

Sports as a Component of the Egyptian Intangible Cultural Heritage Product

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Abstract:

Many of today's sports were practiced by the Ancient Egyptians, who set the rules and regulations for them. Inscriptions on monuments indicate that they practiced wrestling, weightlifting, long jump, swimming, rowing, shooting, fishing and athletics, as well as various kinds of ball games. Ancient Egyptian kings, princes and statesmen were keen on attending sports competitions, which they encouraged and provided with the necessary equipment. Drawings on pharaonic monuments tell us that several thousand years ago, the Egyptians had laid down basic rules for games, chosen a neutral referee, a uniform for players, and a means of announcing the winners by awarding them different collars. Both winner and loser were met with ovation, the first for his superiority and the latter for his sporting spirit. It is obvious from the scenes depicted on tombs and temple walls that ancient Egyptians knew how to keep fit; obviously in ancient Egypt sports must have been a part of the daily life and culture. Archeologists and scholars have uncovered interesting bits of information about the ancient Egyptian sports practiced thousands of years ago. People have played sports since before the written word. Thus, it is no surprise that Ancient Egypt had sports and athletics. Ancient Greece and Ancient Egypt existed at the same time for thousands of years. Although Greece is famous for its sports, but Egypt had much the same activities at the same time and even before. Ancient Egyptian sports are recognizable from that period on, across the world. They are practiced today in playgrounds, fields and arenas. In general, participating in sports in Ancient Egypt was not much different from today. Ancient Egyptians had equipment provided by the wealthy, an audience that included important individuals and enough sports to keep everyone entertained. The current article contributes to the existing body of knowledge on heritage studies in Egypt as a new trend in the tourism academic field through recognizing sport as part of the Egyptian intangible cultural heritage product as well as documenting the origin of

some sports in contemporary times. The paper concludes with a number of recommendations among which is the importance of introducing the concept of "sport Heritage" as a new trend in the tourism academic domain in Egypt. It is also recommended that the best international practices in the area of sport heritage tourism should be applied in Egypt.

Key words:

Egypt - Sports- Intangible heritage -Murals- culture

Introduction

Cultural heritage¹ is a dynamic reference point for daily life, social growth and change. It is also a major source of social capital and an expression of diversity and community identity². In recent decades however, the term “cultural heritage” has changed content considerably partially due to the instruments developed by UNESCO³. In this respect, the concept of cultural heritage has become no longer limited to monuments and collections of objects but has been extended to include traditions or living expressions inherited from a generation to another⁴. Accordingly, since monuments and works of art are identified and collected as part of human heritage, intangible cultural heritage⁵ made up

¹An expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. It is often expressed as either Intangible or Tangible Cultural Heritage. As part of human activity Cultural Heritage produces tangible representations of the value systems, beliefs, traditions and lifestyles. As an essential part of culture as a whole, Cultural Heritage, contains these visible and tangible traces from antiquity to the recent past.

²International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter: Principles and Guidelines for Managing Tourism At Places Of Cultural And Heritage Significance, ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee, December 2002, p.2, URL: <file:///Users/macbookpro/Downloads/ICOMOS%20International%20Cultural%20Tourism%20Charter%201999.pdf> accessed on 5 May 2016.

³United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

⁴United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) *What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?*, URL: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>, accessed on 7 May 2016.

⁵The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. See United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

of all immaterial manifestations of culture⁶, can also be gathered and recorded⁷. Here it is worth noting that the significance of intangible cultural heritage, is not the cultural manifestation itself but the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to another. Moreover, the social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups as well as for mainstream social groups and is as important for both developed and developing countries⁸. Central to its significance is the fact that intangible cultural heritage represents the variety of living heritage of humanity. It is also regarded as the most important vehicle of cultural diversity⁹.

Globally speaking, awareness of the significance of intangible cultural heritage has recently grown, due to the promotional efforts of the UNESCO and its Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)¹⁰ in which five broad domains¹¹ of intangible cultural heritage were manifested. Among these are “social practices, rituals and festive events”¹² that involve a wide variety of forms¹³

(UNESCO). Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, URL: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/convention#art2> accessed on 7 May 2006.

⁶ F. Lenzerini, *Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Living Culture of Peoples*, European Journal of International Law, 2011, Volume 22, Issue 1, pp. 101-120.

⁷United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?*, URL: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/01851-EN.pdf>, Accessed on 9 June 2016

⁸ UNESCO, *What is Intangible Cultural Heritage*, op.cit.,.

⁹ *ibid*, F. Lenzerini, *Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Living Culture of Peoples*.

¹⁰ M. Stefano, P. Davis and G. Corsane (eds.), *Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Heritage Matters Series, Book 8, The International Center for Culture & Heritage Studies, New Castle University, England, 2012, p.20-25.

