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HILDA MATTA

CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVED IN PROVERBS: PROFESSIONS IN EGYPT

Abstract: The main aim of the study is to show that proverbs serve as a means of preserving cultural heritage. Since professions, as an example, are part of cultural heritage, the study focuses on those mentioned in the Egyptian proverbs from the 19th century. The source of these proverbs is the iconic collection of Ahmad Taymour. The corpus of the study focuses solely on professions of the simple working class, which resulted in the identification of 53 professions mentioned in 103 proverbs. Five of the professions referenced in 22 proverbs are now extinct, yet most of these proverbs remain very popular and are still used by Egyptians till this very day. These extinct professions include female and male slaves, the water carrier, donkey driver and mesaharaty (Ramadan drummer). Furthermore, the study has shown that proverbs often convey the nature of the job. They have given insight into the lives of the people practicing these professions, naming different aspects of the job such as the requirements, obstacles, materials, products and tools. The proverbs also express the perception of these professions and their value in society.

Keywords: Egyptian proverbs, professions, cultural heritage, extinct professions, society's perception of the professions, aspects of the professions

1. Introduction

While defining the proverb, many scholars have pointed out some of its main functions such as transferring wisdom from one

generation to another and playing a role in both communication and language learning.

One important function of proverbs is their cultural significance, especially their role in preserving cultural heritage. They serve as documentation of culture, customs and traditions, and a record of the history of a nation in general. Proverbs convey the social and economic context in which they were created. Yu Dz-yadyk and Ildikou Csajbok-Twerefou (2023: 53) state that proverbs “are directly related to folk traditions and help to preserve history, culture, and the mentality of society.” Furthermore, Buriyev Dilmurod Arzimurodovich (2023: 92) states that “Proverbs and sayings cover the socio-historical experience of the people.”

Further concepts relevant to the present study are endurance, cultural memory and intentional preservation. The study is based on the fact that proverbs serve as a means of preservation only if they remain in circulation. Most of the proverbs in this study are still in use today, demonstrating their endurance. People continue to use them because they play a role in communication. These proverbs are also part of cultural memory, reflecting and constituting the identity and values of the people. According to Dinter, cultural memory is a “collective memory shared by societies and communities and recalled by symbolic stimuli”. (Dinter: 2). Yet the wording and thus the “cultural realia” and “traditional matters” (Mieder 2004: 137) embedded in the proverbs are of lesser importance, as speakers focus on the meaning and function of the proverbs. The proverbs are associated with specific wording to which people are accustomed and which they unconsciously use. Furthermore, people do not use proverbs with the aim of an intentional preservation of the elements they contain. This is the role of collectors and scholars, who among others collect proverbs to ensure that this oral tradition does not die out.

What counts for this study are the elements within the proverbs that serve as means of preserving customs and traditions. Wolfgang Mieder specifies some of these elements:

More than other scholars, folklorists and other cultural historians are also interested in the content of proverbs, to wit what cultural realia are contained in individual proverbs and how they differ from culture to culture in proverbs that might mean the same. Many proverbs refer to old measurements, obscure professions,

outdated weapons, unknown tools, plants, animals, names and various other traditional matters. (Mieder 2004: 137)

Mieder identifies professions as one of the traditional themes embedded in proverbs. The interest in examining professions as a source for explaining proverbs has been shared by several scholars. Lutz Röhrich and Gertraud Meinel state that crafts in German proverbs and idioms have influenced the language. Proverbs convey insights into the cultural life of previous centuries and serve as a source for the history of German crafts. They have examined the origin and meaning of many proverbs and idioms, that refer to crafts and how they influence the language (Röhrich and Meinel 1971/72: 163–164). Röhrich and Mieder (1977: 65) regard proverbs and idioms as a mirror of the cultural and historical backgrounds of work, customs and folk belief.

The present study does not approach proverbs from a linguistic or semantic point of view, but rather sees them as a means of documenting history and preserving cultural heritage, as they help us learn about the professions of a past era by mentioning them and thus preserving them for the future generations even if some of these professions are now extinct. Scholars learn about these professions and gain further information about them from the proverbs.

The collections and studies of Egyptian proverbs have paid attention to the role of proverbs in conveying the nature and history of the Egyptians. These studies have recognized not only the general role of proverbs but also the specific role of professions mentioned in proverbs in preserving cultural heritage. The following collections and studies of Egyptian proverbs are based on the conviction that proverbs are a source of documentation and a means of understanding the Egyptians in general and their professions in particular. The collection of Egyptian proverbs by John Lewis Burckhardt dating to the early 19th century recognized the role of proverbs in providing insight into the lives of the Egyptians. His book (first published in 1834) reflects this conviction starting from its title, “Arabic Proverbs or, The Manners and Customs of the modern Egyptians”, which emphasizes that proverbs reflect manners and customs and are key to understanding the Egyptians. Burckhardt wrote: “I also hope that it [the collection] will contribute to knowing the Arabic

People and its current language” (Burckhardt 2012: 25). Mieder writes in his introduction to the reprint of the German version of Burckhardt’s book, that Burckhardt’s proverbs count as valuable “Kulturdokumente” (cultural documents) (Burckhardt 2012: 7). He also states that this collection will contribute to understanding the way of living and thinking of the Arabs. (Burckhardt 2012: 8) Burckhardt’s collection includes 782 proverbs written in Arabic and arranged alphabetically according to the first letter of the proverb, followed by the translation and explanation of the proverb. In his explanations customs and traditions are revealed. Later in 1953, Ahmad Ameen published “The Dictionary of Customs, Traditions and Egyptian Expressions” in which his comments and explanations of the different traditions are partially based on proverbs that he cites to prove his statements. Nabila Ibraheem, a well-known folklorist, writes that the special thing that Ameen did is to register the Egyptian proverbs according to subjects, unlike others who arranged the proverbs alphabetically. What motivated him to do that was his recognition of the great importance of the proverbs of each nation as a significant source for the moral and social historian. She further quotes Ameen as saying that collecting Egyptian proverbs about women enables us to understand how women were perceived (Ibraheem 1974: 174).

