# Denkmal(?) Erbe(?) Perplexity: The Dilemmatic Recognition of the Gabbari Railway Station in Alexandria, Egypt

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#### **SUMMARY**

In recent years, the recognition and valorization of industrial heritage has emerged as a topic whose significance remains an issue of considerable debate. This is conducted in many countries via official and unofficial media, either with a clearly defined identification, or at times with contradicting perceptions, leading to categorical confusion.

In Egypt, terms like *Denkmal* and *Erbe* in the German language, and patrimoine in French, have conceptual translations rather than literal ones. Egypt's monuments are referred to as Athār, whereas heritage is referred to as Turāth; each has its own official definition, means of identification, and classification. And although most of Egypt's ancient and medieval heritage is officially clearly recognized and categorized, this is not the case for its modern manifestations. Industrial heritage, as part of the Egyptian modern heritage, suffers from widespread lack of recognition and valorization. Some of the industrial buildings are referred to as Athār, some as Turāth, and some face a categorical confusion, which are referred to in this paper as the 'greyzoned heritage', exemplified through the example of the Gabbari Railway Station in the city of Alexandria. The first part of this paper demonstrates the linguistic origin and formal definition of the terms Athār and Turāth through an elaborative historical timeline. The second part analyses how the industrial heritage is officially and unofficially referred to in Egypt, and points out where there exists a categorical confusion. The third part investigates and elaborates on this confusion through the example of the Gabbari Railway Station. Finally, based on the example, the paper presents its conclusion and sheds light on the challenges faced by the industrial heritage in Egypt, and offers recommendations.

#### Introduction

With the establishment of the modern discipline of heritage conservation in Europe, by the end of the 18th century a general appreciation of the ancestral legacy as a symbol of national identity emerged. And along with the rise of this discipline's pioneers in its theorists and practitioners across Europe, came the first terminological identification of a country's legacy. The different scopes of words like '(*National-) Denkmal*' in German, 'heritage' in English, and 'patrimoine' in the French language, have led to different foci; within each language lies terminological inconsistency between the original and present understanding, which is still a subject of debate.<sup>1</sup>

In Egypt, the first recognition of historical legacy began with the deciphering of the Rosetta Stone by Jean-François Champollion during Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt at the turn of the 19th century, which produced the series of publications entitled 'La Description de l'Égypte'. However, the term referring to Egypt's monuments was first introduced towards the end of the 19th century, following the formation of the 'Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe'<sup>2</sup> in Egypt; one of its contributions lay in relating the term 'monument' to the Arabic term *Athār*.<sup>3</sup> As for the corresponding Arabic term for heritage - Turāth - it was not a result of any solely national development, as in the case of the 'Comité', but rather an Arabism, perhaps as part of the international heritage movement post WWII, and in particular subsequent to the 1967 Arab defeat.4

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and with the European recognition of industrial history, the terms industrial heritage, industrial archaeology, *Industriedenkmal*, *industrielles Erbe*, and others, were introduced. In the Middle East, Egypt is considered one of the first countries in which modern industries with diversified sectors were introduced in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> In addition to their diversity, these industries held further significance because of their impact on each city's urban, architectural and social development. Furthermore, especially in

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the wake of the cotton boom in the second half of the 19th century, the Egyptian economy became interlinked with the world market, and gained a prestigious global industrial recognition. However, there is still no official reference term in the Arabic language, and, if there is, it is used solely by intellectuals. There have been a few publications about the prominence of industrial heritage in Egypt, but these are mainly in foreign languages.

This paper studies how the Egyptian monument and heritage discourse is recognized officially and publicly. It investigates the complexity of its perception, through the example of the Gabbari Railway Station in the city of Alexandria, to understand whether similar witnesses to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial Egypt are perceived as *Denkmal*, *Erbe*, or otherwise.

