

Egypt in the Hungarian Scientific Journals between the Two World Wars¹

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Abstract:

The period between the two world wars was a crucial one for both Hungarian and Egyptian history. While Hungary was trying to rebuild itself from the shock of the Trianon peace treaty that ended the First World War, the 'land of the pyramids' was fighting for its independence from the British. Although the two states had very different histories and were separated by a considerable geographical distance, their relations developed in many ways between the two world wars. This research aims to make a modest contribution to the discourse on Hungarian-Egyptian bilateral relations through the selected Hungarian academic journals. The article implements the knowledge-geography approach, aiming to show who, what and why they wrote about Egypt, thus revealing what they knew, what interested them, what problems and issues they touched upon, and what opinions they expressed about them. The present paper is the first phase of a basic study, which raises several questions and issues that require further examination.

Keywords:

Colonialism, Egypt, history of science, Horthy-era, Hungarian scientific journals, Suez

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1. Introduction

The period between the two world wars was a crucial one for both Hungarian and Egyptian history. While Hungary was trying to rebuild itself from the shock of the Trianon peace treaty that ended the First World War, the ‘land of the pyramids’ was fighting for its independence from the British.

Although the two states had very different historical paths and were separated by a considerable geographical distance, their relations developed in many respects during this period, and they showed a degree of affinity and sympathy for each other on a number of issues. Although Egypt remains large and important today, research into its relations with Hungary is in many ways an unexplored area. Among the researchers on the subject, we should mention Krisztián Komár (Komár, 2012; 2003) and Abdallah Abdel-Ati Al-Naggar, whose work in this field is unavoidable.

This research aims to make a modest contribution to the discourse on bilateral relations through selected Hungarian academic journals. The study adopted the knowledge-geography approach, aiming to show who, what and why they wrote about Egypt, thus revealing what they knew, what interested them, what problems and issues they discussed and what opinions they expressed. The analysis aims to find focal points, rather than presenting all the information and news about Egypt. To answer these questions, the study intends to interpret them in the context of the relations and aspirations of the two states. The present paper is the first chapter of a basic research that raises a variety of questions and issues that require further exploration.

During the Horthy era, a considerable number of academic writings on Egypt appeared, both in books (Haltenberger, 1937, p. 196) and in social science journals. From these, the study selected, on the one hand, those that were an integral part of the Hungarian academic life and dealt with the country of the Pharaohs in terms of their topics. These included *Földrajzi Közlemények* [The Geographical Bulletins], *Társadalomtudomány* [Social Science], *Közgazdasági Értesítő* [The Economic Bulletin], *Külügyi Szemle* [Foreign Affairs Review] and *Korunk* [Our Age]. The second group includes those journals which, although not strictly scientific, were high-quality, influential journals of the period, and because of their subject matter, were important platforms for the dissemination of knowledge about the East: *Turán* [Turan], *Földgömb* [The Globe], *Magyar Szemle* [The Hungarian Review], *Budapesti Szemle* [The Budapest Review], *Búvár* [Diver] and *Napkelet* [Sunrise].³

2. Egyptian-Hungarian Relations between the Two World Wars

Institutional relations between the states were established during the period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, primarily for political and economic reasons (J. Nagy,

³ The names of the journals are translated by the author. The study uses the Hungarian names of the journals, except some cases.

2015, pp. 15–16). In the 19th century, the region attracted the curiosity of Hungarian Orientalists and researchers of international relations, as the opening of the Suez Canal increased the geopolitical significance of the region, and modern ideas brought from the West led to important transformations in the Islamic world in various spheres of society, politics, and economy. Ignác Goldziher, one of the most prominent Hungarian orientalist, wrote about these developments as early as the 1880s (J. Nagy, 2015, p. 16). However, the further deepening of relations between Egypt and Hungary was interrupted by the First World War and the new international order.

In the 1920s, both countries faced new challenges. After the Trianon Peace Treaty, Hungary's main goal became territorial revision and the reorganization and strengthening of the economic life of the shattered country (Abdallah, 2014, p. 76). Therefore, it structured its foreign relations in this context, mainly in the hope of gaining the support of a great power, which was essential to assert its territorial claims. These foreign policy priorities were not abandoned even after the country's successful integration into the new international system (Romsics, 2010, p. 235).

Egypt also faced enormous difficulties during the same historical period, which Botman called the “liberal era” (Botman, 1998, p. 285). Thus, although the British recognized the independence of the Arab country in 1922, they restricted it in many respects for key geopolitical interests (e.g. the communication and trade infrastructure or the Suez Canal). British troops could continue to be stationed in the territory of the theoretically sovereign country, its specific economic interests could not be harmed, and the British administration could remain in Sudan (Botman, 1998, p. 285). At the same time, the representatives of the nationalist Wafd⁴ party became dominant in terms of their programme and their proportion within the new political elite, with the main objective of overthrowing foreign domination (Abdallah, 2015, pp. 60–61; Botman, 1998, p. 287). Consequently, Egypt, like Hungary, was less concerned with other international issues (Abdallah, 2014, p. 73; Botman, 1998, p. 294). The Egyptians saw the 1936 treaty as a great success and a further step towards true independence, while the 1937 Montreux Convention was another milestone in Egypt's history, as it put an end to capitulations and gave Egypt greater room for maneuver in foreign policy (Botman, 1998, pp. 294–295).

