

Uroš Matić

*Institute for Classics,
University of Graz*

uros_arheo@yahoo.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0701-6104>

Egyptomania, Sex and Ontology in Enki Bilal's *The Nikopol Trilogy* (1980–1992) and *Immortel, ad vitam* (2004)*

Abstract: This paper argues that what advocates of the ontological turn refer to as the question of ontology cannot be understood without taking ideology into account. Enki Bilal's comic book *The Nikopol Trilogy* (1980–1992) and the movie *Immortel, ad vitam* (2004), juxtaposed with ancient Egyptian sources, are used as a demonstration. The issue of appropriate sexual partners for ancient Egyptian deities in the fictional world of Bilal is not only one of ontology, but more importantly one of politics and racial purity, characteristic of racism and totalitarian regimes. Approaching this question solely through the lens of ontology misses the mark. Taking this as a starting point, I will demonstrate that the question of appropriate sexual partners for deities in ancient Egyptian written sources also cannot be reduced to ontological differences. In fact, since Egyptian gods procreate only with some human women, the question of appropriate sexual partners becomes more of a class question.

Keywords: Egyptomania, sex, ontological turn, ideology, re-production, Enki Bilal

Introduction

Current debates concerning ontology in anthropology (Graeber 2015; Holbraad and Pedersen 2017; Simić 2020; Viveiros de Castro 2016), archaeology (Babić 2019; Harris and Cipolla 2017; Crellin, Cipolla, Montgomery, Harris and

* This paper is based on a presentation delivered at the conference *Do ancient Egyptians dream of electric sheep? The reception of ancient Egypt in science fiction* held from 9th to 10th July 2021 at the University of Birmingham and organised by Leire Olabarria and Eleanor Dobson. I would like to express my gratitude to Sonja Žakula (Institute of Ethnography, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts) and Filip Franković (University of Heidelberg) for reading and commenting on this paper in its early form. I am also grateful to Abraham Fernández Pichel (University of Lisbon) and Marc Orriols-Llonch (Autonomous University of Barcelona) for sending me the draft of their paper on sex and ancient Egypt in popular culture. Last but not the least, I am grateful to Monika Milosavljević (University of Belgrade) for kindly providing me some of the references.

Moor 2021; McGuire 2021; Ribeiro 2019) and Egyptology (Matić 2018a; Matić 2018b; Matić 2019; Matić 2023; Nyord 2018; Nyord 2020) seem to have been present in science fiction as a genre for decades (Ueckmann 2005: 301).

Advocates of the ontological turn argue for the existence of multiple worlds rather than only one world differently interpreted by different cultures (e.g., Viveiros de Castro 2016). They claim that the world is populated with actants other than humans and that we should take the agency of, for example, animals (McFarland and Hediger 2009) and things (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007; Latour 2005; Olsen 2010) seriously. Today, few anthropologists and archaeologists would dispute that animals have intentionality and that things can have secondary agency. However, not everyone would agree with the proposal that people on Earth inhabit or have formerly inhabited multiple worlds.

While we can and should be critical of new interpretative paradigms (Babić 2018; Babić 2019; Kuhn 1962), we should be careful not to throw out the baby out with the bathwater. Posthumanism, New Materialism, and the ontological turn urge us to ask questions that have either been rarely asked or were not previously asked at all. These questions include: who counts as human and under what social conditions? Who or what counts as an animal and under what social conditions? Who or what counts as divine and under what social conditions? Thus, social conditions are crucial keywords (Keil 2017: 43).

The idea that there are many worlds populated by different entities with their own agency might seem strange when argued by anthropologists and archaeologists, but it is widely deployed in science fiction.¹ This is because we are more willing to accept this idea when it is safely set in the realm of fantasy and imagination. When we find the same idea outside of this realm, we tend to label it as belief, and hence unreal. However, more often than not, anthropological and archaeological analyses of various works of fiction have demonstrated that although imagined, the worlds, characters, and stories we find in fiction somehow seem awfully similar to us (Matić 2015; Matić and Žakula 2021; Žakula and Matić 2023). This is because creators of fiction frequently address ongoing problems in the real world by transferring them into an imaginary world. Set in another world, these problems can be openly criticized or even resolved. Therefore, it seems that although we are willing to accept certain fictions of our world as realities of fictional worlds (e.g., gods and monsters), we are less inclined to accept certain fictions of other worlds as the reality of our world or the world of Others. However, contrary to the advocates of the ontological turn, I shall argue that there is a valid reason for this reluctance. Sometimes, the reason ontological differences emerge as evident, lies in the ideologies and power relations that insist on their clarity in order to re-produce themselves.

¹ Egyptologists need only to think about the *Stargate* franchise in which the world is populated by humans and different species of aliens (Meskell 1998).

To demonstrate this, I shall first present a case familiar to us “moderns,” a fictional world developed by French comic book artist Enki Bilal, famous for his critical analyses of 20th and 21st-century politics and totalitarian regimes. In his work, the ontological difference (deities, humans, mutants, aliens, androids, etc.) does not precede politics and ideology; rather, Bilal uses this difference to criticize the ideologies that insist on racial purity. The fascist regime in the futuristic Paris of Bilal insists on differences, borders, and purities. In the work of Bilal, the quest of the god Horus for an appropriate host body and sexual partner is also based on this fascist ideology. Therefore, it is the fascist ideology that produces bodies whose ontological difference Bilal acknowledges and criticizes. The themes Bilal works on in his comic books are not timeless but marked by a specific epoch (Тевене 2002: 33) and its troubles. In one interview Bilal himself stated that he draws inspiration from the world around him, making comic books that use the present world as inspiration, since he feels that he must tackle its problems (Бошковић 2002: 92–93).