# Denkmal, Erbe and Their Equivalent Egyptian Terminologies

Before the emergence of the terms *Denkmal*, *Erbe*, monuments, patrimoine and other key factors in modern conservation theories and practices, a religious foundation was established centuries ago which had a great impact on the conservation of the historic Muslim cities from the 7th until the end of the 19th centuries. This type of pious foundation is called 'Waqf', with an Arabic literal meaning of "to stop", and is translated as a "charitable endowment".7 The Waqf structure is a very complex system that can be simplified as confining property ownership to benefit from its revenue for charitable purposes.8 Until the end of the 19th century, the 'Awqāf' (plural of Waqf) were operating as an independent legal entity to prevent any outside interventions. In 1881 the western concept of conservation legally replaced the Waqf system by the formation of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe – in Arabic 'Lagnit hifz al-athār al-'arabīya al-qadīmah' - from which the term Athār derives.9

# (أَثار) Athār

Unlike the term Denkmal, which derives from the Latin word 'monumentum' (monere = remember),  $Ath\bar{a}r$  (the plural of the Arabic word  $Ath\bar{a}r$ ) is the verbatim translation of the word 'traces'. And although the term was first introduced as a scientific translation for 'monument', it is nowadays officially used in Egypt to stand for both terms: "antiquity" and "archeology".

From 1881, the Comité, consisting of foreign and local members, became a multi-disciplinary profession that is now a prevailing trend called 'international cultural heritage'. A few years after the 1952 revolution, the Comité was dissolved and assigned to what is now known as the Egyptian Ministry of State for Antiquities.<sup>10</sup>

The current Antiquities Law<sup>11</sup> states 3 main conditions under which any real-estate or chattel is considered an antiquity:

"Article 1:

1. Being the product of Egyptian civilization, or successive civilization, or the creation of art, sciences, literature, or religions that have taken place on Egyptian land since pre-historic times, and during the successive historic ages up to 100 years ago."<sup>12</sup>

The second condition specifies that only archaeological, artistic and historical values are to be used in recognizing an *Athar*, whereas the third condition recognizes that anthropological mummies should also come under its legal protection.

Nevertheless, the Prime Minister has the right – after negotiating with the Minister of Antiquities – to list any site, building or object, as *Athar*, even if it dates less than 100 years, as long as this property serves a national advantage, and is well maintained and restored by the state. Any property that is discovered or unearthed with the above description can in some cases be expropriated; either way, this must still be done under the supervision of the Egyptian Ministry of State for Antiquities.<sup>13</sup>

Although the term  $Ath\bar{a}r$  was officially first introduced as a translation of Denkmal and monument, it has been officially altered with the words antiquity and archaeology. According to an Arabic-English glossary, published for the ICCROM's  $50^{th}$  anniversary in July 2008, the term monument is referred to in Arabic as 'ma'lam' ( $\hat{a}$ ), whereas the term archaeology is the term which stands for  $Ath\bar{a}r$ . It is in Egypt that this term is officially referred to as Antiquity by the government. a

# Turāth (تُراث)

The term *Turāth*, in contrast to *Athār*, has a terminological meaning today synonymous with heritage and Erbe: *Turāth* is derived from the Arabic 'wirth', ورث) namely inheritance. Like the term heritage, *Turāth* is a scientifically broad term, usually used with different scientific epithets, i.e. tangible cultural heritage — in Arabic 'al-Turāth al-thaqāfi ghayr

al-mādy' – and intangible cultural heritage – in Arabic 'al-Turāth al-thaqāfi al-mādy', etc.

Regarding the origin of the term *Turāth*, with its progressive global affiliation, it was during the 1970s and 1980s that progressive intellectual Arabs from both secular and religious backgrounds conceptualized the term to avoid any misunderstandings with the term referring to the Arab-Islamic imitative traditions of *'Taqālīd'*. It was during the 1979 Iranian Revolution that these conceptions rose to the surface. And though introduced in the late 20th century, it was in 2006 that Law no. 114/2006 was issued legislating the conservation of the architectural heritage. This law defines the architectural heritage as:

"Article 2:

...the buildings or facilities significant with an architectural style which is associated with national history, a historical character or a touristic attraction." <sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup>

Any listed building will still remain under the same ownership, but with governmental supervision to monitor the recommended maintenance. However, in some cases, the state has the right to expropriate the property and pay an equivalent compensation to the previous owner. The listing and conservation recommendations are carried out by a permanent committee – 'Lagnah  $D\bar{a}$ 'imah' – consisting of a representative from the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Communities, two from the governorate, and 5 academics.