¹¹ Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; Performing arts; Social practices, rituals and festive events; Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and Traditional craftsmanship.

¹² *i.e.* Habitual activities that structure the lives of communities and groups and that are shared by and relevant to many of their members.

¹³ *e.g.* worship rites; birth, wedding and funeral rituals; oaths of allegiance; traditional legal systems; traditional games and sports; kinship and ritual kinship ceremonies; settlement patterns; culinary traditions; seasonal ceremonies; practices specific to men or women only; hunting, fishing and gathering practices, expressions, special gestures and words, recitations, songs or dances, special clothing, processions, animal sacrifice, special food, *etc.*

including traditional games and sports among others¹⁴. However, while the Convention set out a framework for identifying the different forms of intangible cultural heritage, the list of domains it provided was intended to be inclusive rather than exclusive as instances of intangible cultural heritage are not limited to a single manifestation and many include elements from multiple domains. In other words, it seemed difficult, if not impossible, to impose solid categories since the boundaries between domains are extremely fluid and often vary from a community to another¹⁵.

In parallel with the protection and promotion of its world famous monuments, Egypt has paid much effort to protect and promote its intangible heritage assets. It has been one of the first signatories of the Convention on the Protection of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity¹⁶. It was also one of the first countries to contribute to the List of Intangible Heritage Masterpieces. Since then, the implementation of the Convention's guidelines regarding the safeguarding and development of national capacities in Egypt has been a main priority. However, most of the activities carried out in this particular area to date are merely focused on the protection and promotion of traditional Egyptian festivals that include all aspects of intangible heritage from religious and seasonal traditions to dancing, oral poetry, music, street puppet theatre, handicrafts and traditional cuisine recipes¹⁷.

Moreover, in collaboration with the UNESCO, Egypt has successfully completed a needs assessment in the field of intangible cultural heritage

¹⁴United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, *Social practices, rituals and festive events*, URL: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/social-practices-rituals-and-00055>, Accessed on 20 June 2016.

¹⁵ United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Intangible Cultural Heritage Domains*, p.3, URL: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/01857-EN.pdf>, Accessed on 20 June 2016.

¹⁶The Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity was made by the Director-General of UNESCO starting in 2001 to raise awareness on intangible cultural heritage and encourage local communities to protect and sustain these forms of cultural expressions.¹Several manifestations of intangible heritage around the world were awarded the title of *Masterpieces* to recognize the value of the non-material component of culture, as well as entail the commitment of states to promote and safeguard the Masterpieces. Further proclamations occurred biennially until 2005.

¹⁷UNESCO Office Cairo, *Intangible Cultural Heritage, Promoting Intangible Cultural Heritage in Egypt*, 2016, URL: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/cairo/culture/intangible-cultural-heritage/>. Accessed on 25 June 2016.

upon which opportunities and gaps in the institutional and professional environment for the effective safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage were identified and the forthcoming steps for strengthening national capacity were indicated. In this respect, the urgent needs ranged from setting up adequate institutional infrastructures, mobilizing all stakeholders, developing policies and legislation, designing inventory frameworks and methods and undertaking other safeguarding measures as required¹⁸.

Additionally, with the support of the European Union, UNESCO has launched the “Mediterranean Living Heritage Project to support the implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Egypt as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic in collaboration with the Maison des Cultures du Monde in France. The project’s overall objective is long-term capacity-building for the implementation of the Convention in the Mediterranean countries by developing national safeguarding projects and supporting the participation of States Parties in international mechanisms. The action is also intended to improve regional cooperation and exchange of skills and experience by establishing a network of institutions and developing a web portal¹⁹.

Besides, in response to the threat of industrial standardization, the Egyptian National Council for Women has taken initiatives with

¹⁸ United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Progress in implementing an eight-country capacity-building project in the Arab States and Africa*, Intangible Cultural Heritage, 4 May 2014, URL: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/news/progress-in-implementing-an-eight-country-capacity-building-project-in-the-arab-states-and-africa-00131> Accessed on 27 May 2016.

¹⁹United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Melcher - Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Mediterranean Partner Countries*, Intangible Cultural Heritage, URL:<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/projects/medliher-safeguarding-of-intangible-cultural-heritage-in-the-mediterranean-partner-countries-00155>. Accessed on 2 June 2016. Also see MEDLIHER: four years of cooperation for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in the Mediterranean, Dec. 2012, URL: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/news/medliher-four-years-of-cooperation-for-the-safeguarding-of-intangible-cultural-heritage-in-the-mediterranean-00010>. Accessed on 2 June 2016.