Bearing this in mind, I turn to ancient Egyptian sources dealing with cross-ontological sex encounters. There, just like in the fictional world of Bilal, there are strict rules on who can reproduce with deities. I take this as a case that could easily be misinterpreted as ontology preceding ideology, a central tenet of the ontological turn. However, since in ancient Egypt, it was exclusively the ruling class that was said to have had sexual intercourse with deities, we cannot ignore the ideological background of what appears as an ontological question. As I demonstrate at the end of the paper, radical ontological difference becomes radical class difference. Contrary to advocates of the ontological turn who would leave this at the level of “thin description” (Babić 2019), a Marxist would insist that even the most radical class differences should be stripped of their universality. To paraphrase Slavoj Žižek (2010), just as it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, today, for some archaeologists it is easier to imagine different parallel worlds than to imagine that some differences are of class rather than of “being”.

Enki Bilal's *The Nikopol Trilogy* and *Immortel, ad vitam*

Enki Bilal is a French comic book artist born in Belgrade (then Yugoslavia) to a Bosnian father and a Czech mother. He is best known for the comic book *La trilogie Nikopol* (*The Nikopol Trilogy*) which includes *La Foire aux immortels* or “The Carnival of Immortals” from 1980, *La Femme piège* or “The Woman Trap” from 1986, and *Froid Équateur* or “Equator Cold” from 1992 (Bilal 2002). The three volumes were compiled in 1995 into a single volume. Bilal was encouraged to work on *bandes dessinées* (the French term for comic books, literally “drawn strips”) by no other than René Goscinny (Hanson 2005: 137)

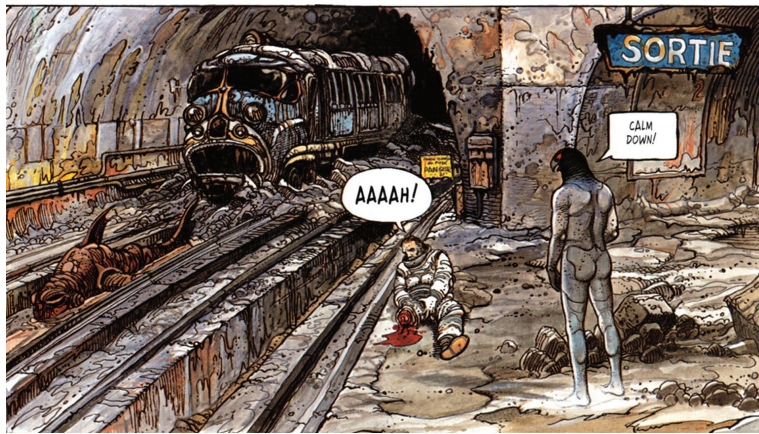


Figure 1. Nikopol and Horus at the metro station in Paris (Bilal 2002: 20).

who created the famous *Astérix* comic book series together with Albert Uderzo (Taterka 2016: 209). Bilal was familiar with Egyptology. This is clear from his comic books in which one finds drawings clearly inspired by ancient Egyptian artefacts from the Louvre Museum in Paris, such as mummified remains of animals. In addition to these, there are often accurate references to ancient Egyptian mythology. Egyptologists are also familiar with Bilal. On 11 October 2018, Bilal met Egyptologist Dimitri Meeks, after the latter presented a lecture, to discuss their views of ancient Egypt. This event was hosted by the Louvre as part of the exhibition “L’Archéologie en bulles” (“Archaeology Goes Graphic”) in Petite Galerie from 26 September 2018 to 1 July 2019 (<https://presse.louvre.fr/archaeology-goes-graphic/>, accessed 25 March 2022). Compared to *The Nikopol Trilogy*, the plot of the movie *Immortel, ad vitam* is far more condensed (on intermedial circulations in Bilal’s work see Sánchez 2015). In fact, the movie was deemed unfilmable by Bilal before producer Charles Gassot encouraged him to look at the latest evolutions in computer animation (Hanson 2005: 137).

According to Abraham Kawa, *The Nikopol Trilogy* (1980–1992) “meshed together European politics, organized religion, urban dystopias, and manipulative Egyptian gods recast as contemporary capitalist entrepreneurs” (Kawa 2009: 164). It spans the years 2023 to 2034 and deals with the love story of Alcide Nikopol, Jill Bioskop², and the ancient Egyptian god Horus. Nikopol is a human deserter who is frozen by the eugenics society “Globus” in 1993 as punishment for refusing to fight against the Sino-Soviet coalition and deserting. The French military court launches him into the cosmos, never to return and in a state of hibernation for the first twenty years. However, due to an accident, his body

² The surname Bioskop means “cinema” in Serbo-Croatian and Bosnian.



Figure 2. Jill in a bathtub crying dark blue tears
(Bilal, *Immortel, ad vitam*, 1h 17min 9sec).

escapes from the capsule sooner, and he is possessed by the god Horus who constructs a mechanical leg for Nikopol using a piece of iron from the metro railway (Figure 1). Horus and Nikopol become entangled (for the concept of entanglement as understood in this paper see Hodder 2012) since Nikopol can only move if Horus possesses him, as the mechanical leg is too heavy for human muscles (see Ueckmann 2005: 310 who interprets Nikopol as Automaton of Horus).