The relationship between the two countries must be understood in the above-mentioned context and had to be completely reshaped in the 1920s. The latter milestone was the appointment of an honorary Hungarian Consul General to Egypt in 1924, followed by the opening of the Hungarian embassy in 1928, which was managed from Bern until 1939, mainly for financial reasons (Abdallah, 2015, pp. 65–66; Komár, 2003, p. 75). In addition, during the decades under review, a number of delegations from both sides participated in high-level visits and several economic associations were

⁴ Egypt's most popular party in the first half of the twentieth century, whose aim was to achieve independence.



established to develop trade (Abdallah, 2015, pp. 70–76). Nagy, 2015, p. 17). Although the relationship between the two countries was primarily characterized by the exploitation of economic potential, in which cotton played the main role from Egypt and technical technology from Hungary, the two administrations also moved closer politically. In this spirit, they expressed their mutual sympathy on diplomatic issues of particular importance to the other side. While King Fuad I supported the Hungarian revisionist aspirations, the Hungarian political elite followed the Egyptian independence aspirations with great interest (J. Nagy, 2015, p. 17; Komár, 2002; Abdallah, 2015, p. 75). The milestone of economic rapprochement was the trade treaty signed in 1928, which implemented the principle of most favorable tariffs (Abdallah, 2015, p. 76). In the 1930s, cooperation also extended to scientific-cultural relations, when Hungarian engineering and scientific groups traveled to Egypt (the latter's achievements included the organization of the Egyptian Agricultural Museum) (Abdallah, 2015, pp. 94–95, p. 101). Besides, Hungary also became a popular tourist destination for the Egyptian elite (Komár, 2002, p. 47). In summary, the relationship between the two world wars deepened slowly and encouragingly, but the positive trend was interrupted again after the outbreak of the World War II (Komár, 2002, p. 47).

3. The Selected Journals and Their Authors

The purpose of this chapter aims to briefly introduce the selected journals and their authors. This is necessary in order to show the most influential scholars and intellectuals who played an active role in knowledge transfer.⁵ Authors are listed by name if they published at least one paper on Egypt or if it is important to mention them because of the information they provided. The journals are grouped by subject.

The first category includes the 'Földrajzi Közlemények' [The Geographical Bulletin] and the 'Földgömb' [The Globe], which were published by the Hungarian Geographical Society. The interest of Hungarian geography in Egypt was well illustrated by the articles of Jenő Cholnoky, one of the most influential geographers of the period, who wrote mainly about hydrology and its relations to the society (Szabó, 2010, p. 476).⁶ Another important geographer of the time, Pál Teleki's protégé, László Kádár, a member of Eötvös József Collegium, also wrote numerous articles, mainly about his travels (Győri, 2014, p. 23).⁷ Other members of this circle also included the geographer Aurél Hézsér, secretary and permanent associate of the Hungarian Geographical Society (Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon [Hungarian Biographical Lexicon], n. d.⁸), the geographer and Catholic priest Gusztáv Kalmár (Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon, n. d.), Elemér Pólay, a jurist

⁵ The individuals listed here are those whom the research was able to identify.

⁶ See, for instance, the short article "*A brit-szudáni öntözések*" [*Irrigations in the British-Sudan*] (Cholnoky, 1924, pp. 114-116).

⁷ See Kádár, 1935a, pp. 58-65.

⁸ The names of the lexicons and encyclopedias are translated by the author of this article. Their Hungarian names are used hereafter.

(Jakab, 2020, pp. 569–570), and Győző Temesy, a secondary school principal (Magyar Katolikus Lexikon [Hungarian Catholic Lexicon], n. d.). A translation of the study “Afrika és a fehér faj telepedése” [Africa and the Settlement of the White Race] by the renowned Italian geographer, geologist, and traveler of the time, Giotto Dainelli Dolfi⁹ (Pampana, 2014, p. 106), was also published during the Second World War (Dainelli, 1942, pp. 150–161). Among the authors were Egyptologists such as Tihamér Kuhárszky,¹⁰ and the leading figure of Hungarian Egyptology of this period, Vilmos Wessetzky (Nemzeti Örökség Intézete [Institute of National Heritage], n. d.). These scholars mainly worked on ancient and historical geography. The journals also published articles by renowned orientalists such as Gyula Germanus and József Somogyi (Mestyan, 2014, p. 5; Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum [Petőfi Museum of Literature], n. d.).¹¹ Among influential contemporaries, László Almásy, “Abu Ramla”, the “father of sand”, also published articles on his travels (Múlt-kor, 2021).¹²

The second “social and political science” group includes ‘Külügyi Szemle’ [Foreign Affairs Review], ‘Turán’ [Turan], ‘Korunk’ [Our Age], ‘Társadalomtudomány’ [Social Science] and ‘Közgazdasági Értesítő’ [Economic Bulletin]. The first journal was published by the Foreign Affairs Society, in which the authors of articles on Egypt were often either not identified or, if they were, little information was available. Sándor Kürthy was one of the latter, who published an article entitled “A független Egyiptom és az angol-olasz viszály” [The Independent Egypt and the Anglo-Italian Feud] (Kürthy, 1936, pp. 9–22). The character of Lajos Kokas, who analyzed the issues surrounding the Suez Canal from a legal aspect, also needs to be explored (Kokas, 1936, pp. 277–284). More detailed information is currently only available on the legal and political writer Olivér Eöttevényi (Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon, n. d.).

Gyula Neubauer (also Gyula Abay Neubauer), economist and member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Hungarian Biographical Lexicon), and László Ottlik, conservative politician, also published in the journal of ‘Társadalomtudomány’ [Social Science] (Szabadfalvi, 2019). These writings were mainly about the British Empire, not Egypt. ‘Korunk’ [Our Age], the journal of the Hungarian intellectuals in Transylvania had a similar profile (Korunk). Imre Gyomai, poet, writer, and journalist, whose wife was an Egyptian of Armenian descent, wrote in a relevant and unique way (Cserba, 2022). The famous journal of the Turanian Society, ‘Turán’, also published articles by Cholnoky and Alajos Paikert. The latter was an economist, organizer of the Hungarian Agricultural Museum and latter a state secretary (Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon, n. d.). His character is particularly important for bilateral relations, as he was asked to organize the

⁹ Dainelli played an active role in the exploration of Africa and Italian colonial efforts (Pampana, 2014, pp. 108-111).