UNESCO to safeguard Egyptian intangible heritage manifested in the domains of traditional craftsmanship, oral traditions and expressions, proverbs and performing arts²⁰. This project included documentation in combination with the collection of all forms and patterns of the Tally²¹. Other intangible heritage assets that are of great significance to the Egyptian cultural tourism product are: the araköz shadow puppet theatre²², Ramadan Lantern²³, the Bamboo Clarinet (Al Arghool)²⁴, The Waw²⁵, Al-Angareeb²⁶, Tahtīb²⁷ stick dance, music of Nubia and the dawr²⁸, the classical art of the Egyptian renaissance²⁹.

Central to the various international initiatives that have been carried out in support of the country's aspiration to preserve its unique intangible heritage as a driving force for sustainable economic development of local populations, the study of intangible cultural heritage has become an overriding academic domain in Egypt. In this respect, many scholars³⁰

²⁰United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Enhancing Women's Role as Custodians and Artisans of Egyptian Handicrafts*, Intangible Cultural Heritage, URL: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/projects/enhancing-womens-role-as-custodians-and-artisans-of-egyptian-handicrafts-00093>. Accessed on 5 June 2016

²¹The art of tinsel needlework. For further information. For further information see N. Shawkat, *Folk: The mysterious art of lonely stitches: Tally*, Ahramonline, 13 July 2011, URL: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/32/97/16282/Folk/Street-Smart/Folk-The-mysterious-art-of-lonely-stitches-Tally.aspx>. Accessed on 7 June 2016

²²A tradition that appeared in the Arab world in the twelfth century

²³Made out of sheets of colored glass and tin in different sizes and forms.

²⁴A traditional Egyptian musical instrument. It has been used since Ancient Egyptian times and is still used as a traditional instrument in Egypt.

²⁵A type of art that flourished in the Mamluk and Turkish era. It is an oral folk poetry with a construction distinguished from the rest of poetry kinds

²⁶A well-known craft in Nuba long time ago as well as for ancient Egyptians. It involves the manufacture of beds made from bare palm branches on a wooden structure then tied with leather.

²⁷Martial art, a dance or a game in which participants wield sticks.

²⁸The most important musical form in nineteenth-century Egypt. During the performance, the singer, backed by a choir and an instrumental ensemble, modulates a poetic text either in classical Arabic or in the Egyptian Arabic dialect.

²⁹United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Examples of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria*, URL: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/examples-of-regional-living-heritage-00379>, Accessed on 13 June 2016.

³⁰A. Abdel Latif, *Intangible Cultural Heritage and Intellectual Property*, in A. Hassan, A. Trafford and M. Youssef (eds.), *Cultural heritage and Development in the Arab*

have contributed to our understanding of the various aspects of the Egyptian intangible heritage assets and their impact on the country's cultural identity. The impact of the Egyptian intangible cultural heritage on the country's tourism product was also identified in various studies. However, most of the work carried out in the area of intangible heritage in Egypt has been more or less concerned with the traditional festive aspects of the Egyptian destination while almost no research has contributed to sports and traditional games as a component of the country's intangible heritage product.

Here, it is worth noting that sports and games have always played a key role in human society³¹. Most sports of today only developed in their contemporary form in the 19th and 20th century, though many of them have originated from more primitive sports and traditional games of ancient times³². In fact, the history of sport can be traced back to the existence of human civilization itself. Moreover, it is a crucial part of cultural identity, and a mechanism for the protection and promotion of cultural diversity. Furthermore, sport and games give the community an opportunity to demonstrate its interpretation of life and the world. A society's games and sports are revealing in that they give insights on the relations between the sexes and generations, on individuals or groups, on physical or mental strength, and on conceptions of nature, the universe, life and death³³.

Central to this is the fact that sport is an integral part of culture and an important aspect of modern life³⁴. Sport, like language, religion and art, is one of the fundamental things in human heritage. It plays an undeniable part in the cultural heritage of many people across the globe whether they

World, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2008, p. 269 -281, 2008, J. Bos-Sheldenthuis, Life and Tradition of Ababda Nomads in the Egyptian Desert: the Junction between Intangible and Tangible Heritage Management, International Journal of Intangible Heritage, Vol. 2, 2007.

³¹United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, Traditional Sports and games <http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php>, accessed on 12 June 2016.

³²R. Wood, *History of Sports*, Topend Sports.com, 2009, URL: <http://www.topendsports.com/resources/history.htm>, accessed on 5 July 2016

³³op.cit., United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Traditional Sports and Games*.

³⁴J. Hill, K. Moore, and Wood, J., *An examination of the relationship between sports and its cultural heritage: Overview*, in *Sport, History and Heritage: Studies in Public Representation, Heritage Matters, Modern History, England and Wales*, 2016.

were professional athletes, enthusiastic amateurs, sports fans, *etc.*³⁵. Traditional sports and games are part of intangible heritage and a symbol of the cultural diversity of our societies. They can form the backbone of a community, bring peoples together and instill a sense of pride in a society's cultural roots. They are also an efficient means to convey values of solidarity, diversity, inclusiveness and cultural awareness³⁶.