Unlike Nikopol who appears in all three parts of the comic book, Jill, a journalist from London, first appears in the second part of *The Nikopol Trilogy* (Bilal 2002). She has dark blue hair, dark blue fingernails and dark blue bodily fluids such as tears and blood (Figure 2). According to the psychoanalytic reading of Natascha Ueckmann (2005: 312), Jill's corporeality is a materialization of her depressive, vulnerable, and anxious state (i.e., blue). However, these features, together with the fact that in the movie *Immortel, ad vitam* Jill has special powers, may suggest that Bilal could have been inspired by the so-called "indigo children." Indigo children are a New Age concept that ascribes special, unusual, and sometimes supernatural abilities to certain children.³ Although indigo children were not originally believed to actually have an indigo body colour, Bilal may have used the body colour to convey the uniqueness of Jill.

The comic book does not deal in detail with the work of the eugenics society "Globus," a topic instead covered in detail in the movie *Immortel, ad vitam*

³ The term was introduced by parapsychologist and self-described psychic Nancy Ann Tappe in the 1970s. Tappe dealt with "life colours" or single colours of auras that remain constant throughout life. She argued that during the late 1960s and early 1970s many children were being born with indigo auras (Singer 2017).

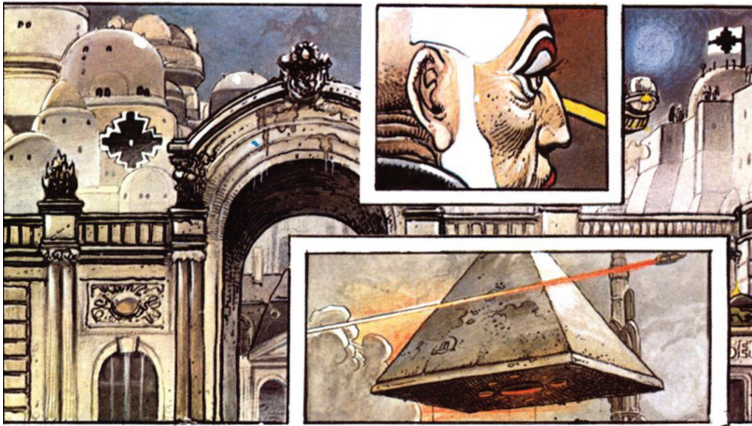


Figure 3. Pyramid-shaped spaceship in the sky above Paris (Bilal 2002: 5).

(2004) where society is simply called “Eugenics.”⁴ Furthermore, ancient Egyptian motifs in the works of Bilal have only recently attracted the attention of Egyptologists (Fernández Pichel and Orriols-Llonch 2023; Matić 2018b). They were used by Bilal among else to communicate ontology as one of the central themes of his works (cf. Ueckmann 2005). Bilal’s world is populated by humans (genetically and mechanically altered and unaltered), extra-terrestrials of different kinds, animals, and ancient Egyptian deities. In this world, corrupt governments and crime syndicates use various means to stay in power, much as ancient Egyptian deities used various means to dominate the divine realm (Figure 3). The two worlds clash, and the ontological difference between humans and deities becomes a crucial obstacle. Unlike humans, deities can use their immortal superiority to further their agenda, and one way of ensuring survival is sexual reproduction with appropriate beings.

Cross-ontological sex in *The Nikopol Trilogy and Immortel, ad vitam*

The central theme of Bilal’s comic book and its movie adaptation is the question of ontology. Are humans still human after genetic and mechanical altera-

⁴ Eugenics is the idea that the genetic quality of the human population can be improved by excluding people and groups judged to be inferior or by promoting those considered to be superior. In our world, eugenics in practice had gruesome consequences (Bashford and Levine 2010) and even found its way into early Egyptology (Challis 2013; Matić 2020: 15–24).



Figure 4. Nikopol, Jill, and Horus in bed
(Bilal, *Immortel, ad vitam*, 1h 19min 38sec).

tions? Is immortality appropriate for humans? How do ancient Egyptian deities reproduce and what beings are appropriate sexual partners for them? Bilal provides answers to all these questions. He chooses not to present genetically and mechanically altered humans as appropriate hosts for Horus in his pursuit of political power in Paris. An appropriate host, and thus an appropriate and (actual) human, is the genetically and mechanically unaltered Nikopol. At the same time, the appropriate female partner for Horus is the non-human girl Jill with special powers, one of them being the ability to procreate with gods. Therefore, Bilal seems to insist on the existence of clear ontological borders between humans, cyborgs, deities, and non-humans, just like in the comic books. This is also materialized in his claims throughout the comic book series and movie that the outer district of Paris is teeming with non-humans of various sorts. The movie version of the story is quite explicit about this. Horus uses the body of an unaltered human – Nikopol – to reproduce with the mutant girl Jill. Frequent sexual encounters between Nikopol/Horus and Jill in the movie are framed as rape (Figure 4). Véronique Sina (2016: 188) even interprets this as an enforced transformation of Jill into a human woman through socio-cultural normativity.