¹⁰ His famous book collection is still illegally owned by Russia (Admin, 1998).

¹¹ József Somogyi, orientalist and professor of Islamic studies, published the works of Ignác Goldziher. He worked in the USA after 1956 (Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum).

¹² See for example „*A Libiai sivatag felderítésének története*” [The History of the Exploration of the Libyan Desert] (Almásy, 1937, pp. 1-15).



Agricultural Museum in Cairo (Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon, n. d.). ‘Közgazdasági Értesítő’ [The Economic Bulletin] was an indispensable journal which recorded all the details of the trade between the two countries and regularly published analyses of Egypt’s economy. The most significant articles were written by Kálmán Petheő, a ministerial adviser, and he was probably responsible for large numbers of articles published on Egypt that did not mention the author (Petheő, 1936, p. 24). His career could be the subject of further research, as his work in the Bulletin suggests that he played a key role in building economic relations.

The last category includes interdisciplinary journals. The first of these was the conservative ‘Magyar Szemle’ [Hungarian Review], a cultural, ideological, and political journal. István Bethlen, a leading politician of the Horthy era, played a major role in its creation, while the renowned intellectual historian Gyula Szekfű was its founding editor (Arcanum a., n. d.). In the “Foreign Policy Review” column of the journal, diplomat György Ottlik, who also had a successful career as a journalist, wrote extensively on international political affairs related to Egypt (Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon, n. d.). The historian Lajos Gogolák, a student of Gyula Szekfű, also wrote in this column. ‘Budapesti Szemle’ [Budapest Review] was a similarly influential journal on a wide range of topics (Arcanum, b., n. d.). Its writers also came from a broad spectrum. On the subject of ancient Egypt, the paper featured writings by the historian, archaeologist and Egyptologist Ede Mahler (Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon, n. d.), and Ferenc Calice, the Austrian Ambassador to Budapest (Magyar Távirati Iroda Hírarchívum, 1920-1945). Furthermore, an important commentary, mainly related to the geopolitical imagination, appeared in the essay about Apponyi by Gyula Kornis, philosopher and cultural politician (Kornis, 1935, pp. 136–152). Gyula Germanus also contributed to the journal.

In 1935, the magazine ‘Búvár’ [Diver] was founded, mainly for natural sciences (Búvár, 1935, p. 1). However, contrary to its introduction, it also published a very large number of important socio-economic-political essays, in which Egypt often appeared. The topics included both ancient and modern themes. For example, the Egyptologist and art historian Aladár Dobrovits published his essay „Természettudomány az ókori Egyiptomban” [Natural History in the Ancient Egypt] (Dobrovits, 1938, pp. 849–854), as well as the aforementioned geographer László Kádár’s study „Afrika Gyarmatosításának a Története” [The History of the Colonization of Africa] (Kádár, 1935b, pp. 678–685). Imre Szieberth, government adviser and technical writer, wrote about the successes of Hungarian engineering in the magazine (Búvár, 1935b). An important article on Hungarian-Egyptian relations and nationalism in the land of the Pharaohs was written by Róbert Kertész, a writer and journalist (Kertész, 1937, pp. 929–932). Quite interestingly, Kálmán Rátz, a far-right politician, military officer, and public writer (Paksa, 2011, pp. 107–108, 117, 119, 154), also appeared in the journal with several studies, including one dealing with the role and importance of the cotton industry in the world economy (Rátz, 1935, pp. 149–154). Finally, the journal ‘Napkelet’ [Sunrise]

deserves a mention for an article by Loránt Harmatzy-Simon entitled „Tut-Ench-Amon és kora” [Tut-Ench-Amon and his Era] (Harmatzy-Simon, 1923, pp. 437–450).

4. Travels in Egypt

Travels played an important role in the Hungarian scientific and non-scientific life. This certainly has something to do with the fact that Hungary was not a colonizer throughout its history, and individual "exotic" travel was considered exceptional. Several periodicals published articles in this field, notably the 'Földrajzi Közlemények' and the 'Földgömb'. Some of the reports referred to Egypt as a stage in the life of a prominent individual, commemorating his or her career. These included Jenő Bánó, former Egyptian diplomat, Béla Erődi, linguist and geographer, and János Jankó, ethnographer (Thirring, 1936, p. 74; Ormós, 1927, p. 246; Gunda, 1935, pp. 634–636).

Another group of journey reports was the travel report of an individual. Among these were shorter ones, such as Zoltán Sulkowsky's and Gyula Bartha's motorcycle journeys around the world, who also crossed Egypt (Sulkowsky, 1936, p. 374). It is also worth mentioning József Haranglábi Nemes' „Magyar hajón Budapestről Egyiptomba és vissza” [On a Hungarian Ship from Budapest to Egypt and Back], which presented the voyage in a very plastic way, illustrated with photographs (Nemes, 1939, pp. 298–308). The creation of the route had not only economic but also psychological significance in the post-Trianon Hungary, as the following extract illustrates: “It is not a sports yacht, my dear captain, - I replied -, it is a regular merchant ship, sailing every two months between Budapest and Egypt, carrying the Hungarian flag with glory” (Nemes, 1939, p. 298).¹³ In Nemes' detailed description, the picture of Port Said stood out, where he noted that all nations were represented, now including the Hungarians (Nemes, 1939, p. 302). The reader can conclude from the report that this region of Egypt was the center of the world, and with its presence in the region, Hungary became equal to other states. Gyula Germanus, in his travelogue, reported with similar pride about the ship connection: “A few years ago, Hungarian entrepreneurship created a direct waterway between Budapest and Egypt” (Germanus, 1941, p. 127).