Ibraheem Sha’lan’s book titled “The Egyptian Folk in Their Colloquial Proverbs” (1972) follows the same concept, stating that the study of proverbs is a study of the lives of different sectors of the people with the variety of their work, ways of communicating, manners and traditions (Sha’lan 1972: 3–4). For him the proverb is a “social document” (Sha’lan 1972: 5), a means of monitoring and recording (Sha’lan 1972: 39) and has a social function (Sha’lan 1972: 43). Sha’lan’s book is not a collection of proverbs like Burckhardt’s but is divided into chapters. Two of its chapters deal with peasants and professions. In these, he discusses different professions and quotes proverbs to support his points. According to Sha’lan proverbs refer to different professions that were common in the past, some of which are now extinct while others are resisting progress, but are also diminishing (Sha’lan 1972: 233). Within the frame of the paremiology of Egyptian proverbs further studies have focused on professions

mentioned in proverbs. Sha'lan (2012), in his article "The Crafts in the Egyptian Popular Proverbs", writes that "The proverbs are the cornerstone for knowing the peoples" (Sha'lan 2012: 135).

Ahmad Ibraheem Al-Şaify published in 2020 the "Encyclopedia of Crafts, Industries, and Works in Egyptian Popular Proverbs". The encyclopedia is organised according to different professions and lists 126 professions. In the introduction, he explains that he starts with a certain profession by providing a brief study of the related proverbs, followed by a comprehensive explanation of each proverb, the meaning of its words, and the context in which it is used (Al-Şaify 2020: 12). In addition, he refers to the article by Hossam Abd El-Zaher published in 2013 titled "The Popular Proverbs as a Source of Studying Egyptian Professions and Crafts in the 19th Century" (Al-Şaify 2020: 12). These collections and studies of Egyptian proverbs not only demonstrate the strong belief that proverbs serve as a means to understand the nature of the Egyptian people in general, but also convey the conviction that they are an important source for learning about different professions, especially those of past centuries, as reflected in Egyptian proverbs. Setting aside the collections that did not aim at focusing on the professions mentioned in the proverbs, it appears that the studies using professions as means to illustrate the nature of the Egyptian people and their cultural history and heritage have mainly examined each profession individually, explaining its nature and providing further information drawn not only from the proverbs but also from other sources. An overall evaluation of all proverbs containing professions has not been provided by the authors. Often, the quoted proverbs do not explicitly mention the names of the professions. Furthermore, the authors often did not adhere to the strict definition of a proverb, so that similes, idiomatic phrases and even vendors' cries (Al-Şaify) are included in their studies, which does not comply with the titles of their books.

The fact that some of these collections and studies date from the 20th. and 21st. centuries will not serve the present study in concentrating on the proverbs of the 19th. century as the main aim of the study is to show that proverbs are a means of preserving cultural heritage, which means that they must originate from earlier times, and that among other things, encapsulate the professions

of the past. Specifically, the main aim of the study is to identify the professions mentioned in the proverbs, provide further information about them as included in the proverbs, and ultimately show that proverbs are a means of conserving cultural heritage through the role they played for the professions.

The questions that the study aims to answer are as follows: Which professions are mentioned in the Egyptian proverbs? Have the professions only been mentioned or do the proverbs contain further information about them? How did society perceive and evaluate the different jobs? Did some of the professions mentioned become extinct, and if so, how many are there? Has the fact that these professions no longer exist influenced their use in the present time?

The corpus of the present study is Ahmad Taymour's collection "The Colloquial Proverbs". The assurance that this collection will serve the aim of the study lies in the fact that it was compiled before 1930, as Taymour died that year and the collection was published posthumously in 1949. Thus, the proverbs in this collection date back to the 19th and early 20th centuries. Another important reason for choosing Taymour's collection is that it is, from the point of view of Egyptian and Arab paremiologists, the best collection of Egyptian colloquial proverbs. "According to many scholars, his [Taymour's] phenomenal work ["The Colloquial Proverbs"] is regarded as a remarkable thesaurus that provides a substantial and comprehensive collection of Egyptian proverbs which is fundamentally an indispensable basis for profound research. This collection is also of immense value to scholars of various other fields" (Matta 2025: 1 – 2). The proverbs in Taymour's collection are arranged alphabetically according to the first letter of the proverb and not by subject, so that part of my work has been to extract the proverbs mentioning a specific profession. There are other proverbs that discuss work or trade in general, or even allude to a particular profession, but the proverbs analyzed here are only those that explicitly mention a specific profession by name. Another restriction of the underlying corpus is that I have focused on professions of the simple working class, in other words, the lower-class jobs. Excluded are "glamorous" and highly regarded professions such as judges, doctors, employees and clergymen.

