

# The Swedish-Egyptian Society

Your suggestions  
and/or  
contributions  
to your bulletin  
are welcome.

Thank you!

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**A**t the threshold of the new year, all the members of the board would like to wish each and every one of you a very

## HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR

and thank you for your support during the year that is about to finish.

In a way, the outward activities during this year were perhaps less evident than in the past but in a way, this year has been one of consolidation and much effort has been spent "backstage" to pave the way for a very active 2003. An overview of these plans is presented on the following pages.

### THE BOARD AND AUDITORS

## THE BIRTH OF A SUBURB OR THE OUTCOME OF A MAN'S VISION

He came to Egypt for the first time in 1904, essentially to rescue his interest from the British but did not succeed.

He figured that if you can't beat them then enlist them and in the process converted his vision to create what is known today as "Masr el Guedida", literally "the new Misr", the City of the Sun or to use its official name Heliopolis.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## ENCLOSURES

One of the two enclosures relates to your annual fee. The second is for the first activity of 2003.

You are welcome to use both!



## FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN

The Members of the Swedish Egyptian Society can look forward to an interesting New Year 2003 with a great number of planned activities. As you can see from the Calendarium of this Bulletin already in February a lecture and a movie will be presented.

A special journey to Egypt will take place from February 22<sup>nd</sup> to March 3<sup>rd</sup> with Mrs Gertie Englund as our Tour leader. The travelling group consists of some 20 members and friends and we will visit Cairo, Abu Simbel, Aswan and Luxor during the first ten days. An extension of another five days is offered to those who want to make the trip longer. The arrangements have been made to all our requests by Egyptenspecialisten Egyptson Tours AB.

The Board has also during December 2002 invited a number of Swedish companies interested in trade with Egypt to join the Swedish Egyptian Society as supporting company Members.

### TO ALL OUR MEMBERS

## A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR 2003

Richard Olsson  
Chairman

①

**TUESDAY**

**FEBRUARY 4TH 2003**  
**VOYAGE WITH RAMSES**

AMUSICAL VOYAGE  
FROM ALEXANDRIA TO ABU SIMBEL  
NARRATED BY  
**LEIF HJÄRRE**  
ACCOMPANIED BY  
**GUNILLA VON BAHR**  
AND HER PHARAONIC MUSICAL GROUP

**PLEASE SEE ENCLOSED INVITATION**

②

**THURSDAY**

**FEBRUARY 13TH 2003**  
**EGYPTIAN FILM**

INTRODUCTION BY  
**NILS PETTER SUNDGREN**

PLACE & TIME

**19:00** **SCHILLER BIOGRAFEN**

**INVITATION TO FOLLOW**

**AGENDA OF ACTIVITIES**

**FIRST QUARTER**

**2003**

③

**TUESDAY**

**MARCH 11TH, 2003**  
**COSMOPOLITAN EGYPT**  
**GREECE IN EGYPT**

LECTURE BY

**MR IOANNIS CONTOPOULOS**

COUNSELLOR  
ECONOMIC & COMMERCIAL AFFAIRS  
EMBASSY OF HELLENIC REPUBLIC

**INVITATION TO FOLLOW**

④

**OTHER FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

A GUIDED TOUR AT  
MEDELHAVSMUSEET  
THE WARDROBE OF

**TUT-ANKH-AMON**

**OUR ANNUAL MEETING**

**BOTH SCHEDULED FOR**  
**SPRING 2003**

(Continued from page 1)

This suburb of Cairo, was created starting 1906 by the Baron Empain, a visionary belgian entrepreneur, and is now one of Cairo's finest residential areas.

All great achievements generate their fare share of legends, each with its own share of truth, and one of these says that our visionary, baron Edouard Empain having met a successful young Belgian architect, Marcel-Henri Jaspar, who, as the baron, was also staying at the Shepherd's Hotel, asked shortly after their first encounter: "What are you doing here?" asked Empain. "Nothing," said Jaspar. "Can you ride a horse?" "Yes." "Come here early tomorrow morning. I want to show you a corner of desert in which I am interested."

Early next morning the two men rode up to a stretch of desert. There was nothing but an expanse of sand on the horizon. "I want to build a city here," said Empain. It will be called Heliopolis, the city of the sun, and first of all I will build a palace...a huge one. I want it to be magnificent. Furthermore, I want the architecture to conform to this country's traditions. I need a specialist in Arab art...You love mosques, you are an architect, can you give me a proposal?



A view from the Heliopolis Palace Hotel. The type of the aircraft shown is perhaps better than a date stamp

Another legend claimed then that he had fallen madly in love with the desert and, from that moment on, had laboured at putting together the pieces of a gigantic puzzle. A third legend whispered that despite a long-standing affair in Belgium he had succumbed to the charms of one of Cairo's most beautiful socialites.