Most of the travelogues were about the voyages of the aforementioned László Almásy. Some of these articles were written by him.¹⁴ It is also noteworthy that, the geographer László Kádár, assistant of the Economic Geography Institute, also mentioned above, accompanied him on part of his travels, and he wrote two articles about their activities.¹⁵ Kádár also took part in Almásy's 1933 expedition, during which he carried out geological and botanical investigations and published the results in the yearbook of

¹³ All of the quotes are translated by the author.

¹⁴ See for example „*A Líbiai sivatag felderítésének története*” [The History of the Exploration of the Libyan Desert] (Almásy, 1937, pp. 1-15).

¹⁵ See „*Gépkocsival a Líbiai sivatagban*” [By Motorcar in the Libyan Desert], „*Khargai emlékek*” [Memories of Kharga] (Kádár, 1935b, pp. 678-685; 1935c, pp. 212-221).



the Cairo Geographical Society and in the *Geographical Journal* (Temesy, 1934, p. 67). Kádár also wrote about their visit to the Khargai oasis in 1934 and gave a detailed account of the natural, social, and cultural conditions of the area, illustrated with photographs (Kádár, 1935a, pp. 58–65). In his writing, he made special mention of the hospitality of the locals and their time spent together with Bey Vashfi, which gave an insight into the life of an "Eastern lord" (Kádár, 1935a, pp. 63–65). Besides describing the geographical conditions, Almásy wrote about the history and contemporary significance of the desert explorations and the experiences of his own expedition (Almásy, 1937, pp. 1–15).

5. The Socio-Economic Geography of Egypt

The examined periodicals contained a wealth of information on the socio-economic geography of the country. However, they only focused on a few key areas, such as the Nile, the cotton, transport geography, and economic analysis.

5.1. The Nile and the Transformation of Nature

The first of these is Egypt's connection with the Nile. This is not surprising, since the country did indeed owe its existence to the river; Vogt called it "the Nile's Fabulous Empire" (Vogt, 1931, p. 74). The interest of Hungarian authors came from the fact that it was similar in Hungary, where the geography was shaped by the rivers too. As a consequence, hydrology was one of the central themes of the Hungarian geography, as exemplified by Cholnoky (Gyuris and Tóth, 2005, p. 46). Although he was originally a natural scientist, he wrote analyses not only of the natural world but also of civilizations, in which Egypt was regularly cited as an example. Cholnoky explained that „Egypt is really nothing but a long series of oases along the Nile” (Cholnoky, 1943, p. 224). The geographer saw the oases as one of the cradles of civilizations (Cholnoky, 1929, pp. 1–11). Szieberth also described the role of the river in shaping culture, and - like Wessetzky - linked it with religion (Szieberth, 1935a, pp. 74–76; Wessetzky, 1936, p. 356).

Another reason for the popularity of the topic - besides the economic reasons detailed later - the author of the study attributes to the modern man's mentality and the Hungarian civilizational consciousness. In the 19th century, the "great transformation of nature" took place in Hungary, which primarily meant river regulation. The works were seen by contemporaries as a kind of heroic achievement in which man conquered the nature, serving the interests of the state and the economy. This approach, as well as the similarities between the two countries, can be felt throughout the tone of the articles. Examples are the articles by Elemér Pólay „A régi Egyiptom öntöző kultúrája” [The Irrigation Culture of Ancient Egypt] and Vilmos Wessetzky „A víz kérdése az ókori Egyiptom életében” [The Question of Water in the Life of Ancient Egypt], in which the

water management of the ancient empire was analyzed in great detail and from many different perspectives (Pólay, 1936, pp. 218–223; Wessetzky, 1936, pp. 349–356). Although Pólay's study has theoretically nothing to do with Hungary, he linked the Hungarian transformation of nature to Egypt. As he concluded his study: „Canalization is, therefore, a very important issue in contemporary agricultural life. In our country, the regulation of the river Tisza and the draining of the marshes have already given a great deal of arable land for agricultural production, but there is still much to be done” (Pólay, 1936, p. 223). This was echoed by Wessetzky, who argued that the Hungarians could feel close to the agricultural Egypt (Wessetzky, 1936, p. 349). He also expressed the modernist spirit when he stated that: „If we look at the history of Egypt, we can see the geographical picture of the country evolving as a result of human labor” (Wessetzky, 1936, p. 356); and that „the human spirit and will could make use of it and lay the foundations of a gigantic empire, a wonderful culture” (Wessetzky, 1936, p. 350). The circle of modernists was further enriched by Horváth, who wrote: „Contrasted with the beautiful image of the Nile caught in the yoke of man, in Egypt all human activity takes place in the valley of the great river” (Horváth, 1932, p. 120). In addition, the influential Hungarian statesman Albert Apponyi had similar feelings in Egypt, according to Kornis: „But he immediately contrasts this with the beauty of the human will, which triumphed over the fierce power of nature, and the great ethical power of creation, which blesses millions of people when the irrigation works multiply the agricultural wealth of Egypt” (Kornis, 1935, p. 144).

5.2. Transport Geography

Besides the already mentioned Hungarian-Egyptian waterway, other transport issues were also raised. Not surprisingly, the Suez Canal was at the center of these. From the perspective of transport geography, an important article was Tihamér Kuhárszky's „A régi egyiptomiak Suzei csatornája” [The Suez Canal of the Ancient Egyptians], which also discussed modern times, and József Somogyi's article „A Szezi csatorna” [The Suez Canal], which described its history (Kuhárszky, 1935, pp. 172–180; Somogyi, 1938, pp. 300–309). The contemporary appreciation of the meaning of the canal was far more pronounced than it is today when its role in the creation of global connectivity was emphasized (Kuhárszky, 1935, p. 172; Somogyi, 1938, pp. 300–309). Suez also claimed the victory of the modernist conception alongside the Nile. According to Kuhárszky: “At Port-Said, the great statue of its builder is still hailed with silent admiration as a symbol of the triumph of unbreakable human will and knowledge” (Kuhárszky, 1935, p. 172). The question of air travel and railway connections was also raised, in which Somogyi saw great potential (Somogyi, 1927, pp. 123–124; Hézsér, 1932a, p. 19; A Földgömb 1935a, 355–356).