2. *Corpus*

The corpus features the professions arranged alphabetically. Only proverbs that mention the professions are included. After listing the proverbs and their explanations, I will provide an overall summary of how the professions are portrayed. If there is only one or two proverbs related to a particular profession, or if the explanation is clear, I will give no further comments to avoid redundancy. Proverbs that mention two professions will be counted only once in the total, even if they are repeated under both professions. For easy reference, the numbering of the proverbs follows the Arabic collection of Taymour (2011), to facilitate locating the original wording in Arabic, as transcribing the proverbs would take up space. The numbers also correspond to the English translation (Matta 2025). The number of each proverb will be given in brackets each time it is mentioned in the text. The cited proverbs will appear in quotation marks. If a proverb contains direct speech, it will be placed in single quotation marks. The proverbs will only be written in the English translation. The explanation is translated from Taymour and placed in simple brackets following the proverb. Further information from my side will be placed in brackets followed by my initials “H.M.” If an exact translation for a particular word is not possible, it will be transcribed and placed in single quotation marks. Some proverbs do not require explanation, especially as I have omitted the figurative meaning. I have translated all passages in the references that are written in Arabic or German.

- *The astrologer*

166: “He is blind and makes himself an astrologer.” (He is incapable of being an astrologer.)

The astrologer must have good eyesight to be able to practice his job.

- *The baker*

92: “Give the bread to its bakers even if they eat half of it.” (Even if the bakers eat half the bread, the remaining half is still good because of its high quality. If you give your bread to an ignorant baker, he will spoil it all.)

1121: "The baker is the partner of the bookkeeper." (Because the baker bribes him, the bookkeeper overlooks the baker's cheating.)

1122: "A baker and a bookkeeper." (Said about the corrupt salesman who determines both the weight and the price, and controls them without anyone to check on him.)

Baking requires special skills. Furthermore, bakers could be corrupt and cheat the customers.

- *The barber*

592: "If you see the barber shaving the beard of your neighbor, wet your own beard with soap." (Be prepared because you might encounter the same destiny as your neighbor.)

2734: "A barber opened (his shop): he started with the head of a bald man." (The barber is unlucky because his first customer is bald.)

2782: "'Molokheya' and fresh bread, oh what devastation it is for you, O barber." (The barber is a poor man with many children.) 'Molokheya' is a thick green vegetable soup (H.M.) and requires a lot of fresh bread, so that this meal is a financial burden for the poor man.

The barber is considered poor.

- *The beggar*

478: "The one whose door is known to the beggar; oh, how long is his suffering." (The beggar is very persistent.)

998: "They made the female beggar get married, so she would not be needy; she put a piece of bread in the bag and said: 'Charity, O my mistress!'" (Although she was no longer needy, she continued begging.)

1646: "The beggar's eye came out, and the owner of the house is taking his time." (The beggar became very tired and suffered, while the landlord is taking his time in giving him what he had asked for.)

1647: "Half the world belongs to the beggar." (The beggar goes everywhere and collects things, so that he acquires a lot.)

1648 and 1993: “A beggar hates a beggar, and the owner of the house hates the two.” (Beggars hate each other and are competing because they are forced to share what is given.)

Beggars are persistent and people do not recognize their suffering and need. Beggars may earn a lot, and begging can become a habit or even an obsession, and they also feel threatened by other beggars.

- *The blacksmith*

2797: “The one who is the neighbor of the blacksmith will be burnt by his fire.”

The blacksmith deals with fire.

- *The bookkeeper*

1121: “The baker is the partner of the bookkeeper.” (Compare 3.2)

1122: “A baker and a bookkeeper.” (Compare 3.2)

Bookkeepers are regarded as corrupt.

- *The builder*

1681: “Make the skillful builder work with you even if he eats your lunch.” (What you spend on a skillful builder will pay back and is not considered a loss.)

Building requires skill.

- *The butcher*

958: “The butcher does not fear the large number of sheep.” (The butcher knows that the enormous number of sheep does not help them defend themselves.)

1270: “The man is like a butcher; he does not like but the fat one.” (The man chooses the fat and strong woman for marriage like the butcher, who chooses the mutton, because of the good quality of its meat.)

2648: “‘Why is your meat of bad quality?’ He said: ‘(It is) from a butcher I know.’” (The butcher only keeps his own benefit in mind, so that he cheats even his own friends.)

The butcher is not afraid of many sheep. He is not honest.

- *The camel-driver*

1683: "Did you see the camel? He said: 'And neither the camel-driver.'"

2493: "I saw neither the camel nor the camel-driver."

- *The captain:*

28: "The son of the captain became too heavy for the boat and perished the food." (The captain's son does not help because of the position of his father. Therefore, he is a burden.)

487: "He who makes himself a captain should get the wind by its horns." (He who says he is worthy of being a captain should find ways to make the ship sail. That proves that he is worthy of being the boss.)

1288: "He is riding for free and flirts with the captain's wife." (The passenger has no sense of honor as he pays back the captain's favor by flirting with his wife.)

1335: "The captain has an opinion, and the sailor has an opinion." (Each one of them does not know what the other wants.)

2727: "The boat that has two captains sinks."

2733: "The south wind throws the captain to a place that he hates." (The south wind is hated by the seamen, and the captain is helpless in the face of this wind.)

The captain should have skill in dealing with the wind. He sometimes disagrees with his subordinates, but disagreeing with another captain leads to drowning.

- *The carpenter*

733: "The door of the carpenter is dislocated." (The carpenter neglects his own property.)

1633: "The skillful woman weaves with the leg of a donkey and the stinky woman beats the carpenter." (The skillful ones do not need the perfect tool. But the clumsy one drains out the carpenter.)

1914: "The knot beats the carpenter." (A knot in the wood stops the carpenter's work. It is a problem that cannot be solved.)