Thus, retaining knowledge of our traditional games and sporting practices is vital in terms of preservation and promotion of sport as an expression of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Moreover, we can gain a better understanding of ourselves and of others by knowing, preserving and encouraging traditional games and sports that are such a priceless part of humanity's cultural heritage. They are a constant reminder that tradition is not gone forever and continues to exist, in syncretic form, in the sports of our time³⁷.

Aim and objectives

The current paper contributes to the existing body of knowledge on heritage studies in Egypt as a new trend in the tourism academic field. The study aims to fill in a gap in our understanding of the role of sports as a significant component of the Egyptian Intangible Cultural Heritage product with particular emphasis on traditional games and sporting activities that have survived from ancient times to date. In this respect, three specific objectives were identified:

- 1) Recognizing sport as part of the Egyptian cultural heritage product.
- 2) Documenting the origin of some sports in contemporary times.
- 3) Identifying the rites associated with sports across the Egyptian history.

³⁵Europeana exhibitions, European Sport Heritage: From the Olympic Games to the Champions League, Europeana Foundation, The Netherlands, URL: <http://exhibitions.europeana.eu/exhibits/show/european-sports-en>, Accessed on 20 June 2016.

³⁶UESCCO Office in New Delhi, *Global Conference on Traditional Physical Cultures, Sports and Games*, 6/12/2012, URL: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/newdelhi/about-this-office/single-view/news/global_conference_on_traditional_physical_cultures_sports_and_games/#.V8gEYZN96uU, Accessed on 23 June 2016

³⁷ M. Linaza, K.Moran and N.O'Connor, *Traditional Sports and Games: A New Opportunity for Personalized Access to Cultural Heritage*, URL: http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-997/patch2013_paper_2.pdf, Accessed on 25 June 2016

Discussion

Despite the fact that the ancient Egyptians did not have video games, televisions or computers, but still they found other ways to entertain themselves. Ancient Egyptian royalty and people have played a wide variety of games and sports. They also watched the dancers and listened to singers and musicians³⁸. Moreover, Ancient Egyptian royalty and high officials enjoyed attending sports competitions³⁹. However, Children played less organized games involving balancing, wrestling, and racing as well as ball games with balls made from papyrus. Children had many toys to play with, usually made to resemble animals and people. In addition to participating in activities such as hunting, fishing and swimming, Egyptian children played with wooden toys and enjoyed outdoor games⁴⁰. Archaeological evidence shows children playing games similar to leapfrog and tug of war. Girls played spinning game similar to "Ring around the Rosie," which honored the goddess Hathor, while boys played soldiers and balancing games. Dolls were whittled from wood, but it is uncertain if they were made as toys or if they served as afterlife companions for the deceased⁴¹.

In the rich and vast civilization of Egypt high importance was given to sports, games and leisure. It is a fact that many of the sports and games that we play today have been in existence several thousand years ago in the ancient Egyptian life. The best evidence of existence of the ancient Egyptian sports and activities is the scenes depicted on the walls of the temples as well as tombs. It clearly shows that Egyptians were people who knew to keep themselves fit. So it is predicted that sports and exercises must have been a part and parcel of the life of the Egyptians⁴².

³⁸ Z. Habashi, *Tutankamen and the sporting traditions*, paris,1992, p. 24,: Peter Lang Publishing,

https://books.google.com.eg/books?id=y7gaB99c0UgC&pg=PA40&lpg=PA40&dq=sports+travel+in+ancient+times&source=bl&ots=M_f9PzWYaB&sig=P0wGp0JJGRHQZHFfUyrL_p8KpCA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiyku7siurOAhVL1RoKHeIjCUcQ6AEIPzAE#v=onepage&q=sports%20travel%20in%20ancient%20times&f=false, Accessed on 23 June 2016

³⁹ Boxing, wrestling, and fencing with sticks were favorite events.

⁴⁰J. Adams, *Sports & Entertainment: Ancient Egypt*, USA, 2008, p. 5-7

⁴¹J. Adams, *Sports & Entertainment: Ancient Egypt*, USA, 2008, p.7

⁴²S. Craig, *Sports and Games of the Ancients. Sports and Games Through History Series*, Series Advisor Andrew Leibs. Westport, London, 2002, p. 20-30

Paintings and murals that date back to ancient Egyptian period depict pharaoh and his men enjoying several activities like the javelin throw or the wrestling game. It can thus be clearly seen that sports in ancient Egypt were very important and formed an integral part of the daily life not just to keep people physically fit but also as a means of entertainment and recreation. Moreover, the ancient Egyptians believed that life after death would follow the general pattern of life on the earth so they kept in their tombs food to eat, clothing to wear, boats to sail, weapons for war, sports and games equipment's for their amusement⁴³.