Explorations on ontology and, more broadly, what it means to be human, are also expressed in the comic book trilogy and film in terms of the anxiety concerning the child of Jill and Nikopol/Horus. For example, in the third comic book, the son of Nikopol finds himself in a hospital room. There he sees a mural of Jill and finds out from a nurse that she has given birth to “something...‘not quite’ natural” in the same hospital and that his father “went crazy, broke down the doors and killed everyone, seized Jill and her offspring and disappeared” (Bilal 2002). Again, Bilal indicates that there is a difference in divine and human nature, such that the offspring of Nikopol entangled with Horus and Jill becomes something not entirely natural (Figure 5). The movie version of the story ends with Jill taking a red pill, which completes her transition to a human



Figure 5. Indigo Horus, child of Jill and Horus/Nikopol (Bilal 2002: 176).

being (“human woman”) and causes memory loss (a reference to the second part of *The Nikopol Trilogy*). She has a non-human indigo-haired child in a levitating baby basket and an indigo-coloured aggressive falcon child, children of Nikopol and Horus respectively (Figure 6). These ontological borders are also insisted upon by Horus throughout the comic books and the movie in his statements on the weakness of the human species. This is why one of the characters in the third comic book, a geneticist named Yéléna Prokosh-Tootobi, is after data on Jill’s child (Bilal 2002).

Ultimately, we are also dealing with ontological hierarchies, as deities are above non-humans with special powers. The latter are above humans, and humans are above genetically and mechanically altered humans or cyborgs. That is why Horus, both in the first part of the comic book and the movie, claims that he



Figure 6. Indigo-coloured falcon child of Jill and Horus (Bilal, *Immortel, ad vitam*, 1h 34min 33sec).

has unsuccessfully inhabited other bodies before Nikopol and adds that “sickness and mutations are eating away the quarters adjacent to this city...healthy bodies are rare...” (Bilal 2002). This ties well with the fact that in the world of Bilal, the government in power in Paris is fascist⁵ and ascribes much importance to racial purity.⁶ This also implies that the citizens of fictional futuristic Paris are regularly confronted with questions of who counts as human. For example, in a conversation with Nikopol in the third part of the comic book, Horus announces that he will leave him but also that he will inspire a new order and replace humankind with something better. Thus, in the comic book, Horus would have ancient Egyptian deities to create and rule over a divinely inspired new world. Some interpret this as a clear reference to the US’s attempts at global hegemony (McKinne 2020: 176). However, this does not seem to be based on the words of Horus. In fact, the reasons Horus gives for his choice to start a new world order are the mortality of humans and their short life span.

Bearing all of the above in mind, sex, in the work of Bilal, is therefore not only a means of reproduction but also an ideology, a result of power relations (*cf.* Foucault 1978; Matić 2021). We cannot understand the ontological differ-

⁵ In fact, fascism features in other Bilal’s works, such as his first directed and co-written feature film *Bunker Palace Hotel* from 1989. The film is set in Belgrade in an alternative reality and deals with a political system that in the words of Bilal “mostly resembles fascism” (Tunić 2018).

⁶ Bilal’s interest in human segregation can also be found in some of his most recent works such as *The Hatzfeld Tetralogy* (1998–2007) dealing with segregation based on religious affiliation and nationalism, certainty related to the background story involving orphans from the Yugoslav civil war trying to reunite with each other (Tunić 2018).

ences and the ways ontological borders are strictly kept without understanding the ideologies that are behind them. In the case of Bilal's fictional world, these are futuristic fascist ideologies that very much and deliberately resemble actual fascist ideologies of the 20th century. In such ideologies, the insistence on ontological purity is a metaphor for the insistence on racial purity (Young 1995).

Cross-ontological sex in Ancient Egypt

When strict rules on cross-ontological sex are concerned, ancient Egypt provides us with comparable cases from different periods (von Lieven 2013; von Lieven 2014; Matić 2018a; Matić 2018b; Matić 2023). However, in ancient Egypt, these cases are devoid of any fascist and racist ideologies in the background. As I shall demonstrate next, other ideologies seem to have produced these strict rules of cross-ontological coitus.

Already Papyrus Westcar (Papyrus Berlin 3033, 9.9–10) of the Late Middle Kingdom (ca. 1800–1650 BCE) informs us of Ruddjedet, the wife of a priest of god Re and the mother of three male children fathered by this deity (Blackman 1988: 11–12). These three children became the future kings of Egypt. In the *Divine Birth Legend* of Hatshepsut (ca. 1478–1458 BCE) and Amenhotep III (ca. 1391–1353 BCE), the queens Ahmose (mother of Hatshepsut) and Mutemwiya (mother of Amenhotep III) are both impregnated by the god Amun, who takes the form of the king in the story in order to approach these women. Pharaoh's wife recognises both the god and her husband, the former through his smell, the latter through the vision of his body. They have sex and the queen gets impregnated with a divine seed, later giving birth to a child who grows up to have a body with divine features (Matić 2018a; Matić 2023). Furthermore, Papyrus Leiden T20 and Papyrus Louvre 3218 from the Ptolemaic period (305–30 BCE) inform us that the penis of god Osiris is in *hnm.wt*-women (Allam 2006: 48). Although the exact translation of *hnm.t*-woman is debated (Quack 2009: 157–160), it has been suggested that the phallus determinative⁷ used to write this word could indicate that it is a designation for a female sex-worker (Quack 2009: 158).

