



The Bee Kingdom sticker, Cairo ca.1930.

Pollen & Fragments

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Poetry dissolves foreign existences into itself.

~ Novalis

"Pollen & Fragments" is an interdisciplinary work-in-progress comprising several parts. It relates to objects of scholarship, science, poetry and art produced in Egypt in the early to mid-20th century. Its purpose is to generate different kinds of visual media as well as a book—a hybrid family memoir/fiction—objects that point our attention to a particular historical moment in Egypt. Both [artworks](#) and [book](#) draw on the contents of the Abushady Archive, a small, historically significant family archive that I have been organizing.

"Pollen & Fragments" refers to [Blütenstaub](#) ("Pollen"), an early philosophical work of "fragments" by the German Romantic poet [Novalis](#), published in 1798. Consisting of aphorisms and texts that range from laconic to dream-like and mystical, *Blütenstaub* is devoted to many subjects including poetry, art, language, epistemology, philosophy of science, religion and metaphysics, and is one of the most important philosophical sources of 19th-century Romanticism. A manifestation of connections between philosophical and visual fragments,

Blütenstaub provides a particularly suitable inspiration and model for my contemporary work *Pollen*, which is essentially a conglomeration of interconnected fragments whose purpose is to shed light on specific objects of Egyptian Modernism.

I first began to envisage this project in 2011-13 following the deaths of my mother and her two older siblings. Throughout my life, these three native Egyptians were my [living links to the time and place](#) of their childhood and young adulthood: Cairo and Alexandria in the early part of the 20th century up through the close of World War II. Their father was the Egyptian poet and scientist [Ahmed Zaky Abushady \(1892-1955\)](#)—the storied grandfather I never met. After his death, his publications, private papers and other materials were divided between his three children. I discovered these materials quite by chance and have since worked to bring them together and house them as a succinct, freestanding archive.

A.Z. Abushady is remembered as a Romantic poet and liberal-minded publisher and editor of the groundbreaking journal of Modern Arabic poetry [Apollo \(1932-34\)](#). He was also a physician, bacteriologist and bee scientist whose [inventions](#) were instrumental to the modernization of bee husbandry across the British Isles and in Egypt. Abushady straddled cultures and disciplines, and sought to locate and nurture philosophical and practical connections between them. He promoted his idealistic [visions of cross-pollination](#) through the many literary, political and scientific projects he generated over the course of his life.

In this presentation of fragments from the archive, I will share some of my discoveries, including Abushady's forgotten [contributions to modern bee science](#). Bees were a life-long commitment, and they provided him with a useful metaphor for cultural harmony and hybrid vigor. They frequently cropped up in his poetry and other writings. As a scientist and pedagogue, Abushady initiated best beekeeping practices and established a succession of apiaries of mammoth proportions in both England and Egypt. While living and practicing medicine in Oxfordshire, he invented, patented and implemented beehive improvements and promoted the co-operative system as an equitable economic model for rural bee farmers. In 1919 he launched the publication [Bee World](#), which is still published today by the [International Bee Research Association \(IBRA\)](#) in Cardiff. In Egypt, Abushady launched [The Bee Kingdom](#), a "monthly review of modern bee culture," which was bilingual in English and Arabic, and ran from 1930 to 1940, a period of lively cross-cultural exchange that was, like many other creative initiatives of the period, both facilitated and complicated by late colonial politics.

As I work my way through the archive, [I discover new things](#)—objects and images, poetry and documents that I never knew existed. Each discovery brings me closer to understanding Abushady's life and the story of his time. As my research feeds both book and contingent artworks, "Pollen & Fragments" begins to function as a vehicle where specific historical objects—artworks, texts and ephemera—can cohere as a [meta-archive](#) of diverse, harmonious fragments. It begins to tell a story, a look back to a recent moment in our immediate history, which, in many ways and unavoidably so, is a Romantic look back: a contemporary Egyptian *Blütenstaub*.

Visit TheBeeKingdom.com for more info.

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"Pollen & Fragments" was a talk given at a workshop titled '[Cultures of Diversity: Arts and Cultural Life in Arab Societies before Independence](#)' held at The Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World (CASAW) and Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies (IMES) at the University of Edinburgh 3-4 December 2015.

Funded by a CASAW research grant, this workshop will focus on the diverse sources of artistic and cultural practice in the modern Arab world by examining the interplay between diverse local traditions and non-indigenous elements during the formative late colonial period. In interrogating the social, economic and intellectual connections operating between these different cultural sites across wider Middle Eastern society and beyond, it seeks to explore the vibrant dynamics of the cultural world that existed before the changing political terrain of independence saw more narrow definitions of national culture emerge. Conceived to highlight the diverse roots of modern Arab cultural practice, it will also serve as a basis for a critique of the notion of national culture.

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