1980: "When the carpenter encounters a knot, he is perplexed." (Compare explanation for 1914)

Sometimes a carpenter neglects his own property. Knots and bad helpers drain him out.

- *The confectioner*

2638: "Not everyone who arranges the pots (kitchenware) says: 'I am a confectioner.'" (It is not enough to seem to be doing the right thing.)

The confectioner must have skill.

- *The cook*

637: "If your cook is great, you are not safe from disgust."

1784: "The cook of the poison must taste it."

Even a great cook makes mistakes, and he must bear the consequences of his actions.

- *The corpse-washer*

1870: "My female enemy and she became my corpse-washer." (The corpse-washer might gloat.)

2057: "The female corpse-washer is blind and the gravedigger is crippled."

2058: "'Wash his corpse and make him a turban!' He said: 'Am I a corpse-washer and a guarantor of paradise?'" (The people asked the corpse washer to make a turban for the deceased so that he might go to paradise. He replied that this is not within the scope of his job.)

The female corpse-washer must be fit for the job. The corpse-washer cannot go beyond the scope of his work.

- *The dancer*

910: “The woman dancer (ghazeya) dies, and her finger is dancing.” (‘Ghazeya’ is a dancer who dances and plays on the rope in the countryside. She cannot quit the habit of dancing.)

1244: “The world is like a ‘ghazeya’: she dances a bit for everyone.” (‘Ghazeya’ see 910.)

The “ghazeya” cannot give up dancing and performs for everybody and not just for a single person.

- *The diver:*

2912: “The water proves the diver a liar.” (Deep water is the real test for the diver.)

- *The donkey driver:*

540: “If the donkey drivers oppose each other in stubbornness, it is the luck of the passengers.” (If the donkey drivers fight, they lower the fees.)

713 “What made him carry and what made him load and what made him a donkey driver, the charge he gets is not equal to the errand.” (What made the donkey driver do all that useless effort, although the fee is less than the effort.)

1181: “The fighting of the donkey drivers, the luck of the passengers.” (Compare explanation of 540)

Competition among donkey drivers lowers the fee. In general, they are poorly paid.

- *The dressmaker*

86: “I would rather sew with a horn of a palm tree than have the mistress (dressmaker) say: ‘Give me the fees.’”

The dressmaker’s fees are high.

- *The druggist*

1725: “The morning of the seller of beans and not the morning of the druggist.” (Beans are eaten for breakfast. People prefer beans as the need for food in the morning is greater than that for perfumes.)

1910: “The druggist who is like pitch loses the mastic and preserves the paper.” (The ignorant druggist underrates the important substance and preserves the unimportant display.)

The ignorant druggist does not know his priorities. People prefer the seller of beans over him.

- *The drummer*

1812: “As long as I am a piper and you are a drummer, oh how many long nights we will see.” (The nature of their jobs requires staying up very late.)

- *The ferry driver*

2755: “The old ferry driver has been spared.” (The ferry driver transports people in his boat.)

- *The foreman*

173: “He is one eyed and makes himself a foreman.” (A foreman supervises farmers and others.)

The foreman must be fit for his job.

- *The garbage collector*

1338: “A garbage collector and a flower in his hand.”

1337: “A garbage collector whose needs are covered is a hidden sultan.”

The garbage collector is disdained by the people, and they mock him. But being self-sufficient makes him as good as a ruler.

- *The gardener*

3128: “He sells flowers to the gardeners.” (This is useless, as gardeners have flowers in abundance.)

- *The goldsmith*

29: “The son of the goldsmith longs for a ring from his father.”

831: “The daughter of the goldsmith longs for a necklace from her father.”

2779: “(She is) crippled and tells the goldsmith: ‘Make the anklet heavier!’”

The goldsmith’s son, daughter and a crippled woman ask for his products.

- *The gravedigger*

2057: “The female corpse-washer is blind and the gravedigger is crippled.”

The gravedigger must be fit for his job.

- *The guard*

1149: “Take a man for yourself and he will be a guard for you at night and a hireling at daytime.” (Get married and your husband will benefit you.)

1835: “Be hostile to a prince and not be hostile to a guard.” (Hostility against a great man does not harm, as he will do nothing to shame himself, unlike the disdained guard whose enmity can bring you great distress.)

The guard protects his wife at night, but he is very hostile and mean when people disagree with him.

- *The harvester*

1273: “Where can the sun go from the neck of the harvester?” (The harvester endures a lot of sunshine.)

The harvester is exposed to the sun as he works in the open field all day.

- *The hireling*

1149: “Take a man for yourself and he will be a guard for you at night and a hireling at daytime.” (See *The guard*)

The hireling serves his wife.

- *The hunter*

405: "He who made it easy for the hunter will make it easy for the frying." (If God facilitates the beginning, He will facilitate the end.)

1906: "The bird is cleaning its feathers, and the hunter is being fried." (The bird is at ease while the hunter cannot catch the bird and is waiting for a chance to catch it.)

2182: "They said to the hunter: 'What have you caught?' He said: 'What is in the net is gone.'"

Hunting requires patience, but there is the risk of not catching anything.

- *The magician*

1014: "The magician does not die except by the snake."

1015: "The magician does not forget the death of his son and the snake does not forget the cutting off of her tail."

3100: "Oh, how many things do you have in the bag, you magician." (The magician hides snakes and other things in his bag to impress the audience during his show.)

The magician's job forces him to work with snakes, which he fears and which might kill him or his son.

- *The maid*

980: "Maids serve maids, how treacherous are you, O fate." (Used for two who used to be equal, but one was raised by luck to a higher status.)

Maids are disdained.