Sport in ancient Egypt like all other aspects of ancient Egyptian culture was closely linked up with religion. During the feasts watching athlete's competition in combative sports were presented as a main part of the festival as well as appealing petitions to deities⁴⁴. This may indicate how sport and games were considered in ancient times as activities of recreation and enjoyment as well as a reflection of religious concept. Rules like choosing a neutral referee, uniform for players, announcement of winners by awarding different collars were some rules of the sports that were played in Egypt during ancient times⁴⁵. Fully aware of the invaluable role of sport in raising the standard of health, and hence of national productivity, the ancient Egyptians as a whole, men, women, youths and children, were all engaged in sporting activities with a zeal which amounted to a cult. There is a theory that the ancient Egyptians began the custom of holding international games regularly at Akhmem in Upper Egypt. It should also be said that in Egypt, sport was born and flourished, and from there spread to Greece, Rome and to the rest of the world⁴⁶.

With the fact that Egypt lies on the banks of the Nile River it is quite likely to assume that many of the ancient Egyptian sports were water related. Evidence indicates that Egyptians enjoyed such sporting events as swimming and rowing. Judging by drawings and paintings, ancient Egyptian sport also included an assortment of ball games. One of the games involving ball play

⁴³ A.E.A. Hamed, *Sport, Leisure: Artistic Perspectives in Ancient Egypt*, Cairo, 2015, p.

1.

⁴⁴ J. Baines and J. Malek, *Cultural Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, England, 2000, p.120-128.

⁴⁵ S. Craig, *Sports and Games of the Ancients. Sports and Games Through History Series*, London, 2002, p. 20-30

⁴⁶ J. Swaddling, *The Ancient Olympic Games*, Austin, 1999, p.12.

appears to be a version of handball, while other games were played using balls and bats fashioned from palm trees⁴⁷.

Many of the ancient Egyptian sports were enjoyed for the pure fun of it, but others might have developed into professional spectator sporting events. Certainly the latter would have been attended by the royal family as means of entertainment and diversion⁴⁸. The high standard of physical fitness reached by the ancient Egyptians is revealed in their standard portrayals of the male and female forms in sculpture and painting. However, men are strong, and radiate a muscular vigour, while the women are slender, and redolent with femininity⁴⁹. In addition, ancient Egyptian sport included marathons that were recorded in a number of Egyptian texts. Marathons seem to have even played a part in the coronation festivities of pharaohs throughout most ancient Egyptian history⁵⁰.

The Egyptians favoured organized sporting events, such as boxing and fencing with sticks. Marathon races were important events, particularly during celebrations commemorating a new pharaoh. One of the rituals of these celebrations was to hold a marathon run by the pharaoh around the temples before spectators to reveal his physical strength and his ability to rule using his bodily and mental capabilities⁵¹. The artist has brought out, with a thorough knowledge of anatomy, the harmonious play of muscles. Most sports in ancient Egypt are believed to have been an activity for mere enjoyment while some also seem to have developed into professional spectator sporting events. These sports were usually seen by the royal families in order to enjoy and have fun. Lengthy marathons were also a part of the sport scene for ancient Egypt as can be seen from the texts. Apart from these, marathons were quite common among the Ancient Egyptian sporting activities. The rules followed in the modern day sports are also mainly based on the ones practiced by the Ancient Egyptians⁵².

⁴⁷ J. Adams, *Sports & Entertainment: Ancient Egypt*, USA, 2008, p. 5-7

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁴⁹ MA: Harvard, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge, 1997, p. 7.

⁵⁰ S. Craig, *Sports and Games of the Ancients. Sports and Games Through History Series*, Series Advisor Andrew Leibs. Westport, London, 2002, p. 20-30

⁵¹ Z. Habashi, *Tutankamen and the sporting traditions*, Paris, 1992, p. 24.

⁵² J. Adams, *Sports & Entertainment: Ancient Egypt*, USA, 2008, p. 5

After the Greco-Roman conquest, theater became a popular form of entertainment. Parts of plays were discovered on the scrap papyri used to make cartonnage mummy covers. Sporting competitions were still important; Indeed, Ptolemy II established a festival called the Ptolemaieia that occurred every four years and was intended to rival the Olympics⁵³. People have played sports since before the written word. Thus, it is not surprising that Ancient Egypt had sports and athletics. Moreover, ancient Greece and ancient Egypt existed at the same time for thousands of years. Greece is famous for its sports, but Egypt had much the same activities at the same time and even before. Ancient Egyptians had equipment provided by the wealthy, an audience that included important individuals and enough sports to keep everyone entertained⁵⁴.

Team Sports in Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egyptian sports included multiple team sports, all of which we recognize today. Like today, they required **team work** in an effort to display skill, strength and sportsmanship.