In 2008, the National Organization for Urban Harmony (NOUH) was established and affiliated with the Ministry of Culture with a legislative and non-executive power. Since Law no. 114/2008 only mentions architectural heritage, NOUH published a report in 2008 recognizing the urban significance, along with the architectural heritage. In this report, it defines 'Al-mabāny wal-manāṭek al-Turāthīyah wa dhat al-qīmah al-motamaiyezah' (trans. The architectural and urban heritage with a significant value)<sup>18</sup> and its characteristics, and puts forward general guidelines for the committee in each governorate responsible for maintaining the National Registered Heritage Buildings List.<sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup>

# Industrial Witnesses in Egypt: A Perplexity of Categorization

The industrial heritage in Egypt – as in the rest of the world – conveys a significant urban and architectur-

al value, and also carries the intangible significance of the cultural and social history in its context. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term 'industrial heritage' became an important element in describing a country's historical importance. However, the Arabic term for 'industrial heritage' or 'industrial monument' does not quite exist in the Egyptian culture. This is elaborated here through each interest group:

## Government

Inspired by the daring statement by archaeologist Laurajane Smith: "There is, really, no such thing as heritage" it can be stated that there is, really, no such thing as ' $Tur\bar{a}th$   $sina'\bar{\tau}$ ' (industrial heritage) in Egypt. Of course, Egypt is very rich in urban and architectural evidence of its historical industries since the end of the  $19^{th}$  century, but somewhat parallel to Smith's statement, the  $Tur\bar{a}th$   $sina'\bar{\tau}$  is not comprehensively categorized with defined meanings and values, but rather faces a discordant official categorization in the present.

Since the witnesses to Egypt's industrial heritage cannot easily be brought under a single terminological umbrella, they are categorized under the following:

1. Athār: Generally, any historical entity officially acknowledged by the Egyptian Ministry of State for Antiquities falls under one of two sectors: "The Ancient Egyptian and Greco-Roman Sector" or "The Islamic, Coptic and Jewish Sector". In 2006, the Egyptian Ministry of State for Antiquities<sup>22</sup> founded an administration responsible for the management and revitalization of the art and Athār of the modern period – in Arabic 'Idārit Iḥya' fann wa athār al-'aṣr al-ḥadīth'. This administration is responsible for the Athār dating back to the period from 1798 (start of Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition) until the 1952 Egyptian revolution.<sup>23</sup>

However, this new administration does not have its own official sector. Accordingly, any witness of the modern period, i.e. a recognized industrial building which dates back more than 100 years, is officially labelled by this new administration, but is ironically categorized under the Islamic, Coptic and Jewish Sector.

2. Torāth: According to the National Registered Heritage Buildings List published by the Alexandria Governorate in 2007, buildings are listed according to their importance<sup>24</sup> and representative lev-

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el. <sup>25</sup> Since there is no mention of the 'industrial' term at the architectural level, at the urban level, however, the urban district of ' $M\bar{\imath}na$  al-Baṣal' contains a listed industrial area under the name 'mantiqat hanāgir' (trans. hangars area).

#### Media

At the media level, the terms  $Ath\bar{a}r$  and  $Tor\bar{a}th$  are typically used interchangeably, and at times are even considered synonyms. As for the  $Tur\bar{a}th$   $sina'\bar{\imath}$ , there is — at the state level — no acknowledgment. Yet, after the 2011 revolution, and the rise of the security vacuum, which allowed the real-estate mafia to demolish listed buildings, and the antiquity thieves to smuggle antiquities abroad, the media started to shed light on the importance of both  $Ath\bar{a}r$  and  $Tor\bar{a}th$ , and to question the state's effectiveness in their preservation. <sup>26</sup>

#### **Academics and Activists**

Academics and activists are considered the only group who fight for establishing the term  $Tur\bar{a}th$   $sina'\bar{\tau}$  in Egypt. The Egyptian industrial heritage is referred to as al- $tur\bar{a}th$  al- $sina'\bar{\tau}'$  and not as 'al- $ath\bar{a}r$  al- $sina'\bar{\tau}yah'$ ; these are published and discussed in papers, articles, workshops and lectures. Pecently, there has been a number of master and doctoral theses about industrial architecture; many still undertake the study of an industrial building or

type without assigning it as a *Turāth ṣina'ī*.