- *The makeup artist*

1962: "She is bleary-eyed and pretends to be a makeup artist."

The makeup artist should be fit for her job.

- *The master*

1234: "The strike of the master equals one thousand, even if it fails." (The proverb praises the skillful master.)

1682: "The work of the master for his son." (Something is so skillfully done as if it is the work of a master for his son.)

3181: "The master dies, and he goes on learning."

Being a master means being skillful. He produces good products and continues learning until death.

- *The merchant*

866: "When the merchant goes broke, he goes through his old copybooks." (The merchant hopes to find an old, unsettled debt.)

1685: "Paying on credit will make the merchant owning a thousand go broke."

2080: "The insolent eats the money of the merchant."

Part of the merchant's job is keeping records of his expenses. Merchants possess money.

- *The "mesaharaty"*

1966: "They made you a 'mesaharaty'. He said: 'Ramadan is over.'" (The 'mesaharaty' (Ramadan drummer) walks at night through the streets in the (Islamic fasting) month of Ramadan, to wake people up before dawn prayer, so that they can eat before starting to fast.)

The 'mesaharaty's job is seasonal.

- *The milkman*

1212: "The flies know the face of the milkman."

The money changer:

160: "He is bleary-eyed and makes himself a money changer." (He is not fit for the job.)

The money changer must be fit for his job.

- *The mourner*

2756: "The female mourner laments and every sad woman weeps over her own deceased." (Female mourners are hired

at funerals to mention the good traits of the dead and magnify the loss.)

- *The peasant*

601: "If pincers come out of wood, a pasha comes out of the peasant." (Such a tool cannot be made of wood. That means a peasant can never become a pasha (a high-ranking person in society H.M.).)

674: "If it rains on the iron in the season of plowing, oh how lucky is the peasant." (It is good luck when it rains early.)

1958: "The peasant will never be successful."

2118: "A peasant whose needs are covered is a hidden sultan."

2119: "No matter how much the peasant is promoted, the tattoo does not go away." (The tattoo indicates his origin and actual environment. Tattoos are very common among villagers.)

3012: "Feed the peasant apples for two years, you give him a spanking, he gets it down as 'galoween'." ('Galoween' is a kind of plant peasants eat with cheese.)

According to Taymour, city people unjustifiably mock the peasants, saying nothing good can come from them and that they will never change nor get promoted. If a peasant is self-sufficient, he is as good as a ruler.

- *The piper*

1356: "The neighborhood's piper does not enchant."

1357: "The piper does not cover his beard."

1812: "As long as I am a piper and you are a drummer, oh how many long nights we will see." (Compare explanation 3.20)

3178: "The piper dies, and his finger is playing."

The piper's job makes him stay up late. His music is not appreciated in his own neighborhood. He should not cover his beard in shame, as his job is a reason enough to be ashamed. He goes on playing even after his death as he cannot give up his habit.

- *The sailor*

1335: "The captain has an opinion, and the sailor has an opinion." (The sailor has a different opinion than the captain.)

- *The seller of beans*

1725: "The morning of the seller of beans and not the morning of the druggist." (Compare explanation 3.19)

People prefer the seller of beans to the druggist, as they need food in the morning more than perfume.

- *The seller of old shoes*

2742: "The destiny of the bald is the seller of old shoes." (The seller of shoes can make hats for the bald to protect their heads, as the normal hats will wear out.)

- *The shepherd*

1322: "Get a shepherd and watch him." (Watch over someone you hire even if he is trustworthy.)

- *The singer*

2764: "The singer sings, and everyone applies the meaning to himself."

- *The shoe man*

2525: "His tongue is like the scissors of a shoe man: it opens only on impurity." (The shoe man repairs old shoes so that the scissors only open on old used and impure leather.)
The shoe man's job is regarded as impure.

- *The (female) slave*

150: "'Cook, O female slave!' 'Pay the cost, O master!'"

828: "The daughter of high origin is precious even if she is a slave."

933: "A female slave serving a female slave. He said: 'This is a huge disaster.'" (The two used to be equal, but one was raised by luck to a higher status.)

1008: "What belongs to the mistress is in the box and what belongs to the female slave is in the market." (The secret of the female slave is revealed as she is not valued.)

1582: "A mistress and two female slaves to fry two eggs." (Describes many workers doing something small that does not require all these workers.)

1583: "The mistress and a female slave for a plate of 'basaria'." ('Basaria' are small fish. The proverb describes many workers doing something trivial.)

The female slave cannot do anything unless her master pays the cost. Slaves are disdained. Their secrets are revealed without considering their feelings. It is a disaster if a woman of high class who became a slave is forced to serve another slave.

- *The (male) slave*

761: "Instead of telling the male slave: 'O my master!' I will make my errands with my hand."

870 and 1985: "She is one-eyed and the daughter of a slave and her wedding night is a Sunday." (The daughter of a male slave is ugly. Usually, the wedding nights are on Friday or Monday night. The proverb refers to someone who has two hated traits.)

1023: "Your darling whom you love even if he is a slave."

1659: "Buying the slave is better than raising him."

1806: "The 'tanboura' of the slave is a recreation over his condition." ('Tanboura' is a musical instrument.)

1858: "A slave who is not yours is as free as you are." (If you do not own a slave, you have no power over him.)

2183: "They told the slave: 'Your master is going to sell you.' He said: 'He knows what is good for him.' They said: 'Then why don't you run away?' He said: 'I know what is good for me.'"

2652: "They did not find bread to snatch so they got a slave to slap."

3125: "Either the male slave dies, or his master sets him free." (The slave should be patient and endure what he is going through.)