The following is an exposure of some ancient Egyptian sports:



Hockey

Ancient Egyptians played a game that is similar to our present-day hockey. Drawings on tombs at Beni Hassan⁵⁵ in Menia Governorate show players holding bats made of long palm-tree branches, with a bent end similar to that of the hockey bat. The hockey ball was made of compressed papyrus fibers covered with two pieces of leather in the shape of a semicircle. The ball was dyed in two or more colors⁵⁶.

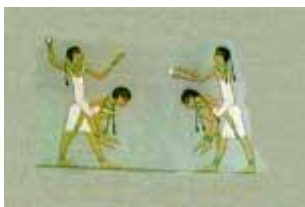
⁵³J. Rutherford and D. Media, *Leisure in Ancient Egypt*, USA, 2014, p. 2.

⁵⁴ J. Adams, *Sports & Entertainment: Ancient Egypt*, USA, 2008, p. 5-7

⁵⁵ P. E Newberry, *Beni Hasan. Part I-IV*. London, 1893-1900, p. 170.

⁵⁶S. G. Miller, *Ancient Greek Athletics*. New Haven and London, 2004, p.145.

Handball



Drawings of this sport are found on Saqqara tombs, five thousand years old. The teams would both throw their balls at the same time, catching them and then throwing them back. Handball was unique, though, because the players could either run or climb onto each other's shoulders to catch high balls. The ball was made of leather and stuffed with plant fibers or hay, or made of papyrus plants in order to be light and more durable. It was seldom used for more than one match⁵⁷. The painting shows four girls playing handball. Each team throws the ball to the other at the same time. Players can either be on their feet or on top of their teammates' backs while exchanging balls.

Wrestling



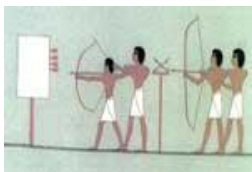
Of all the Egyptian sports disciplines, wrestling has the best visual documentation⁵⁸. The first depiction of wrestling occurs on the so-called cities palette from the time of the kingdoms. Here the wrestling pair is obviously utilized as a hieroglyphic. The six snapshots of a wrestling match from the tomb of Ptahhotep, of Fifth Dynasty, are complete free of any emblematic character. Ptahhotep's son Achethotep who shares the tomb with his father, fights as youth against a friend of his own age. By far the greatest number of wrestling scenes comes from the Middle Kingdom⁵⁹. Outstanding among these are the scenes from the tombs of the princes of the Antelope District in Middle Egypt (in Bani Hassan). In the tomb of Baqti III the wrestling scenes are painted across the east wall⁶⁰.

⁵⁷G. Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997, p.8.

⁵⁸G. Norman, *Athletics in the Ancient World*. London, 1930, p. 90

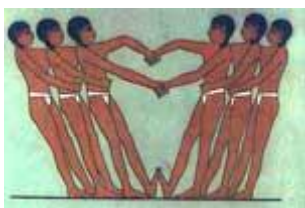
⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p.90-92.

⁶⁰The action of the wrestlers can be followed easily by the color scheme. The wrestlers are stripped except for their belts. The sequence of the wrestling begins with the placement of this bit of equipment that often belongs to the sport of wrestling. The next scenes picture the exploratory moves and the first attempts at a hold. Swings and throws follow in the swift alternation with positions on the ground. The scenes which follow swiftly one after the other, are like a cinematographic reproduction of a sequence of movements that can be divided into five individual phases. One might well consider them impressions of a wrestling match.



Archery

Archery was a well-known sport in Ancient Egypt and was often recorded on plates in ancient temples. These plates show the kings' and princes' skill in accurate aiming at the target, and their strength in pulling the bow. Archery competitions were common. In the 18th dynasty King Amenhotep II boasted that he pierced the middle of a thick brass target with four arrows. He then set a prize for anyone who could do the same⁶¹.



Tug of War

One of the ancient Egyptian plates at the "Marorika tomb" shows teams standing in two opposite rows, with the first players of each row holding hands and pulling back each other while the other members of each team hold each other tightly by the waist and try to pull back the opposite team. The first contestant in the front has one foot supported by that of his opposite number. This sport is still practiced in the Egyptian countryside⁶².



Javelin Throw

Javelin throwing during the Pharaonic age was first linked to hunting. Drawings show how the hunter could hit his prey by one single throw despite its speed. The javelin differed in length according to the kind of prey⁶³. The javelin is thrown upwards lightly so that it revolves in

⁶¹C. E. Grayson, M. F., Michael J. O'Brien. *Traditional Archery from Six Continents: The Charles E. Grayson Collection*. University of Missouri Press, 2007, P.1

⁶²J.M.Layne, *The Enculturative Function of Toys and Games in Ancient Greece and Rome*, Pro Quest, 2011, p.5.