True or false, the Societé des travaux publics du Caire (Cairo Public Works Company), established in Brussels in 1905, opened its Cairo offices at the Shepherd's Hotel the same year. Shortly after Empain had secured a formidable partner, Boghos Nubar Pasha, with whom, in May 1905, he purchased all the land of the "oasis" of Abbasiya,

5 952 feddans or 6 178 176 acres sold to them for a pound per feddan, on the express condition that one sixth of the land only be used for buildings. The partners were also granted a 70-year monopoly on an electric train and two tram lines to link Heliopolis to the city centre. Thus equipped, the Cairo Electric Railways and Heliopolis Oasis Society was duly established under Egyptian law by a decree ratified on 14 February 1906.

The society was headquartered momentarily at the Shepherd's Hotel. Its declared capital



Left, post card from the first decade of the century (Horreya Mostapha's private collection), right, eighty years later

comprised 60 000 preferential shares at 250 francs each (of which Empain owned 33 000) and 60 000 ordinary shares divided among 22 000 subscribers.

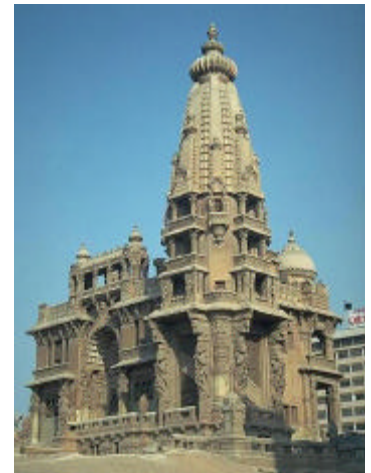
The company board members were five Britons, three Belgians, one Frenchman and one Egyptian. Empain was the president of the company and Boghos Nubar its vice-president.

If the company managed to build 100 villas, an option for the purchase of an equal stretch of desert would be available at the same conditions. Empain, having a priori and whole-heartedly subscribed to the modern ideas for the creation of satellite cities, such as improved infrastructure, better layout of living units and a faultless transport system, was able to give free rein to his imagination. He wanted an enormous hotel, "the largest in the world", he had told Jaspar, a race course, a casino, endless sports fields, an amusement park and an airport, to begin with. Empain, not a trained urbanist, did not mind learning the rules of the game on the ground, though he was always prompt to point out to his associates that he had known it all long before the professionals formulated their suggestions.

Empain's ideas were basically European. He lacked an Egyptian perspective, and was wise enough to know it. He was prompt to recognise that Habib Ayrout, a young contractor whom he had befriended and would represent an invaluable asset as an "Egyptian" adviser to his team. It was Ayrout who was called upon to change the Western layout of the houses, adding outdoors brick ovens for the baking of bread, extra balconies, larger windows decorated with mashrabiya, spacious terraces and inside courtyards.

Meanwhile, Jaspar was busy building, mixing styles, adding Orientalist touches to pure Art Déco, personalising the neo-Mauresque, all the time borrowing his propensity for the gigantic from a well-known Belgian tradition.

Alexandre Marcel, another member of the team, owed his fame to the Cambodian pavilion and to an anthology of south Asian architecture, comprising a Japanese pagoda, a Chinese pavilion and an Indian temple etc., all decorated by Georges-Louis Claude and presented at the Exposition Universelle in 1900. King Leopold II had ordered the complete set for his palace at Laeken, and Empain had also admired Marcel's Japanese tower, with decorations by Claude, inaugurated in Brussels in 1902. He did not hesitate, therefore, to entrust the architect and the decorator with the building of his own palace, which was to represent, once completed, a sort of synthesis of the architectural bravura displayed by the pair at the Exposition.



The "Villa Empain"

Even more important than his "villa", was the huge palace ordered by Empain and worthy of the Thousand and One Nights: 150 metres long, flanked by two wings of 64 metres each, constructed on 6,500 square metres and comprising 300 suites surrounded by 54,000 square metres of exquisitely landscaped gardens, liberally sprinkled with stone fauns and damsels gamboling in the shrubbery. The main ballroom, the largest in the world at the time, was covered with a huge dome 35 metres from the floor.

The third noteworthy building of Empain's Heliopolis was the basilica in which he was eventually buried.

Within two years of Empain's arrival, the suburb had started extending, its large avenues traced out, the imposing palaces and lovely villas constructed amidst the flourishing greenery and colourful flowering trees. The palace of Prince Hussein, with its dome resembling a mosque's, or the immense villa built for Boghos Nubar were among the landmarks that attracted more clients every day. The "madman's fantasy" had not only taken root in a relatively short time, it had prospered beyond the most audacious dreams, despite serious teething difficulties.

By 1909, the success was total and, with the small electric train -- dubbed Metro -- running, dwellers and visitors who crammed the wagons every day had no need to follow the yellow brick road to reach the fabulous city of Heliopolis in just a few minutes.

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