The slave is not a free man. His captivity would end either by dying or by being set free. A slave is on the one hand expensive to maintain, and on the other hand could be badly treated by his master. His life is difficult, so that a musical instrument is his means of recreation. The slave is only owned by one master, who may sell him, but for others he is a free man. Running away might be a choice. Slaves are difficult to raise and train, so buying them is better than raising them. Slaves are disdained, so it is degrading to have to call them, "My master". Slaves are also regarded as ugly.

- *The spinner*

2056: "The female spinner spins with the leg of a donkey."

The female spinner manages to spin with the least of tools.

- *The tailor*

66: "The fee of the tailor is under his hand." (The cloth is a guarantee for getting paid.)

- *The water carrier*

21: "How can I be a water carrier and you splash water on me?" (The water carrier is used to water and does not fear it.)

3127: "He sells water in the quarter of the water carriers."

The water carrier has water in abundance.

- *The witch:*

1333: "Go away you witch, you will neither win this world nor the hereafter." (People did not want to deal with witches. They used to fear their harm.)

The witch is disdained and people think that she has lost both life and the afterlife.

3. *The analysis*

3.1 *Combination of two jobs*

In six proverbs *two jobs* are combined. The evaluation of a job can be unexpected and may favor a job that is usually not favored, only because of the contrast to the other job. In proverb (1725), the seller of beans is preferred to the seller of perfume – the druggist –, as the former provides people – especially the poor – with essential food, not like perfume which is considered a luxury.

Sometimes, the workers of two jobs are not opposed to each other but are connected, such as the baker (1121) and the bookkeeper, who, according to the proverb, is bribed by the baker, so he can overlook his dishonesty. In proverb (1122), the baker and the bookkeeper are the same person which is unethical as the baker is without any supervision.

Sometimes both jobs are *similar*, like the captain and the sailor (1335), who are not of the same opinion and neither of them knows what the other is thinking. Also, similar jobs are the drummer and the piper (1812) as they have, by the nature of their jobs, to stay up late at night to entertain people. Sometimes, the jobs are in the same field, such as the corpse-washer and the gravedigger (2057). Two jobs might also be mentioned together without a real link between them, like the guard and the hireling (1149).

Some proverbs discuss the *relationship between the members of the same job* or trade. While in others, there is a sense of intense competition or hostility between them, like beggars (1648, 1993) who hate each other. Donkey drivers (1181, 540) are also depicted as fighting, which is the luck of the passengers, as the conflict leads to the reduction of the fare. -

3.2 *Specific aspects of the professions*

Studying all the proverbs in the corpus reveals that there are certain aspects related to the jobs. People should be *fit to practice* a certain job according to its nature and requirements. Therefore, people wonder how those who are *unfit* for a job could practice it. A blind man can neither become an astrologer (166), nor a corpse-washer (2057), nor a money changer (160). A one-eyed

person cannot become a foreman (173) and a weak-sighted person cannot become a makeup artist (1962). A crippled person cannot become a gravedigger (2057). Sometimes *skill* is required, so that workers would stand out: people are advised to choose the skillful workers, as the strike of a master (1234) is worth a thousand strikes. Even if assigning skilled workers will cost a lot, one should choose them. Thus, people should choose skilled bakers (92) even if they eat half of their bread, and hire the skilled builder (1681) even if he eats their lunch. If the captain (487) is capable and worthy of being a captain, he can get the wind by its horns. Skill must be developed; thus, the skilled master (3181) continues learning until death. Sometimes, it is not skill that is needed, but *the minimum requirement* is not being ignorant or stupid, or depending on the position of the father, like the following proverbs: If the druggist (1910) is ignorant, he preserves the wrapping paper and neglects the mastic. A stupid sailor (1548) is a burden on the ship. The captain's (28) son can be a burden on the ship, as he does not work but, on the other hand, eats from the supply, which is counted as a loss. Sometimes, what is needed is just patience, like the hunter (1906). At other times, the nature of a job leads to certain *habits* which grow and over time become obsessions. This applies to the female beggar (998) who, after being forced to marry so that she is no longer needy, goes back to begging. This also applies to the female dancer (910), whose finger dances even after she dies, and the piper (3178), whose fingers play even after death. The old tattoo of the peasant (2119) still shows, although he has been promoted.

There are *dangers* associated with the nature of certain professions, such as the magician (1040) who ultimately dies from a snake bite. The captain (2733) encounters strong winds which lead him to places he does not want to go to. The diver (2912) is tested by the deep water. A *difficulty* that a carpenter (1980 and 914) encounters is a knot in the wood or just a clumsy helper (1633). The harvester suffers from the sun (1273). Sometimes, workers are incapable of fulfilling the wishes of the clients because they are not within the *scope* of their work, as with the corpse-washer (2058), who cannot guarantee paradise for the deceased since his job is strictly washing the corpse. Even if people are careful, they might encounter *bad luck* in their jobs:

