

CEREMONIES OF SHIP LAUNCHING IN EGYPT BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT; TOURISM PROMOTION FOR EGYPTIAN MARINE HERITAGE

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Abstract:

Since the earliest period of the ancient Egyptian history, heads of the votive animals were placed on the prow of the ship before launching. This practice was applied to overwhelm the launched ship with divine blessing and protection. By the Roman times, the sailors launched the “*vessel of Isis*” into the sea to symbolize their opening of the shipping season and was accompanied with various rituals and festivities. After the spread of Christianity, ship christenings or baptisms continued to include liturgical elements. In Islamic and Ottoman Periods, Qur’anic verses and prayers were used to be recited before launching ships in Egypt and were attended by the ruler and his dignitaries in certain cases. By the 18th century AD, celebrations were held to launch many ships in Egypt, particularly the royal and military one. After reciting prayers and verse 41 of Surah Houd in Quran, the ship was launched through slipways. This paper aims to throw the light on the various ceremonies of ship launching in Egypt and approaches such ceremonies from a cultural perspective rather than a technical one. Launching the ships in Egypt reflects the diverse religious and cultural context of the Egyptian society along its long history. In modern Egypt, the current ceremonies of launching the ships are a remarkable aspect of marine cultural heritage. Thus, these ceremonial reenactments should be utilized for sustainability of local communities and in the field of tourism.

Keywords: ships, launching, ceremonies, marine, heritage, Egypt

1. INTRODUCTION

Garofalo (2018) defined launching as “*the birth of a new ship for seafarers*”. This birth is accompanied with remarkable ceremonial context and is dated by the competition of its hull rather than the end of construction. After launching the ship, the interior parts of the superstructures might be added. Following the launch, the floating hull is moved to the quay for the subsequent achievement of the ship. As early as the early 20th century, the launch took place after the construction of the ship was completed. There are two different types of launch. In the first and oldest, using a slipway to slide the hull on it. The side launch for medium to small boats built on sites with little opening in front of the sea. Thus, the research objectives are to trace the ceremonies of launching the ships in ancient Egypt since the dynastic period till its modern times. Moreover, the current study will analyse the authenticity of such ceremonies and their development and diversity from the ancient world till the modern times. The analysis will be studied in accordance

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to the religious, social and political contexts of these launching ceremonies. The research aims also to frame the current ceremonies of launching the ships as a crucial aspect of marine cultural heritage. Ultimately, the paper throws the light on the utilization of launching practices in maritime communities as means of promoting tourism in Egyptian ports.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A significant number of sources and researches throw the light on the rituals practiced in Egypt while launching ships and boats particularly during the Roman times (Metamorphoses, Book XI; Apollonius Rhodius (I: 375); the *Orphic Argonautica* (270)). However, sources dealing with launching ships in Islamic and modern Egypt are obviously limited. Certain Arab historians, namely el-Maqrizi, Ebn-Eyas, and later Ali Mubarak gave a brief account about certain practices during ship launching in Egypt. Prior research on the religious, political and social context of such ceremonies are also pertinent to this research. George Hodgkinson (2024) recently published his book which deals mainly with ship launching ceremonies in the ancient world part of which were attested in Egypt.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research combines both the descriptive research and analytical research. Based on the descriptive research, the study will throw the light on the various launching ceremonies in Egypt and their development through the historical phases of Egypt. Furthermore, the analytical research will assist the researcher to study the diversity and the importance of such ceremonies in the marine heritage of Egypt. A quantitative approach was also used to examine the validation of the study hypotheses. Surveys, including interviews with ship makers, will frame the current status of these ceremonies in modern times.

Based on the objectives of the study, as previously mentioned in the introduction, the research questions are:

- RQ1: How did launching ceremonies develop in Egypt as early as the dynastic period till its modern times?
- RQ2: What are the differences between the various rituals of launching the ships in Egypt in every period according to the religious, political and social context of the Egyptian society?
- RQ3: To what depth did the ceremonies form a crucial aspect of the Egyptian marine heritage?
- RQ4: How could ship launching ceremonies be involved in tourist promotion for Egyptian marine heritage?

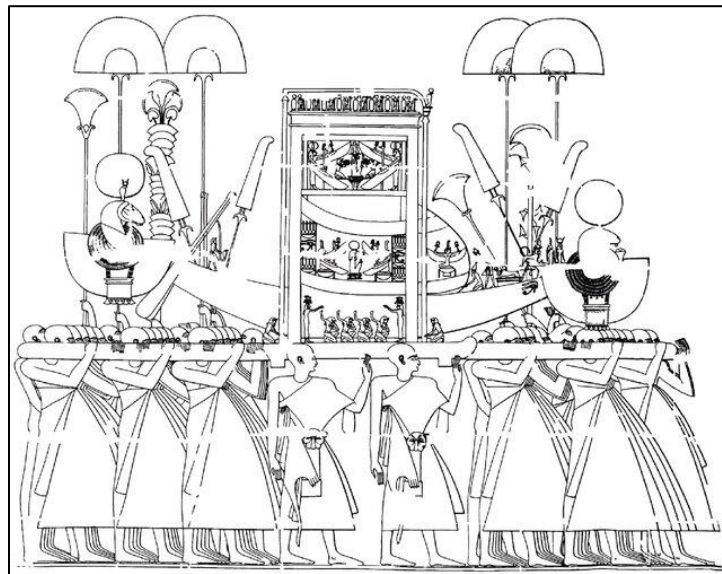
4. CEREMONIES OF LAUNCHING SHIPS IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Launching is perceived as the birth of a new ship for seafarers, and many propitiatory rituals have been handed down over the centuries. The most widely known is probably the breaking of a bottle on the bow but the traditions are copious – i.e. a hull blessing by a priest, the sacred images