Common to all of these cases is that, although sexual intercourse between deities and humans was imagined by ancient Egyptians, the male partner had to be divine and the female partner human. Just like in ancient Greek mythology, it is the male gods who initiate relationships with mortal women, the cause being

⁷ Determinatives or classifiers are hieroglyphic signs in ancient Egyptian writing system which do not have sound values but are used in writing to designate the meaning of the word.

the sexual desire from the side of divinity, and not a wish to generate particular progeny (Scodel 2021: 176). This is quite clear in the case of Amun who desires the wife of the Pharaoh before he has sex with her disguised as her husband. When ancient Egypt is concerned, in all of the cases except the one of Osiris and *hnm.wt*-women, we are informed about the offspring of the god and a human woman. These offspring are rulers of Egypt, also considered to be of divine nature. In ancient Egypt, the mothers of these divine beings are also not just any women, but the wife of a priest of god Re or the great royal wife of the reigning king himself. The opposite, the sexual encounter of a male human partner and a female divine partner, seems not to be attested. In fact, we know from the *Tale of the Herdsman* (Papyrus Berlin 3024), from the 12th Dynasty (ca. 1991–1802 BCE), that the encounter between a human man and a goddess was considered to be frightening for the man (Matić 2018b: 146–148). Unlike the case of Amun who intentionally takes the form of the Pharaoh to have sex with the queen, the goddess appears to the herdsman in a non-human form.

The reason for such a clear distinction regarding who can reproduce with whom may lie in the understanding and practice of gender and sexual intercourse in ancient Egyptian society. In general, women were subordinated to men in ancient Egypt, but a more nuanced intersectional approach demonstrates that things were not as simple as they might seem: some women were subordinated only to some men (Matić 2021). On the other hand, and without exception, humans were subordinated to deities. Therefore, a male penetrative human partner and a female divine partner would have caused an inversion of ontological difference (von Lieven 2013; von Lieven 2014: 22; Matić 2018b: 154–155). Furthermore, the human seed could not have produced divine offspring.

Consequently, just like in Bilal's world, ontological boundaries are usually not crossed and the only exception concerns the reproduction of the divine rulers: Pharaohs. Ultimately, like in Bilal's world, we are dealing with ideology here as well, since only the ruling family is of a divine nature and can procreate with divine beings. To paraphrase historical materialism, sex is the means of re-production. To put it in Egyptological terms, human-divine sex is the means of pharaonic class re-production. Ontological boundaries are kept, class boundaries are kept, and the ruling family uses them as an ideological tool. Therefore, ontological boundaries are also socio-culturally constructed and serve a specific social class, the ruling class, in establishing power relations with its subjects. One might accuse this view of "introducing Marxist theories 'behind the natives' back'" (for a defence of this introduction see Graeber 2015: 33–34). Nevertheless, the alternative approach based on the ontological turn fails to explain the fact that access to divine sex partners curiously coincides with access to ultimate power in the Nile Valley.

If we were to view cross-ontological sex encounters in ancient Egypt from the perspective of the flat ontology of symmetric agents in emerging assemblages, we could easily overlook the asymmetric gender and class relations between those who can and those who cannot have sexual encounters with deities. If we overlook the class background, we reiterate the powerlessness of the subject (Keil 2017: 56). An approach that takes power relations among “beings” seriously is one that allows us to really see ontological differences for what they are. This is why, in relation to the proper approach to cross-ontological sex encounters in ancient Egypt, I would like to rephrase Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and ask why return to the moderns (e.g., Bilal), when this is a question of the lives of the “primitives”? (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 209).⁸ The answer is that power relations and class differences behind certain ontologies are bluntly visible when we ourselves experience them.

Conclusion

Previous research on Egyptomania in comic books has demonstrated how stereotypes about ancient Egypt (for instance, the arcane wisdom of ancient Egyptians, their otherness, the seemingly magical powers of their priests, and so on) played a crucial role for artists in setting the story in ancient Egypt, although these same stereotypes do not necessarily form a crucial part of the story itself (Vasiljević 2012: 784; Васиљевић 2016: 216). The stereotype of the unprecedented wisdom of ancient Egyptians is present in the work of Bilal only to a certain extent. It is a part of the divine knowledge and power of ancient Egyptian gods, but nothing more than that. Here it serves to make a clear ontological distinction between deities and other beings, especially humans. Bilal does not present us with an *orientalist* (Said 1978) image of ancient Egyptian deities, since he does not place his entire story in Egypt or the Orient. His story takes place in a futuristic posthumanist world troubled by war, plagues, genetic mutations, and mechanical alterations. Cairo and the rest of Africa as they appear in *The Nikopol Trilogy* are no less futuristic than Paris or Berlin (Figure 7). This futuristic world is also troubled by fascism, an ideology that seems to lurk in the background of rigid borders between the bodies of different beings. The insistence of Horus on the appropriate host being unaltered is a metaphor for racial purity. Unless we understand this, we

⁸ The question Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987: 209) posed is: “Why return to the primitives, when it is a question of our own life?”. They ask this question in the context of social segmentarity arguing that modern societies are no less segmented than “primitive” ones.