5.3. The Economy

The 'Közgazdasági Értesítő' reported on the situation of the Egyptian economy on a quarterly and annual basis, which was mainly motivated by the purpose of promoting Hungarian export opportunities beyond the general reports. The articles were written on the one hand by the journal's staff, probably mainly by Kálmán Petheő.¹⁶ The other source of information was the Royal Hungarian Consulate in Alexandria, which sent continuous information on the situation in the Arab country, generally under the title „Egyiptom gazdasági helyzete” [The Economic Situation of Egypt] (see *Közgazdasági Értesítő*, 1929a, pp. 11–12; 1929c, 9–10; 1928b, pp. 10–12; 1928c, pp. 14–15; 1927b, p. 15; 1927c, pp. 14–15; 1936, pp. 26–30; 1932a, pp. 15–16), or under a very similar title. These reports covered the whole economic spectrum, reporting on the performance of agriculture and industry, trade figures, planned infrastructure investments, and the development of Hungarian-Egyptian trade. Moreover, it is worth mentioning Suhay's „A független Egyiptom élete” [The Life of the Independent Egypt], which also tried to give a comprehensive picture of the conditions (Suhay, 1938, pp. 645–650). The journal also followed the development of Egypt's international trade and customs treaties with particular attention.¹⁷ There were also some less comprehensive publications which analyzed specific economic sectors. It is interesting to note that, there were two articles about the furniture market, one in 1929 and the other in 1932 (*Közgazdasági Értesítő*, 1929b, pp. 14–15; 1932b, pp. 9–10).

Overall, the economic development of Egypt was seen as positive by the *Közgazdasági Értesítő* and other authors before the Great Depression of 1929 (*Közgazdasági Értesítő*, 1929a, pp. 11–12). Afterward, the consequences of the crisis were also reported in detail (*Közgazdasági Értesítő*, 1930, p. 23). The 1930s were also viewed positively by the Hungarian experts. In their view, the state was steadily strengthened by the cotton, mining, and industrial developments, and was one of the few countries in the world where the budget had a surplus (Suhay, 1938, pp. 646–647; *Közgazdasági Értesítő*, 1936, pp. 26–30). Hungarian readers may also have been informed that the Egyptian economic structure was dualistic, where the large industry was in the hands of foreigners and small business was in the hands of the locals (A Földgömb, 1931, p. 350). In connection with the establishment of modern industries, Suhay also reported that a Hungarian engineer was hired to explore petroleum (Suhay, 1938, p. 647).

The question of Egyptian cotton was one of the key themes in the economic geography essays. This was partly because, although the state was trying to industrialize, cotton remained its main product (Beinin, 1998, p. 318). According to Suhay, it was so essential - slightly overstated - that the country owed its existence to it (Suhay, 1938, p. 646). In order to increase its production, the Egyptians built numerous dams and

¹⁶ See for example „Kiviteli lehetőségek a Levante országaiba” [*Export Opportunities to the Countries of the Levant*] (Petheő, 1935a, pp 13-20; 1935b, pp 16-21).

¹⁷ See *Közgazdasági értesítő*, 1927b, p. 15; 1928c, p. 15; 1928b, pp. 10-12.

reservoirs during this period (Harkay, 1941, p. 174). Besides, unsuccessful experiments with the raw material were also carried out in Hungary between the two world wars (Hajdú, 2000, p. 245). Kálmán Rátz dealt with the topic as he was convinced that it was one of the most significant raw materials in the world, from which almost 80% of textile products originated (Rátz, 1935, p. 149). Rátz also analyzed the use of the crop from the military point of view, highlighting its crucial role in the production of uniforms and weapons (Rátz, 1935, p. 149). In his article, he explained that, because of its strategic value, one of the main objectives of the British was to create their own production capacity, in which Egypt played a major role (Rátz, 1935, pp. 149–150). Petheő also considered it appropriate to monitor the situation, albeit because of the emerging textile industry of Hungary (Petheő, 1935b, p. 16).

In addition to the central issues, there was also a presentation on oasis management by László Kádár (Kádár, 1935a, pp. 58–60) and consultancy for increasing exports, which emphasized Egypt's excellence and the baselessness of European complaints and considered the assistance of a good agent essential for the successful commercial activity (Közgazdasági Értesítő, 1928b, pp. 10–12). A very modern work on the conflict between economic interests and cultural heritage was also published in 'A Földgömb' in 1929. The article discussed the situation of the island of Philae, "the pearl of Egypt", an island of great cultural value for its ancient monuments, which was threatened by the raising level of water caused by the Assuan dam (A Földgömb, 1929, pp. 36–37).

6. The History of Egypt and the Games of the Great Powers

Although the history of the land of the pharaohs was one of the most popular topics of the period, there was also a tendency for authors to concentrate on a few areas. Dainelli emphasized the uniqueness of the civilization: „Of the great cultures of the past, only one was born on the African continents, and that was the Egyptian” (Dainelli, 1942, p. 150). He and Somogyi also pointed out that the ancient civilization was inherited by the Hellenes and the Arabs (Dainelli, 1942, p. 152; Somogyi, 1943, p. 26). The Italian scholar also found Egypt unique in the sense that because of its historical background, it was able to absorb the Western culture, and it was the only place in Africa where the national feeling emerged (Dainelli, 1942, p. 152). Somogyi also referred to the European connection and a common origin when he stated that the „most ancient civilization of the white man” was Egypt and Mesopotamia (Somogyi, 1941, p. 33). Harkay, who argued that, unlike the rest of the continent, Egypt had long been a player in the historical process, also took a Europe-centred approach (Harkay, 1941, p. 171). There were, of course, opposing views on this. For example, Kornis described the Egyptian monuments and ruins as alien, in contrast to their early Christian, Greek, and Latin counterparts, where he felt the connection from the common past (Kornis, 1935, p. 143). Ambassador Calice, on the other hand, approached the issue from the perspective



of the organic state theories that were widespread at that time. In his opinion, he explained that the study of the civilization was an exceptional opportunity, since it was possible to see its entire life cycle, implicitly suggesting that, in his opinion, the 'real Egypt' was already dead (Calice, 1933, p. 152).