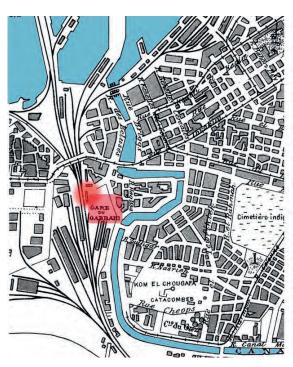
### **Public Society**

There is still not enough public awareness within Egyptian society of the difference between Athār and Torāth. Like the case of the media professionals, many people tend to confuse the terms, and even think one is 'superior', more important or valuable, than the other. It is often the case among the public that Athār is considered to refer to the remains of the ancient era (mostly the ancient Egyptian period), whereas Torāth refers mainly to the intangible heritage. As



Fig. 1: First footprint of Gabbari Railway Station, here marked as l'embarcadère (1855)

for the industrial witnesses, there are locals who consider them as part of their history, regardless of which title they refer to it under (*Athār* or *Torāth*). Some, however, view these buildings simply as old and/or unsightly.



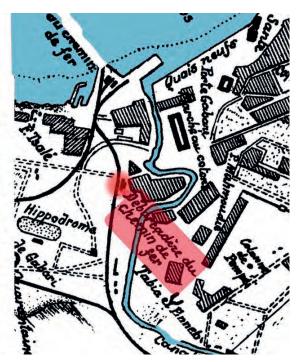


Fig. 2: Right: Footprint of Gabbari Railway Station, here marked as Dèbbarcadère du chemic de fer (11/07/1882) – Left: Footprint of Gabbari Railway Station, here marked as Gare de Gabbari (1917)

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### The Example of the Gabbari<sup>29</sup> Railway Station

In Egypt, many industrial buildings stand to this day as historical witnesses of the industrial, technological and economic developments which brought them into the modern international world. These buildings played an essential role in increasing Egypt's industrial significance on the national as well as international stage. The traces of such historical industrial developments are distributed across a number of Egyptian cities, primarily to be found in Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said and their surroundings, due to their geographical, economic and political status.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Mediterranean city of Alexandria became established as the gateway to Egypt's industrial potential. In 1855 the first railway between Alexandria and Cairo was completed;<sup>31</sup> and in this period a railway station was constructed next to the Alexandrian port, which influenced the morphology of the industrial manifestation and economic boom in Alexandria. This so-called Gabbari Railway Station served as a 'Terminus'; nowadays, the main building of the railway station stands neglected, and in great decay, exposed to frequent vandalism.

# **Location and Historical Background**

The Gabbari Railway Station is located next to the western harbor of Alexandria, in the district of 'Gumruk'<sup>32</sup>, in the 'Mina al-Baṣal' quarter.<sup>33</sup> The station occupies a large railway site, surrounded by historical wooden pitch-roofed structures, and is owned by the Egyptian National Railways.<sup>34</sup> The building is bordered by the railway tracks to the south, and by the 'Maḥmudīyah' Canal and the 'Kafr 'ashrī' residential peninsula to the north,



Fig. 3: Illustration of the Egyptian Railway Terminus in Alexandria (1858)

which provides the only point of access to the site.