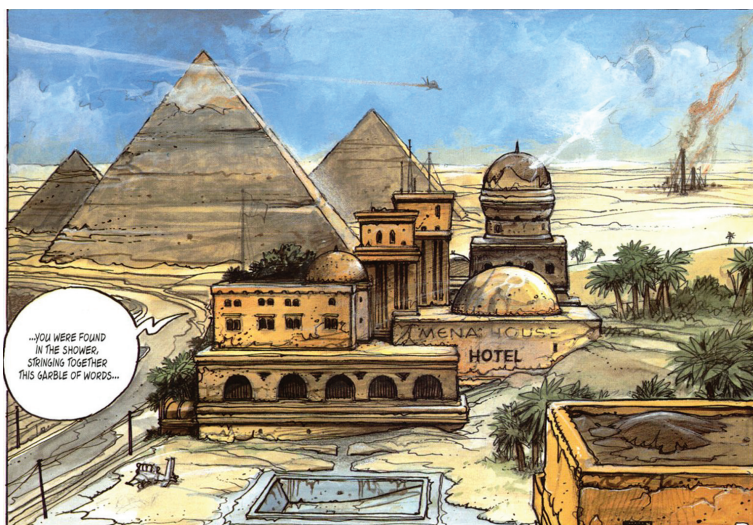


Figure 7. Futuristic Cairo with Giza plateau and the famous Mena House hotel (Bilal 2002: 115).

cannot fully comprehend the reasons behind the rules of cross-ontological sex encounters in Bilal's work.

The question of an appropriate partner for a divine being is also found in ancient Egyptian sources because this motif ultimately illustrates the ontological question of alterity found in different cultures (Simić 2020). Nevertheless, science fiction should not be a model or a source of analogies, but an inspiration for how different concepts and worlds can be imagined. It reminds us not to forget the ideologies in the background of many radical differences. Just as Bilal took divine agency and ontological differences seriously, so did ancient Egyptians. Egyptologists should also take ontology seriously, but not lose sight of the fact that ontological differences can serve the ideological aims of the ruling classes. Whenever ontologies establish asymmetrical power relations, we should investigate them in order to reveal who is at what end of the pole (*cf.* McGuire 2021). The ancient Egyptian examples discussed in this paper demonstrate that ontological differences can be imagined and maintained by the ruling classes to justify their rule as a consequence of sexual reproduction, a divine order of things. Bearing this in mind, we cannot simply accept that there are many worlds out there. If ruling classes in different worlds (e.g., ancient Egypt and the fictional world of Bilal) use ontological differences and similes to justify their place in these worlds, then maybe neither these ruling classes nor these worlds are so radically different after all.

References

- Allam, Mourad. 2006. "Der Totenbuchspruch 162*a im Papyrus Leiden T20 (Inv. NR. AMS 47A)", *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 80: 45–57.
- Babić, Staša. 2018. *Metaarheologija. Ogled o uslovima znanja o prošlosti*. Beograd: Clio.
- Babić, Staša. 2019. "Arheološka stratigrafija, ravna ontologija i tanka deskripcija. Beleška o (inter)disciplinarnom dijalogu". *Etnoantropološki problemi* 14.3: 811–831.
- Bashford, Alison and Philippa Levine, eds. 2010. *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bilal, Enki. 2002. *The Nikopol Trilogy*. Paris: Humanoids Publishing.
- Blackman, Aylward Manly. 1988. *The Story of King Kheops and the Magicians: Transcribed from Papyrus Westcar (Berlin Papyrus 3033)*. Reading: J.V. Books.
- Challis, Debbie. 2013. *The Archaeology of Race: The Eugenic Ideas of Francis Galton and Flinders Petrie*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Crellin, Rachel J., Craig N. Cipolla, Lindsay M. Montgomery, Oliver J.T. Harris, and Sophie V Moor. 2021. *Archaeological Theory in Dialogue. Situating Relationality, Ontology, Posthumanism, and Indigenous Paradigms*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fernández Pichel, Abraham I. and Marc Orriols-Llonch. 2023. "Some notes on Sex, Gender and Sexualisation of Ancient Egypt in contemporary popular culture" In *How Pharaohs became Media Stars: Ancient Egypt and Popular Culture*, edited by Abraham I. Fernández Pichel, 162–184. Oxford: Archaeopress.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality. Volume I. An Introduction*. Translated from French by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Graeber, David. 2015. "Radical alterity is just another way of saying "reality". A reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro". *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5.2: 1–41.
- Hanson, Matt. 2005. *Building Sci-fi Moviescapes: The Science Behind the Fiction*. Burlington: Focal Press.
- Harris, Oliver J. T. and Craig Cipolla. 2017. *Archaeological Theory in the New Millennium: Introducing Current Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Henare, Amiria J. M., Martin Holbraad and Sari Wastell, eds. 2007. *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hodder, Ian. 2012. *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Holbraad, Martin and Morten Axel Pedersen. 2017. *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kawa, Abraham. 2009. "Comics since the Silver Age", In *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Mark Bould, Andrew Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sherryl Vint, 163–173. London and New York: Routledge.
- Keil, Daniel. 2017. "The Ontological Prison. New Materialism and their Dead Ends". *Contradictions. A Journal for Critical Thought* 1.2: 41–59.
- Kuhn, Thomas S. 1962. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- von Lieven, Alexandra. 2013. “Jungfräuliche Mütter? Eine ägyptologische Perspektive”, In *Zu Bethlehem geboren? Das Jesus-Buch Benedikts XVI. und die Wissenschaft. Theologie kontrovers*, edited by Thomas Södling, 156–170. Freiburg: Herder.
- von Lieven, Alexandra. 2014. “Father of the Fathers, Mother of the Mothers: God as Father (and Mother) in Ancient Egypt”, In *The Divine Father. Religious and Philosophical Concepts of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity*. Themes in Biblical Narrative 18, edited by Felix Albrecht and Reinhard Feldmeier, 17–36. Leiden: Brill.
- Matić, Uroš. 2015. “Pyramids, dragons and whores: (Post)colonial myths and metafiction in “A Song of Ice and Fire” novels by GRR Martin”, *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 30.2: 172–184.
- Matić, Uroš. 2018a. “The sap of life: Materiality and sex in the divine birth legend of Hatshepsut and Amenhotep III”, In *Perspectives on materiality in ancient Egypt-agency, cultural reproduction and change*, edited by Renan Lemos, Carolina Vellozo and Érika Meynard, 35–54. Oxford: Archaeopress.
- Matić, Uroš. 2018b. “Ägyptische Gottheiten und ars erotica: Ein Versuch der ontologischen Anthropologie erotischen Netzwerken im alten Ägypten”, In *Funktion/en: Materielle Kultur – Sprache – Religion: Beiträge des siebten Berliner Arbeitskreises Junge Ägyptologie (BAJA 7) 2.12.–4.12.2016*. Göttinger Orientforschungen, 4, Ägypten, 64, edited by Alexandra Verbovsek, Burkhard Backes and Jan Aschmoneit, 141–159. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Matić, Uroš. 2019. “The Good God in the Form of Montu: Pharaoh as the Warrior God on the Battlefield. Beyond the Human” *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 34.2: 80–91.
- Matić, Uroš. 2020. *Ethnic Identities in the Land of the Pharaohs: Past and Present Approaches in Egyptology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Matić, Uroš. 2021. *Violence and Gender in Ancient Egypt*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Matić, Uroš. 2023. “On lustful deities and the ontological turn in archaeology of ancient Egypt”. *Ars & Humanitas* 17.2, in press.
- Matić, Uroš and Sonja Žakula. 2021. “Alien and Storytelling in the Anthropocene: Evolutionism, Creationism and Pseudoarchaeology in Science Fiction”, *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* 16.3: 677–698.
- McFarland, Sarah E. and Ryan Hediger, eds. 2009. *Animals and Agency: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- McGuire, Randall H. 2021. “A Relational Marxist Critique of Posthumanism in Archaeology”, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 31.3: 495–501.
- McKinne, Mark. 2020. *Postcolonialism and Migration in French Comics*. Leuven: Leuven University Press.
- Meskill, Lynn. 1998. “Consuming bodies: cultural fantasies of ancient Egypt”, *Body and Society* 4.1: 63–76.
- Nyord, Rune. 2018. “Taking Ancient Egyptian Mortuary Religion Seriously: Why Would We, and How Could We?”. *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 17: 73–87.