Among the issues published in journals, those dealing with the ancient period were popular. Among them, Calice wrote about the times before the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt, including linguistic and archaeological aspects (Calice, 1933, pp. 152–169). Tihamér Kuhárszky, in his article „A legrégebbi tengeri expedíciók” [The Oldest Maritime Expeditions], illustrated the greatness and the main historical events of ancient Egypt (Kuhárszky, 1932, pp. 75–88). Ede Mahler, an Egyptologist, and Harmatzy-Simon presented archaeological relics. The former also provided translated inscriptions, while the latter described the significance of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb and the historical context of the reign of the pharaoh (Mahler, 1924, pp. 45–60; Harmatzy-Simon, 1923, pp. 437–450). This area also includes a paper by Kuhárszky on the significance and history of the ancient Suez Canal (Kuhárszky, 1935, pp. 172–180). It is interesting that there was only one article on Hellenized Egypt, Gusztáv Kalmár's „Az ókori görög városok történetföldrajza” [The Historical Geography of Ancient Greek Cities] (Kalmár, 1926, pp. 202–218).

However, after the achievements and significance of the ancient civilization, there was a gap of several thousand years in the historical periods covered by the publications, as the interest of Hungarian scholars returned to Egyptian history mainly in connection with the events and processes of the 19th century. Only Kürthy's study went back to the 16th century in outline, but he did this to explain the background of the problems of his present (Kürthy, 1936, pp. 11–12). In the modern era, Hungarian researchers were most interested in the history of colonialism, but it also had a strong present focus. The subject of Egypt usually came up in the context of the colonization of Africa, mainly because of its links with the English and the French. Among these, it is worth mentioning Lajos Kokas's „A Francia diplomácia útjai” [The Ways of the French Diplomacy], László Kádár's „Afrika Gyarmatosításának a Története” [The History of the Colonization of Africa], and the studies published in the 'A Földgömb' entitled „A szaharai gyarmatok határainak kialakulása” [The Formation of the Borders of the Saharan Colonies] (Kokas, 1935, pp. 335–351; Kádár, 1935b, pp. 678–685; The Globe, 1935b, pp. 117–120). Overall, these were mainly descriptive, with little private reflection. Among the few documented opinions, Kádár's should be mentioned, who saw the colonization of Egypt by the French as positive and liberal, who did not violate the laws of the local people, and who therefore benefited much more from the occupation than France (Kádár, 1935b, p. 681).¹⁸ And in 'A Földgömb' it was stated that although the colonial borders were not perfect, they were still much fairer than the borders of Trianon (A Földgömb, 1935b, pp. 117–118).

¹⁸ This reflects Kádár's personal opinion, which did not correspond to reality.

In addition, the most popular issue was the articles about the games of the great powers, which proved to be dominant not only in the 'Külügyi Szemle' but in most of the journals. According to Hungarian authors, geopolitical rivalries had to be dealt with for two reasons. On the one hand, as Geszti stated: „Three or four thousand years ago, all events were congested here, and there is no other place in the world where so much blood was shed as for the possession of the Mediterranean” (Geszti, 1940, p. 145). The latter was made clear in Eöttevényi's statement when he said: „Even that part of Hungarian public opinion which consciously looks beyond the borders of Trianon pays relatively little attention to events in foreign policy outside Europe, which, even if they have no direct effect on us, may nevertheless influence the future of the Carpathian Basin in its further development” (Eöttevényi, 1937, p. 146).

The studies focusing on the great power struggles centered on the Suez Canal, which, because of the British control and the Italian expansionist efforts to gain control over it, was mainly examined in the British-Italian context. Among the works dealing with the subject, one should highlight the works of the Foreign Affairs Review „Egyiptom viszonya Angliához” [Egypt's Relations with Britain], György Ottlik „Külpolitika Szemle” [Foreign Policy Review], Imre Lakatos „Világpolitikai problémák. Küzdelem a Földközi-tengerért” [World Policy Problems; Struggle for the Mediterranean], the author of „Az Egyiptomi kérdés” [The Egyptian Question], writing under the pseudonym Omikron, and Péter Domony „Nagy-Britannia és Egyiptom” [Great Britain and Egypt] (Külügyi Szemle, 1936, pp. 169–170; Ottlik, 1935, pp. 372–378; Omikron, 1930, pp. 187–188; Domony, 1929, pp. 79–85; Lakatos, 1926, pp. 651–657). In the Hungarian perception, it was also clear that Egypt was cardinal for the British because of the canal, the traffic through it, India, and the oil fields of the Middle East, and its status in the geopolitical imagination only strengthened with time (A Földgömb, 1930, p. 151; Kádár, 1935b, p. 684; Petheő, 1935c, pp. 17–19; Somogyi, 1938, p. 307; Gogolák, 1940, p. 417). According to Lakatos, for London, the maintenance of control over Egypt was a major issue, as the existence of the British Empire depended on it, and he cited the peace treaties around Paris, which he considered short-sighted, as the cause of the conflicts (Lakatos, 1926, p. 651). Ottlik considered that the British were also aware of this, which was the reason for the Briand-Kellogg pact, what the Brits called the Monroe Doctrine about Suez (Ottlik, 1928, p. 387). In addition to this, Kokas also approached the rivalry from a legal point of view in his paper „A Szuezi-csatorna a nemzetközi jogban” [The Suez Canal in the International Law] (Kokas, 1936, pp. 277–284).