Since the railways played such an important role in British colonial interests during the 19th century, the British were persistent in their negotiations for a railway project in Egypt from the 1820s until they finally received approval from the then Wālī of Egypt, Abbas Hilmi I, in 1851. This railway project, a standard gauge railway from Alexandria to Cairo, 35 was supervised by the English civil engineer Robert Stephenson, and was the first railway line in Africa and the Middle East.<sup>36</sup> The Gabbari Station building, referred to in historical literature as the Terminus, was designed and constructed by the locally resident architect Edwin C. Baines, who was appointed by the chief-engineer, Stephenson.<sup>37</sup> It was probably constructed before 1855, according to the historical map by Charles Müller, and is labelled as "l'embarcadère" (Fig. 1). On other historical maps from the years 1882 and 1917, the location of the station is indicated with the same rectangular shape, bearing the titles "Dèbbarcadère du chemic de fer" and "Gare de Gabbari" (Fig. 2). In 'The Illustrated London News' magazine from 1858, the Gabbari Station is illustrated and described as "the most substantially constructed edifice in the city partaking more of a European or Anglican character than most civil structures in Alexandria." (Fig. 3)

Illustrated as a two-storey longitudinal cuboid, remarkable for its arched elevation, historical photographs appear which show a similar looking station between that illustrated and the one now standing. However, in some references, these photographs are described as "Gare du Caire", which is the former Cairo station standing in the Latin quartier in the historic city center of Alexandria, not far from where the current still-operational station is located (Fig. 4). 38 Today, the Gabbari Railway Station stands as a deteriorating, single-storey edifice, with physical evidence of modified construction phases (Fig. 5). The railway tracks, along with other structures in situ, are still operational, but not the station itself, which is probably the oldest architectural evidence standing, for it has been left abandoned, vandalized and in great danger of demolition.

# Gabbari Station: Athar or Turath?

Based on the historical maps which show the still existing location of the Gabbari Railway Station, it is more than likely that the building as it stands

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today retains traces of its original mid-19th century structure. Hence, the oldest building sections date back more than 100 years, and therefore should be listed as Athar. And although some references state that the construction of the Cairo Railway Station was completed by 1856, the Illustrated London News reports in May 1858 that the "... Cairo Terminus of the Egyptian Railway, (is) in a state of completion". The Gabbari Railway Station may represent therefore the 'first terminal' for the railway industries' existence in Egypt. However, to date the building has not been officially acknowledged by either the Ministry of State for Antiquities – *Idārit* Iḥya' fann wa athār al-'aṣr al-ḥadīth – or the Ministry of Culture - Alexandria National Registered Heritage Buildings' List.

The Gabbari Railway Station as it stands today probably represents the traces of the first terminus in Africa and the Middle East. The first railroad project from Alexandria to 'Kafr al-'īs' was opened in 1853, followed by the second phase railroad extension to Cairo in 1855. <sup>39</sup> The Gabbari Railway Station is documented as existing on Müller's historical map of 1855. Based on the presumption that the Gabbari Railway Station might hold the traces of the oldest 'terminus' in Africa and the Middle East, the station therefore conveys more of a 'historic' significance than a 'historical' one<sup>40</sup>, and should be recognized, valorized and listed as such, rather than left in its current state of neglect.

Based on this example, the station, supposedly officially identified in Arabic as Athar, is more de facto to be translated as 'Denkmal' / monument rather than 'Antiquity'. Although there is an official categorization distinguishing between  $Ath\bar{a}r$  and  $Tur\bar{a}th$  in Egypt, the industrial heritage — as part of the modern heritage — is not recognized as a single category, but is divided between the two terms.

# Conclusion

Terms such as *Industriedenkmal* and *Industrieerbe* in German have their synonyms or equivalent meanings in other languages, yet not necessarily carrying the same implication, thus leading to confusion when translated. In Egypt, witnesses of industrial history are individually listed by their architectural significance, rather than their historical significance, as witnesses to the industrial or even modern period in Egypt.