- Nyord, Rune. 2020. *Seeing Perfection: Ancient Egyptian Images beyond Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Olsen, Bjørnar. 2010. *In Defense of Things: Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects*. Lanham: Altamira Press.
- Quack, Joachim F. 2009. "Herodot, Strabo und die Pallakide von Theben". In *Tempelprostitution im Altertum. Fakten und Fiktionen*, edited by Tanja S. Scheer, 154–182. Berlin: Verlag Antike.
- Ribeiro, Artur. 2019. "Archaeology and the New Metaphysical Dogmas: Comments on Ontologies and Reality". *Forum Kritische Archäologie* 8: 25–38.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Salvioli, Stefano. 2011. "Sci-fi Quests for Longevity and Immortality", in *Discourses and Narrations in the Biosciences*, eds. Brian Hurwitz and Paola Spinozzi, 197–209. Göttingen: V&R unipress.
- Sánchez, Carlos Redondo. 2015. "Ilustración, Reescritura y Transficción de la Trilogie Nikopol de Enki Bilal," *1616: Anuario de Literatura Comparada* 5: 107–133.
- Scodel, Ruth. 2021. "Heroes and Nephilim. Sex between Gods and Mortals". In *Gods and Mortals in Early Greek and Near Eastern Mythology*, edited by Adrian Kelly and Christopher Metcalf, 169–184. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Simić, Marina. 2020. *Ontološki obrt. Uvod u kulturnu teoriju alteriteta*. Novi Sad: Mediterranean Publishing.
- Sina, Véronique. 2016. *Comic – Film – Gender. Zur (Re-)Medialisierung von Geschlecht im Comicfilm*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- Singler, Beth. 2017. *The Indigo Children: New Age Experimentation with Self and Science*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Taterka, Filip. 2016. "Egyptianizing Motifs in the Products of Popular Culture Addressed to Younger Recipients", in *Antiquity in Popular Literature and Culture*, eds. Konrad Dominas, Bogdan Trocha, and Elżbieta Wesolowska, 205–224. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Ueckmann, Natascha. 2005. "Hybride Kreaturen im modernen französischen Comic: Enki Bilal". in *Der automatisierte Körper. Literarische Visionen des künstlichen Menschen vom Mittelalter bis zum 21. Jahrhundert*. Körper • Zeichen • Kultur 17, edited by Cerstin Bauer-Funke and Gisela Febel, 301–328. Berlin: Weidler.
- Vasiljević, Vera. 2012. "Princess Ru and Papyrus* Stereotypes on ancient Egypt in graphic novels", *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* 7. 3: 763–788.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. 2016. *The Relative Native: Essays on Indigenous Conceptual Worlds*. Chicago: HAU Books.
- Young, R. J. 1995. *Colonial Desire. Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Žakula, Sonja and Uroš Matić. 2023. "The Motif of the "lost paradise" in blockbuster films set in the post-apocalypse". *Glasnik Etnografskog Instituta SANU* 71.3, 117–136.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2010. *Living in the End Times*. New York: Verso.
- Бошковић, Александар. 2002. Разговори. *Градац* 141–142: 92–94.
- Тевене, Жан Марк. 2002. Билал. *Градац* 141–142: 10–39.
- Васиљевић, Вера. 2016. *Сенка Египта*. Београд: Досије студио.