Egypt was also an unavoidable part of the British geopolitical discourse. Their control over the African state was, according to contemporaries, based on two pillars - military occupation and the Nile floodgates in Sudan (Omikron, 1930, pp. 187–188; Ottlik, 1926, p. 414). Hungarian scholars expressed their opinions and claims about British imperialism and the Egyptian independence issues extensively, and they can be divided into two main groups. Some of them accepted the British narrative and adopted



the “classical geopoliticians” view of Britain’s presence in Egypt as legitimate (Ottlik, 1926, p. 414). Domony went further in this respect when he wrote that the English occupation was in fact a consequence of the weakness of Egypt and the external power factors, which, in the absence of planned colonialism, was nothing more than a series of ad hoc actions (Domony, 1929, pp. 79–81). He acknowledged the presence of the British Empire as legitimate and even beneficial to the Egyptians since it allowed the modernization of the state during this period (Domony, 1929, p. 81). Ottlik also highlighted that the locals owed their self-government exclusively to the British (Ottlik, 1926, p. 414). Accordingly, Domony was hostile to the nationalist aspirations: „... the fighting soldiers of nationalism are not the Fellahin themselves, but those who have emerged from their ranks, and who, intoxicated by the slogan “Egypt for the Egyptians”, and with the lack of judgment of their intellectual and social flock, saw themselves as capable of creating a better state than the British had done in decades of cultural work, and capable of achieving their goals by terrorist means” (Domony, 1929, p. 82).

However, the majority of commentators opposed this group and were negative about British policy and presence in Egypt. Kürthy argued that the 1882 riots were a good thing for the Brits because they were able to invade the country by using them as an excuse (Kürthy, 1936, p. 12). Regarding the Suez issue, Suhay did not accept the dominant narrative of the time, which was that the British needed to occupy the canal (Suhay, 1938, p. 646). He aptly noted that „a reason for conquering an empire can always be found if someone wants it” (Suhay, 1938, p. 646). Gyula Neubauer also opposed the British colonial policy, which he linked to Trianon and the hypocrisy of great power: „At the Congress held in Glasgow, not the mildest accusations were made by Egyptians and Hindus against the British rule, and it was evident that the right of self-determination of peoples is only agreeable to the English if it leads to the dismemberment of the Monarchy, but not if it threatens their world empire. Their colonial policy may be very liberal where English “legionaries” live, but in Egypt and India the traditional principle of ‘divide et impera’ is applied, and they are not better than the Habsburgs” (Neubauer, 1931, p. 169). The ‘A Földgömb’ sarcastically remarked about the British methods of negotiation, „For it is always good to have polite diplomatic negotiations accompanied by the menacing buzz of warplanes circling in the air” (A Földgömb, 1930, p. 151). The members of this group were accordingly sympathetic to Egyptian nationalism and national aspirations (Somogyi, 1943, pp. 27–28; Geszti, 1941, p. 98; Kertész, 1937, p. 932).

Very few publications have been written about the domestic politics of Egypt. The 'Külügyi Szemle' reported on the political crises but did not go into the deeper analysis (Külügyi Szemle, 1931, p. 362; 1934, p. 56). In this respect, Sándor Kürthy’s „A független Egyiptom és az angol-olasz viszály” [The Independent Egypt and the Anglo-Italian Feud] was the only and thus unique study which detailed the events of domestic politics, as well as the parties, their political programs, their aims and instruments, the democratic institutions and their functioning (Kürthy, 1936, pp. 9–22). He underlined

that the Wafd was a non-extremist nationalist party, which only sought to gain independence for the country. But the state was on a kind of forced path, because of the threat of the Italian ambitions against it, which explained its pro-British policy (Kürthy, 1936, pp. 14–16). Kürthy also made several comparisons with the independence aspirations. According to him, the political spectrum was very similar to the situation in Hungary in 1867, with the Wafd party representing the party of '48 and the ruling party the party of '67 (Kürthy, 1936, p. 15). The author even drew parallels with the Young Turk movement and highlighted the difference between them, since the Egyptian modernists sought to implement their ideas by maintaining religious traditions (Kürthy, 1936, p. 18).

The Nile also played a major role in the games of the great powers, and the Hungarian intellectuals were also aware of this. The topic is particularly interesting because similar conflicts still exist around the river today. As Lakatos and Harkay argued, the dominance of those who controlled the upper reaches of the river underlined the significance of Sudan (Harkay, 1941, p. 174; Lakatos, 1926, p. 655). Cholnoky was also critical, drawing attention to the British policy of the Nile and the dangers of their Sudanese dam-building efforts for Egypt (Cholnoky, 1924, p. 114). He sarcastically remarked about the plans and their consequences: „But what does the English care about that” (Cholnoky, 1924, p. 116).

7. Culture and Anthropology

The subject of culture and anthropology also appeared in the journals, but because of their sporadic appearance, the reader of the era could only get a very fragmented picture.

Egypt was considered by contemporaries to be very rich in cultural heritage, and according to Vogt, few countries were so diverse (Vogt, 1931, p. 75). The ancient monuments, the pyramids, and the climate were all attractive and encouraged the development of tourism (Vogt, 1931, p. 75; Nemes, 1939, p. 303). Moreover, Dorothea G. Schumacher argued that anyone who wanted to know about Islam had to go there. Surprisingly, the authors only briefly mentioned the role of El-Azhar¹⁹ in the Islamic world (Schumacher, 1930a, p. 140; Kürthy, 1936, p. 17).

