situated within the technical acumen of the time, resonating widely with the literature of treasures as well as with the broader corpus of technical writings – from the manufacture of talismans to the "science" of tricks and illusionism (*šaʿwāḍa*).

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