⁶³ S. Landells, *Finnish advice is the secret to African javelin throwers' success*, *International Association of Athletics Federations'*, 2014. URL: <http://www.skysports.com/more-sports/news/15234/10514542/ihab-abdelrahman-banned-from-rio-2016-olympic-game>, accessed, May 2016

quick spins until it returns to the player to be used again. The javelin is a stick with a twisted end. The picture shows the player in a position of readiness to throw ⁶⁴.



Fishing

Fishing was one of the sports practiced by kings, princes and commoners. There are many drawings of scenes of fishing as a hobby on the Saqqara tombs of the Old Kingdom as much as there are on the New Kingdom monuments. The

Egyptian Museum in Cairo comprises numerous kinds of fishing rods and hooks of various shapes, which indicate the advance of such a sport in ancient Egypt ⁶⁵.



Boxing

Some ancient Egyptian scenes of boxing as a game were found in the tomb of "Mery Ra" in the Minia Governorate and in the "PtahHotep" tomb in Saqqara ⁶⁶. In this picture, a player is

depicted in a position ready to direct his blows with his fist to another player, who in turn, tries to repel these blows. Pharaohs and princes watched the boxing match, which indicates that it was an organized contest ⁶⁷. Ancient boxing had fewer rules than the modern sport. Boxers fought without rounds until one man was knocked out, or admitted he had been beaten. Unlike the modern sport, there was no rule against hitting an opponent when he was down. There were no weight classes within the mens' and boys' divisions; opponents for a match were chosen randomly.

⁶⁴J.M.Layne, *The Enculturative Function of Toys and Games in Ancient Greece and Rome*, Pro Quest, 2011, p. 8.

⁶⁵ D. J. Brewer, and F. F. Renée *Fish and Fishing in Ancient Egypt.*, England, 1990, p18.

⁶⁶The Egyptian boxers used a type of gloves that was worn up to the elbow, however this custom was also found in Crete and ancient Greece.

⁶⁷C. Steve, *Sports and Games of the Ancients. Sports and Games Through History Series*. Series Advisor Andrew Leibs. Westport, London, 2002, p.75.



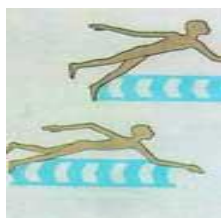
Weightlifting

Weightlifting was one of the sports known by the ancient Egyptians. One method of weightlifting was the attempt to lift a heavy sack of sand with one hand (clean and jerk lift) and keep it high in a quasi-vertical position. The player had to stay in that position for a short period. This is one of the rules of weightlifting applied till now. Murals of weightlifting are depicted on tombs of Beni Hassan⁶⁸.



High Jump

Ancient Egyptians practiced field and track sports such as the high jump. Two players sat opposite each other with legs stretched, with one player's feet on top of the toes of the other⁶⁹. If the third player managed to jump over that barrier, the two sitting players placed their palms on top of their feet to heighten the barrier which the third player had to jump across without touching. This game is still practiced in the Egyptian countryside and is called "goose steps"⁷⁰.



Swimming

Swimming was the favorite sport of the ancient Egyptians, who made use of the River Nile to practice it. The Nile was not the only place for swimming contests. Noblemen's palaces had swimming pools in which princes learnt the sport. The calm waters of the Nile encouraged youths to hold swimming competitions in which they could show their skills⁷¹.

⁶⁸G. Norman, *Athletics in the Ancient World*, London, 1930, p. 37-40, Chapter XV.

⁶⁹W.H. Gourdin and W.D. Kingery, "The Beginnings of Pyrotechnology: Neolithic and Egyptian Lime Plaster". *Journal of Field Archaeology*.2, 1975, p.133-150.

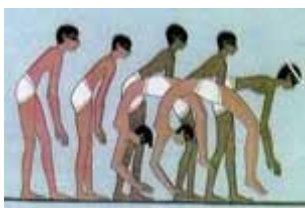
⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 133-150.

⁷¹J. Baines and J. Malek. *Cultural Atlas Of Ancient Egypt*, England, 2000, 128 .



Rowing

Rowing was one of the sports that required most physical strength on the part of the ancient Egyptian. Plates recorded team-rowing in which the players depended on harmonizing their rowing according to the directives of their leader who held the rudder. The leader also controlled their movement through a high-pitched systematic call to unify the moment when oars touched the surface of the water and that helped to push the boat forward more steadily and swiftly - a method still being adopted in rowing nowadays⁷².



Gymnastics: Consecutive Vault

This painting represents pharaonic gymnastics. The players performed consecutive vaults without touching the floor with their heads and making more than one complete turn in the air. At the end of the exercise the players stand firmly upright, which is one of the basic rules of floor exercise applied in today's Olympics⁷³. In Egyptian civilizations the sport was also used as a form of entertainment. "The earliest known physical evidence of gymnastics can be found in the art of ancient Egypt, where female acrobats performed for the Pharaohs and the Egyptian nobility"⁷⁴.