From the perspective of cultural anthropology, there were also only short articles by Schumacher and László Kádár. Regarding the holidays, Schumacher described the celebration of the flooding of the Nile and the birth of the Prophet in a literary style: „In the warm, clear night by the Nile, this oriental music has a magical effect” (Schumacher, 1930a, p. 140). She also mentioned the situation of the peasants, the fellahs (Schumacher, 1930b, pp. 180–182). She described the conflict between the two

¹⁹ El-Azhar University is located in Cairo and has been one of the most prestigious educational institutions in the Islamic world since the 10th century.



major social groups, the fellahs²⁰ and the Arabs. While Schumacher was positive about the former, emphasizing their work ethic, she was very negative about the latter: „The Arab, proud of his ancestors, is a great master in dreaming; an idle idler” (Schumacher, 1930b, p. 180). Among these writings, it is worth mentioning Imre Gyomai’s literary description of Cairo, „Kairói Baedeker” [Baedeker of Cairo] (Gyomai, 1935, pp. 337–345). There were also comments about the dual impact of modernization on the East, where the writers distinguished the city from the countryside. The former was portrayed as belonging to the West, in some cases corrupt and cold, while the latter as a place where hospitality and the ideal of traditional life survived (Schumacher, 1930b, p. 180; Kádár, 1935a, p. 65; Nemes, 1939, p. 303).

8. Bilateral Relations

Bilateral relations played a major role in journals, especially in the ‘Közgazdasági Értesítő’, indicating the Hungarian intention to develop mutual economic activities. In this respect, Petheő, cited above, should be mentioned in particular, who highlighted Turkey and Egypt as countries in the Levant region where Hungarian exports had great potential (Petheő, 1935a, pp. 16–19). Alajos Paikert agreed with him when he created a list of Eastern countries that offered opportunities for Hungarians: „There are so many interesting countries, peoples, territories, and opportunities where few Hungarians live, but where there are countless opportunities for distinction, for gaining wealth and power” (Paikert, 1930, p. 7). During the period, relations between the two states expanded in all areas and a sense of mutual sympathy developed between them. Spectacular successes were achieved, especially in the commercial and technical fields, which were welcomed by the contemporaries (Suhay, 1938, p. 645; Kertész, 1937, p. 929). The good relations were also demonstrated by the fact that Paikert was asked to organize the Egyptian Agricultural Museum (Turán, 1931, p. 59).

Concerning the economic sector, the Hungarian part of the process was led by Jr. Miklós Horthy and the Hungarian-Egyptian Trading Company (Kertész, 1937, p. 929). Although the volumes were indeed increasing, contemporaries also noted that the economic relations were still in their beginnings (Kertész, 1937, p. 929). Kálmán Petheő, who published an important article entitled „Magyar-egyiptomi gazdasági kapcsolatok” [Hungarian-Egyptian Economic Relations] (Petheő, 1936, pp. 24–28), is unavoidable in this field. Besides the economic overview, he pointed out that in 1932 he had formulated proposals for cooperation, which he submitted to both the Hungarian Foreign Office and the Egyptian government. According to his own admission, he proposed the establishment of a trading company (Petheő, 1936, pp. 24–25). His summary clearly revealed the raw economic interests of Hungary, which, according to Petheő, needed primarily industrial raw materials - raw wool and rawhide - in exchange

²⁰ The agricultural population of Egypt, who are common descendants of the ancient Egyptians and the Arabs.

for which, in his view, Hungary could export almost any commodity²¹ to Egypt (Petheő, 1936, p. 26). The expert did a comprehensive job, as he also informed the readers of the 'Közgazdasági Értesítő' where they could find relevant and important economic data about Egypt (Petheő, 1936, p. 27). The economic journal also published major milestones such as the export of flour after 15 years and the signature of the trade treaty (Közgazdasági Értesítő, 1928d, p. 13; 1930b, pp. 1–4). The success of the Hungarian machinery industry was also given special attention in the journals. The 'Közgazdasági Értesítő' published articles entitled „Gépek és készülékek piacca Egyiptomban” [Machinery and Devices Market in Egypt], while Szieberth published articles on the subject entitled „Magyar gépek a Nílus mentén” [Hungarian Machines along the Nile] and „Az Árpádok Egyiptomban” [The Árpáds in Egypt] (Közgazdasági Értesítő, 1928d, p. 13; Szieberth, 1935a, pp. 74–76; 1935b, pp. 826–828). These revealed that the pumping stations in the Nile dam system had been installed by the Ganz factories (Szieberth, 1935a, 74–76). Szieberth triumphantly noted that „the Ganz factories in Budapest, as on so many other occasions, were able to take their place in this very keen competition among the world companies” (Szieberth, 1935, p. 76). The other focus of the technical writer was the “Árpád”²² high-speed trains, which he considered to be the conquest of Egypt by Hungarian technology (Szieberth, 1935b, pp. 826–828).

9. Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to examine, through selected periodicals and authors, the image of Egypt that emerged in the minds of contemporaries in the period between the two world wars. The research found that the works from different backgrounds focused on a few main areas. Thus, writings on travel, the Nile and river management were popular. There was also a strong focus on the economic life of Egypt, motivated primarily by the desire to export Hungarian manufactured goods and the need to import of raw materials. Although the authors saw Egypt's history as unique, articles were published only on the ancient and modern periods. In addition, great power games were among the most popular topics. In these writings, the authors not only described the processes but also commented on them. Most of them were critical of British colonialism and supportive of Egyptian independence aspirations. As far as culture was concerned, there were very few publications that contained only a few anthropological descriptions. Bilateral relations focused on deepening trade and Hungarian engineering products. On the whole, a relatively large number of articles on the distant country appeared in leading scientific and cultural journals, which the study has tried to present and interpret in the appropriate order. However, several sub-issues and sub-problems require further research, the results of which could be the subject of further studies.

²¹ This is a rather strong and exaggerated expression, but the author thought.

²² Árpád was the leader of the Hungarian tribes during the conquest of the Carpathian basin.



Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

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