The job of the Ramadan drummer (1966) is tied to the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, so when this month is over, he is jobless. Also, the barber (2734) is unlucky if his first client is bald. Moreover, *bad or poor judgement* can be a reason for failure. You do not give people something they have an abundance of; for example, gardeners (3128) have plenty of flowers and water carriers (3127) plenty of water, so you neither sell flowers to gardeners nor water in the quarter of the water carriers. In other instances, poor judgement involves using too many workers for a job that requires only one, like the proverbs where one (1583) or even two slaves (1582) and the mistress cook a small meal which only requires one person. More than one captain (2727) leads to the sinking of the ship. Furthermore, poor judgement is evident when somebody puts too much effort into something which is not worth the trouble and will not pay back, like the donkey driver (713). The druggist is ignorant and negligent, so he does not know the priorities and thus loses the mastic, while preserving the wrapping paper (1910). Given these obstacles, the proverbs send out *warnings* to people to avoid anything that can stand in the way of fulfilling a task. However good the workers might be, they should not be left unsupervised; even if the shepherd (1322) you assigned to watch your sheep is trustworthy, you must still supervise him yourself. And even if the cook (637) you hire is great and very clean, you may find things in your food that disgust you. The proverbs also warn the merchants (1685) not to sell on credit, as even a very rich merchant can go broke this way. People are also warned not to believe that somebody is clever because he seems to be doing the right things; for example, if someone is able to arrange baking tins in the right way, this will not make him a confectioner (2638).

Every job is tied to specific *materials, products and tools* that are important constituents of the profession. *The material* of the shoe man (2525) is old leather. The magician (3100) has all kinds of things hidden in his sack, with which he surprises and fascinates people. The material must be available, so that the female slave (150) can cook; it is the responsibility of her master to provide the necessary food for cooking. The tailor (66) has a guarantee of getting his fee, as the material (cloth) is in his possession.

The goldsmith manufactures jewelry, so rings (29), necklaces (831) and anklets (2799) are the products he sells. If the product of the cook is poison (1784), he must taste it. The seller of old shoes (2742) will sell hats to the bald. The gardeners (3128) sell flowers and the water carriers (3127) sell water. The milkman (1212) sells milk, and the butcher (248) sells meat. The druggist sells mastic (1910) and perfume (725), and the baker bakes and sells bread (92). The seller is even named after the products he sells, such as the name of the 'seller of beans' (1725).

Every job requires certain *tools*, which are an important part of the job, such as the plow for the peasant (674), the net for the hunter (2182), the scissors for the shoe man (2525), the copy-books for the merchant (866), the bag or sack for the magician (3100), and soap for the barber (592). Sometimes, if someone is very clever, they may use makeshift equipment, like the resourceful female spinner (2056), who weaves with the leg of a donkey, or a woman who does not want to pay high fees to the dressmaker (86) and would rather sew with the horn of a palm tree.

3.3 Society's perception of the professions

Another important aspect of professions is how society evaluates them. In other words, how the ones who practice a certain job are judged on the grounds of their job. As the corpus of the study is already restricted to the simple, less glamorous jobs, the evaluations found in the corpus are mostly negative. Out of the six proverbs about *peasants*, four are negative. According to Taymour, city people unjustifiably mock peasants, saying nothing good can come from them (601 and 1958), and that they will never change as they stick to their old habits, cannot be promoted, and their origins will always show (3012 and 2119).

The *guard* is regarded (1835) as unrefined. The enmity of a guard can cause great distress for his enemy. The *beggars* (1648, 1993) are hated by the owner of the house, and it is regarded as torture if a beggar finds their way to someone's house (1478). The beggar's (1646) feelings are disregarded and overlooked. Also, the *garbage collector* (1338) is regarded as inferior, so it is surprising to see a flower in his hand. *Maids* are looked down upon, and it is considered a treacherous fate if a mistress becomes a maid and serves others. (980) The secrets of the *female*

slave (1008) are out in public, as hurting her feelings does not count. She is disdained, looked down on and is regarded as low class (828). It is even considered a disaster or betrayal of time and fate if a former slave becomes a mistress with another slave serving her, as in proverbs (933, 980). *The male slave* (870) is also regarded as low class, considered ugly (1023) and looked down on and having to deal with him or abiding to the male slave (761) should be avoided. A *witch* (1333) is feared for her potential harm, so people avoid her and do not even see a chance for her to go to paradise after she dies. The *butcher* (2648) is dishonest and cheats his clients. The *baker* and the *bookkeeper* are also dishonest (1121 and 1122). Society regards the job of the *shoe man* as disdained (2525). The negative perception of the job of the *piper* made him feel ashamed of his job (1357).

3.4 Proverbs as a means of preserving cultural heritage

The question of whether proverbs can be regarded as a means of preserving cultural heritage can be partially answered by examining the professions mentioned in the proverbs. Selecting Taymour's collection is appropriate for answering this question, as his collection mainly contains proverbs from the 19th century. The analysis has shown that some of the professions mentioned in Taymour's collection are now extinct. These include slaves in general, both the female and male slave, the water carrier, the donkey driver and the Ramadan drummer. Identifying extinct professions is not straightforward and I have tried to support my opinion with quotations from reputable studies. Ameen, in his dictionary published in 1953, writes about some of these professions: he notes that slavery has been abolished and slaves set free (Ameen 1953: 216). According to Ameen, the profession of water carriers has declined as water faucets are now found in homes. (Ameen 1953: 235)

Sha'lan mentions other extinct jobs. He states that the job of donkey drivers has become extinct. They do not exist in the present time, except in places where there are tourists, unlike in the past when they played a major role in the sector of transport as there were no other means available. (Sha'lan 1972: 235) Sha'lan also writes about the profession of the Ramadan drummer, which is nearing extinction because it is seasonal and peo-

ple use other means to wake up at dawn and eat before fasting (Sha'lan 1972: 236).

It is very difficult to determine whether other jobs such as magicians, witches, camel drivers, corpse washers, dancers, astrologers, makeup artists, money changers and spinners are extinct or still exist. It is possible that their nature, their scope of work or their tools have changed. A makeup artist from the 19th century might look quite different and use tools which are quite different, so these professions could – based on their nature – be regarded as extinct. However, trying to make such comparisons would go beyond the scope of the present study.