The example of the Gabbari Railway Station, as part of the Egyptian industrial heritage, represents



Fig. 4: Postcard with a probable photograph of Gabbari Railway station, SW view (1880s)



Fig. 5: Gabbari Railway Station, SW view (7/4/2015)

the case of a number of other buildings which face the same dilemmatic categorical confusion. Listing the Gabbari Railway Station in the Alexandria National Registered Heritage Buildings List would be a categorical misallocation of its real significance. However, if the Gabbari Railway Station is classed as Athar, it will fall under the administration of Idarit Iḥya' fann wa athār al-'aṣr al-ḥadīth, and therefore labelled under the Islamic, Coptic and Jewish Sector. This is still not a solution for the issue of properly labelling the identity, value and manifestation of the building. This indicates that the foundation of the administration of *Idārit Iḥya' fann wa athār* al-'aṣr al-ḥadīth was intended to fill a timeline gap in Egyptian modern history, but was not conceptualized properly to characterize its components. In this case, listing industrial buildings - as part of the modern heritage – either as Athār or Turāth,

will not fully portray their significance; this paper defines them as the 'grey-zoned' heritage; this expresses the perplexity of the zone between the two official terminologies, neither of which fully encompasses their true value.

Having such a long history, with so many diverse civilizations and cultures, the labelling of Egyptian historical heritage is very generalized. Egypt still needs to re-conceptualize, redefine, re-categorize and re-constitute its modern legacy in a more accurate and comprehensive manner.

### **Image sources**

- 1 Müller, Charles: map XXXV, in: Jondet, Gaston: Atlas Historique de la Ville et des Ports d'Alexandrie, Cairo, 1920 (cropped), © CEAlex
- 2 Right: La flotte Anglaise: map XLIV, in: Jondet, Gaston: Atlas Historique de la Ville et des Ports d'Alexandrie, Cairo, 1921 (cropped), © CEAlex. Left: The Survey of Egypt: map LIII, in: Jondet, Gaston: Atlas Historique de la Ville et des Ports d'Alexandrie, Cairo, 1921 (cropped), © CEAlex
- 3 Unknown illustrator: The Illustrated London News Jan. to June 1858, 29.05.1858
- 4 Unknown photographer, ©Mirhan Damir
- 5 © Heba Hanafi

#### **Notes**

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- <sup>9</sup> El-Habashi, Alaa El-Din Elwi 2001 (as in note 3)
- The Comité's occupation was run by Egyptians first under the Ministry of Education in 1953 then transferred under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture in 1960, which was renamed the Egyptian Antiquities Organization in 1971. It was then renamed the Supreme Council of Antiquities in 1994 until after the 2011 revolution, when it became an independent ministry with the name of the Ministry of State for Antiquities: www.sca-egypt.org (2017).

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- The current Law of the Supreme Council of Antiquities is derived from Law no. 215 (31st October 1951) on the Protection of Antiquities, later revised by laws no. 529 of 1953, no. 24 of 1965 and no. 117 of 1983
- Supreme Council of Antiquities: Law No. 117 of 1983 as Amended by Law No. 3 of 2010 Promulgating the Antiquities' Protection Law. Egypt, Article 1, p.12
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- 17 Author translates the law article
- <sup>18</sup> Author translates the title
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- 21 L. Smith declared this quote as the opening sentence of her book: The Uses of Heritage, published in 2006
- 22 At that time called Supreme Council of Antiquities
- <sup>23</sup> 'Abd-Al-Raḥman, Maḥmud Abbas Aḥmad: Athar Al-'asr Al Ḥadith: 'ilm Wa-Turāth, 1st ed., Ad-dar Al-'alamiyah, Egypt, 2008, pp. 9–15
- 24 The four levels are: National Level, City Level, Local Level and finally City outskirt level
- The five levels are: Characteristic architectural style, national history, historic character, historic period and finally a touristic attraction
- Example: Report on the threatened architectural heritage (in Arabic) TV program al-hiwār mustamir: https://www. youtube.com/watch?v=G5mNM7xifNQ&t=4s (first published 24.02.2017)
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- 32 haī gumruk literally means the customs district due to its location by the port
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- 36 Silva, Carlos Nunes: Urban Planning in North Africa, Routledge, 2016, pp. 187–205
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- Nasr ElDin, Amr 2006 (as in note 31)
- According to the Oxford Dictionary: "Historic and historical are used in slightly different ways. Historic means 'famous or important in history', as in a Historic occasion, whereas Historical means 'concerning history or historical events', as in Historical evidence; thus, a Historic event is one that was very important, whereas a Historical event is something that happened in the past."