Gymnastics (floor exercise)

The ancient Egyptians invented many sports, some for entertainment, and others for keeping strong, physically fit, and slim. The picture dates back to 2000 years BC. It shows a gymnastics drill in which the body is bent backwards until

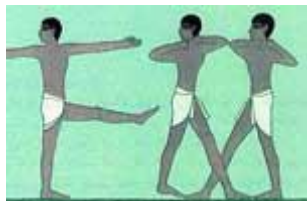
⁷²G. Norman, *Athletics in the Ancient World*. London, 1930, p. 37-40 Chapter XV..

⁷³D. Alexander, *The Early History of Gymnastics Part 1 "The Stunt Gym"*, London 2010, p. 23.

⁷⁴G. Dan, *Gymnastics*, New York, 1996, p. 60.

the hands touch the ground, revealing bodily flexibility. It is one of the most commonly practiced exercises today⁷⁵.

Rhythmic Gymnastics



The picture shows four players performing rhythmic gymnastics in different positions. The one on the left stands on one foot, stretching his two arms horizontally, and lifting one leg as high as possible to the front to help him revolve swiftly and lightly.

The two players in the middle are standing facing each other, bending their arms near their shoulders while twisting their waists towards the left and right. The fourth player stands on his head upside down in perfect equilibrium, without touching the floor with his arms. All these positions are close to some practiced in today's rhythmic gymnastics⁷⁶.

Tug of Hoop



This is an ancient Egyptian game in which two players compete in pulling the hoop swiftly. Each contestant fixes a hooked staff to hinder any snatch of the hoop by the other player. This game needs sharp physical maneuvers and strict observation, particularly because the hooked

staff is used both to pull the hoop and support it from falling flat on the floor⁷⁷.

Marathon



Marathon races were of the utmost importance in ancient Egypt, particularly during celebrations marking the assumption of power of new kings. One of the rituals of these celebrations was to hold a marathon run by the

king around the temples before spectators to reveal his physical strength and his ability to rule using his bodily as well as mental capabilities.

⁷⁵J. Baines and J. Malek. *Cultural Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, England, 2000, 120.

⁷⁶C. Steve. *Sports and Games of the Ancients. Sports and Games Through History Series*. Series Advisor Andrew Leibs. Westport, London, 2002, p.75-80.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p.75-80.

History records that the Pharaoh, together with those who were born on the same day of his birth, participated in hectic marathons. No one was allowed to have a meal before covering 180 stages of his race⁷⁸.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Physical activities, including games and sports, are a quasi-universal phenomenon in time and space. Games and sports are not frozen in tradition but are constantly evolving, while keeping traces of their past forms. Whether it is considered as a culture in itself or an expression of culture, sport is undoubtedly part of our cultural heritage, of the legacy of knowledge and know-how passed from a generation to another. In this respect, history reveals that every ancient civilization that existed and flourished on earth had developed items of their entertainment that included various forms among which are games and sporting activities that are recognized as the product of diverse cultures, a component of the heritage of humanity and a constituent of the memory of civilizations.

This has consequently resulted in the existence of a staggering cultural richness of indigenous, traditional, historical, and regional folk sports and games from different nations and ethnic minorities around the world, many of which are fascinating not only for their differences, but also for the similarities of shared common features. It is worth noting here that the ancient Egyptians led a colorful and pleasant life as their energy was directed towards arts of life and arts of death. Sports were not a recreational trend only, but an educational part of life as well.

Central to the significance of sports, as a component of human culture, the notion of “sport heritage” or “heritage of sports” is of relevant significance in the literature of leisure and tourism. Since sport has played an integral role in various cultures and societies for ages, the relics, events and locations of sporting past may be celebrated, venerated and protected like any type of heritage. Although sport-related heritage has been explored in the literature of leisure, sociology, history and

⁷⁸J. Swaddling, *The Ancient Olympic Games*, Austin, 1999. P. 30

geography, it was with sport tourism that the relationship between sport and heritage began to take shape. However, although sport heritage is becoming more widely represented, it has not always been embraced as part of the heritage canon.

Thus it is recommended to introduce the concept of "sport Heritage" as a new trend in the tourism academic domain in Egypt where further investigation of the various aspects of the country's sport cultural background and its manifestations are given special consideration in terms of its role as a component of the Egyptian cultural intangible heritage product. It is further recommended that the best international practices in the area of sport heritage tourism should be applied in Egypt. Moreover, lecturers in the fields of leisure, Tourism and sports are recommended to bring examples of traditional national sports and games into the lecture room with proper local combination to clarify the meaning of sports intangible culture and to emphasize on its role in boosting the Egyptian heritage product.

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