Examining the jobs that are proven to be extinct, we find that their number, compared to the underlying corpus, is substantial. There are six proverbs mentioning the female slaves, 10 mentioning the male slaves, two mentioning the water carrier, three mentioning the donkey driver and one mentioning the Ramadan drummer. The total number is 22, which is about 21.4 % of the corpus. The question remains whether the extinction of certain professions has affected the use of the proverbs containing these professions in today's society. To my knowledge, the proverbs containing extinct professions have not been affected by this; they have shown endurance, as some of them are very popular and are constantly used among the Egyptians. I will provide some examples based on my knowledge as a native speaker of Egyptian-Arabic. Proverbs which are still very popular include: “‘Cook, O female slave!’ ‘Pay the cost, O master!’” (150), “Buying the slave is better than raising him.” (1659), “He sells water in the quarter of the water carriers.” (3127), “The fighting of the donkey drivers, the luck of the passengers.” (1181), “They made you a ‘mesaharaty’ (Ramadan drummer). He said: ‘Ramadan is over.’” (1966).

4. Conclusion

The main aim of the present study is to demonstrate that proverbs serve as a means of preserving cultural heritage. As professions form part of cultural heritage, the study focuses on the professions mentioned in proverbs. The study has taken Egyptian proverbs as an example. The source for the present study is the collection of Taymour, which is considered the best collection of

Egyptian proverbs, and was compiled before 1930. Therefore, these proverbs provide evidence that the professions, along with the information about them included in this collection, belong to the past and have been preserved through proverbs to the present day. The corpus of the study is restricted to professions of the simple working class, excluding the so-called “glamorous” and highly valued professions, so that the numbers mentioned refer only to a subset of the professions found in Taymour’s collection.

The total number of simple jobs mentioned in Taymour is 53, which appear in 103 proverbs. Twenty-nine professions are mentioned in only one proverb (astrologer, blacksmith, book-keeper, builder, confectioner, diver, dressmaker, drummer, ferry driver, foreman, gardener, gravedigger, harvester, hireling, maid, makeup artist, ‘mesaharaty’ (Ramadan drummer), milkman, money changer, mourner, sailor, seller of beans, seller of old shoes, shepherd, singer, shoe man, spinner, tailor, witch); seven professions are mentioned in two proverbs (camel-driver, cook, dancer, druggist, garbage collector, guard, water carrier); 11 professions are mentioned in three proverbs (baker, barber, butcher, corpse-washer, donkey driver, goldsmith, hunter, magician, master, merchant, piper); one profession is mentioned in four proverbs (carpenter); one profession is mentioned in five proverbs (beggar); three professions are mentioned in six proverbs (captain, peasant, female slave.); and one profession is mentioned in 10 proverbs (male slave).

It is also noteworthy that the job appearing in the largest number of proverbs is that of the male slave, who appears in 10 proverbs, while the female slave appears in 6 proverbs. Together, they account for nearly 15.5 % of the proverbs in the corpus of the study. Both jobs, as previously noted, are extinct. Six proverbs contain a combination of two jobs, which are either in harmony with each other, or in competition, in the same field or simply mentioned together without a valid reason.

As mentioned above the numbers should not be regarded as absolute, as the source is only one collection and the study does not include all professions. The figures should be taken as indicative only. Furthermore, the study has shown that most of the professions in the corpus are not merely mentioned by name; proverbs often convey the nature of the job along a variety of as-

pects related to them. The proverbs provide insight into the lives of the people practicing these jobs, highlighting different aspects of the job such as the requirements of a job and the obstacles facing the job. The proverbs also name the materials, products and tools which constitute an important part of the job.

I have also attempted to answer the question of how society views these simple jobs and the people who practice them. The evaluation of some of these jobs and their worth in society is reflected in the proverbs. As the corpus of the study is already restricted to the simple, less glamorous jobs, the evaluations found in the corpus are mostly negative. Peasants, guards, beggars, garbage collectors, maids, shoe men, witches, pipers, female and male slaves are looked down upon. Members of other professions, such as barbers, bookkeepers and butchers, are regarded as dishonest.

The important question of this study is whether proverbs can be regarded as means of preserving cultural heritage. This question can be partially answered by noting the extinct professions that are mentioned in the proverbs, which make up nearly 21.4 % of the corpus of the study. As mentioned above, selecting Taymour's collection is appropriate for addressing this question, as this collection mainly contains proverbs of the 19th century. Identifying extinct professions that belong to the past and no longer exist in the present is not easy, and I have tried to support my opinion with quotations from reputable studies. These extinct jobs that have been found in the proverbs of the corpus are slaves in general, both the female and male slave, the water carrier, donkey driver and Ramadan drummer. Considering their number, which is 22 proverbs (21.4 % of the corpus), this is substantial in relation to the total of 103 proverbs mentioning jobs in this study.

Another question the study has attempted to answer is whether the extinction of certain professions has affected the use of the proverbs containing these professions in today's society. It has been noted that many proverbs containing extinct professions have not been affected, as some of them remain very popular and are still widely used among Egyptians today. Studying other traditional elements, as mentioned by Mieder, could significantly contribute to answering the question whether proverbs serve as a

means of preserving cultural heritage. This could be the subject of further research in this field.

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Hilda Matta
Cairo University
Faculty of Arts, Department of German
Cairo, Egypt
E-mail: hilda.a.matta@cu.edu.eg, hilda.a.matta@gmail.com

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