Internet sources

Tunić, Srđan. 2018. "Science Fiction Belgrade. Imagining different realities in the works of Enki Bilal and Aleksa Gajić". <http://unevenearth.org/2018/06/science-fiction-belgrade/>, accessed on 19. April 2023.
<https://presse.louvre.fr/archaeology-goes-graphic/>, accessed 25 March 2022

Filmography

Immortel, ad vitam, 2004. Directed by Enki Bilal. Paris: Duran Entertainment and Quantic Dream. 2004. DVD.

Uroš Matić
Institut za klasične studije
Univerzitet u Gracu
uros_arheo@yahoo.com

Egiptomanija, seks i ontologija u strip-trilogiji Nikopol (1980–1992) i filmu Immortel, ad vitam (2004)

Koristeći se primerom strip-trilogije *Nikopol* (1980–1992) Enkija Bilala i filma *Immortel, ad vitam* (2004), ovaj rad analizira temu seksa koji nadilazi ontološke kategorije, odnosno, seksualnog odnosa između ljudi i božanstava u modernoj naučnoj fantastici. Pitanje prikladnog seksualnog partnera ili partnerke za staroegipatska božanstva u radu Enkija Bilala je pitanje ontologije i rasne čistoće. Prikladan domaćin za boga Horusa je u Bilalovom delu ljudsko telo koje nije pretrpelo nikakve promene. Prikladna seksualna partnerka za boga Horusa je u Bilalovom delu ne-ljudska žena sa sposobnošću da začne sa božanstvom. Ova tema u Bilalovom radu je iznenađujuće slična pitanju prikladnih seksualnih partnera i partnerki za staroegipatska božanstva u staroegipatskim pisanim izvorima. Dok egipatski bogovi opšte samo sa boginjama i pojedinim ženama (na primer: supruga sveštenika boga Sunca Rea, supruga faraona), egipatske boginje ne opšte sa ljudskim muškarcima. U ovom radu pokazuje se da ono što bi zagovornici i zagovornice ontološkog obrta razumeli/e kao pitanje ontologije, ne možemo razumeti bez uzimanja ideologije u obzir. Kod Bilala je u pozadini ideologija fašizma, a u starom Egiptu ideologija klasne razlike. Posledično, ukoliko su ontologije ideološki proizvodi, one su društveno-kulturno konstruisane. Ukoliko različite vladajuće klase različitih svetova (fiktivnih, prošlih i sadašnjih) koriste iste ideje o privilegovanoj seksualnoj reprodukciji sa božanstvima, onda ni te vladajuće klase ni ti svetovi nisu toliko radikalno drugačiji jedni od drugih.

Ključne reči: egiptomanija, seks. Ontološki obrt, ideologija, re-produkcija, Enki Bilal

*Égyptomanie, sexe et ontologie dans la trilogie
Nikopol (1980–1992) et le film Immortel, ad vitam (2004)*

À partir de l'exemple de la trilogie *Nikopol* (1980–1992) et du film *Immortel, ad vitam* (2004) d'Enki Bilal, cet article analyse le sujet du sexe qui transcende les catégories ontologiques, c'est-à-dire la relation sexuelle entre humains et divinités dans la science-fiction moderne. La question de partenaire sexuel(le) approprié(e) pour les divinités égyptiennes antiques dans l'œuvre d'Enki Bilal est une question d'ontologie et de pureté raciale. Dans l'œuvre de Bilal, un hôte approprié pour le dieu Horus est un corps humain qui n'a subi aucune modification. Dans l'œuvre de Bilal, une partenaire sexuelle appropriée pour le dieu Horus est une femme non-humaine étant capable de concevoir avec une divinité. Ce sujet dans l'œuvre de Bilal ressemble étonnamment à la question de partenaires sexuel(le)s approprié(e)s pour les divinités égyptiennes évoquée dans les sources écrites égyptiennes antiques. Alors que les dieux égyptiens n'ont des relations sexuelles qu'avec les femmes humaines (par exemple: l'épouse du prêtre du dieu-soleil Rê, l'épouse du pharaon), les déesses égyptiennes n'ont pas de relations sexuelles avec les hommes humains. Dans cet article, on démontre que ce que les partisans du tournant ontologique comprendraient comme une question d'ontologie, ne peut être compris sans que l'idéologie soit prise en compte. Chez Bilal, c'est l'idéologie fasciste qui se trouve au fond, et dans l'Égypte antique, c'est celle de la différence de classe. Par conséquent, si les ontologies sont des produits idéologiques, elles sont construites socioculturellement. Si différentes classes dirigeantes de différents mondes (fictifs, passés et présents) utilisent les mêmes idées sur la reproduction sexuelle privilégiée avec des divinités, alors ni ces classes dirigeantes ni ces mondes ne sont si radicalement différents les uns des autres.

Mots-clés: Égyptomanie, sexe, tournant ontologique, idéologie, reproduction, Enki Bilal

Primljeno / Received: 24.4.2023.

Prihvaćeno / Accepted: 5.8.2023.