



## **EGYPTIAN CHEMISTRY AGRO-SCIENCES**

### **URSULA BIEMANN**

As a primal force, the Nile has always powerfully meddled with life, human existence included. In response, Egyptians have long built large-scale engineering projects and launched huge land reclamation ventures that could reallocate water across time and space for communities and entire ecosystems. The hydrologic workings of successive civilizing plans have laid their mechanisms inside and across each other, enmeshing them into a complex eroding whole. In the process they changed the ecology of the country. The High Dam, as the most prominent of these hydraulic structures, is a time barrier. It changed the floods, the seasons, the crops and the species. KIMA, the nitrate factory designed to compensate for at least part of the disruption, sits right next to the dam, admixing its own little composition to the Nile. A few hours further out into the desert, a vast New Valley project stretches out under the heat, sucking water from artificial Lake Nasser for tests in new food productions. Egypt is one large chemical experiment catalyzed by water engineering. Water is a coalescing agent in land-use politics, crop cycles, nitrate industries, soil composition, farmers' collectives, oxidants, irrigation technologies, and hydropower. These entities discussed in Egyptian Chemistry, constitute a significant part of Egyptian reality.

In Egypt's extreme hydrography entirely dependent on the Nile, it is easy to make out water's political potential to materialize national and societal visions. Since Anwar Abdel Nasser it has been clear to every president: To be in power in Egypt you need to be in control of water. In modern times, two particular models of water governance stand out for their distinct tactics in harvesting political power. To grasp the scope of this particular mode of civil engineering, capable of simultaneously mastering the course of water and of civil society, one must comprehend water as a vehicle for epic narratives. Take the Aswan High Dam. This emblematic infrastructure was envisioned by socialist Gamal Abdel Nasser, engineered by the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War, and built mainly by Nubian labor. At the time of construction, the massive hydropower project united the Soviets' vision of a progressive labor force with an Egyptian modernist project of transporting water and electricity to cities and villages. Damming as a form of rationing available resources into economically viable portions to be dealt out to all citizens throughout the year perfectly embodied the socialist principles. Simultaneously, the monolithic construct acted as a centralizing force for technocratic power and for the national project at large. As a giant collective achievement, it quite simply stands for national pride, still today. And it's of utmost strategic sensitivity. The patrolling martial entities can't help but conjure the

cataclysmic imagination that if the High Dam, by whatever natural or otherwise hostile force should get fatally damaged, Egypt as a whole will be gone.

Toshka, on the other hand, a New Nile Valley irrigation project of pharaonic scale, enacts an entirely different vision?

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