affix to the hull, or an olive branch fix on the bow. The launch date is dated by the competition of its hull rather than the end of construction. After launching the ship, the interior parts of the superstructures might be added. Following the launch, the floating hull is moved to the quay for the subsequent achievement of the ship. As early as the early 20th century, the launch took place after the construction of the ship was completed. There are two different types of launch. In the first and oldest, the hull, having been built on a slipway, is slipped into the sea. In its most common form, the vessel slips with its stern at sea. There is also the side launch but such cases are usually reserved for medium to small boats built on sites with little opening in front of the sea (Garofalo 2018, 236-237).

Since the earliest period of the ancient Egyptian history, heads of the votive animals and even their horns were used to be placed on the prow of the ship before launching. The practice was applied to overwhelm the launched ship with divine blessing and protection during her voyage from any dangers and evil spirits (Landström 1970, 82-246, 249; Stockholm. 1970, fig. 15; Hornell 1939, 35-44, pls. I-IV 283). By the late period, the stern of the Egyptian ships was made to take the shape of the heads of various sacred animals for the same purpose. For instance, in a chamber of Mut Temple in Ashr, wall scenes represent number of the ships are represented. One of them is pointed out by Landström (1970, 140) and was described by the text to be the great ship from Sais. Heads of falcons adorns the two prows of the ship. On the right of this scene the “*great ship of Amun*” is represented. It is apparently a late version of the divine ship Amun Useret. The prow of the ship takes the shape of the divine ram of God Amun (Blackman 1995, 153; Benson & Gourlay 1899: 257-258). The same processional boat of Amun has been attested in the temple of Madinet Hapu. The stern and stem of the boat take the shape of the sacred ram of Amun, namely wsr HAt of Amun and is carried by a row of priests (Doyle 2017, 2, fig.1) (fig.1).

Figure 1. Detail from a relief of priests carrying the processional barque of Amun. Twentieth Dynasty, Medinet Habu.



Source: Doyle 2017: 2, fig.1

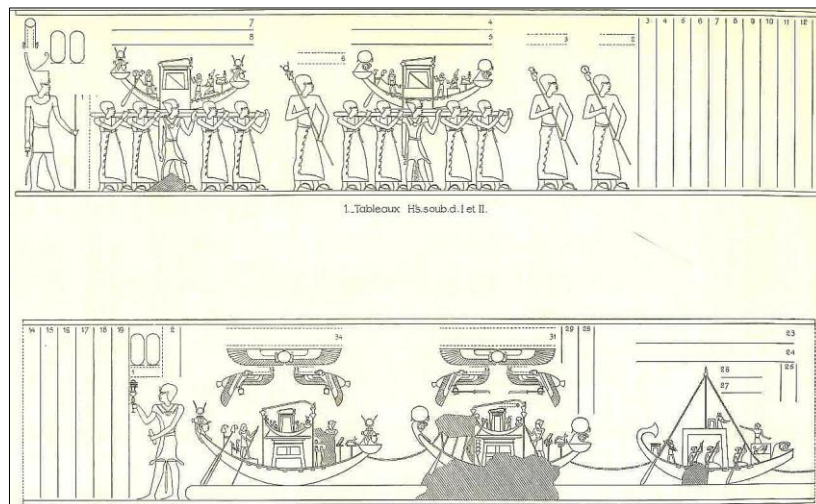
In addition, there is bronze head of an ibex and dates back to the 25th dynasty. This piece is now preserved in Berlin Museum. Despite of not being dedicated to any deity in ancient Egypt, the ibex was involved in the rituals of sacrificed animals (Landström 1970, 140, fig. 409). Stern-posts were found also in the tomb of Tutankhamun and another similar craft is figures in the mortuary temple of Quenn Hatshepsut. Furthermore, there is terracotta model discovered in Luxor and shows a high stem and stern-post taking the shape bull (Landström, 1970, 116-127, 141, fig. 410).

There is another remarkable piece from the Late Period and preserved now in Louvre Museum. It is a pendant which is said to have belonged to a King Necho of the 26th dynasty. The piece takes the shape of a small boat with similar holes in the bulwark, and with a ram as a prow in the Graeco-Phoenician style (Landström, 1970, 141, fig. 411; Paris L 5856; La Rotrie, 381). According to Herodotus, after sacrificing a sheep during Amun's feast, its fleece was placed upon the statue of the god so that it could be identified with him. Similar to this ritual, the skin of a sacrificed goat was placed to cover the head of the ship's stem head (Blackman 1995, 153). According to Hornell (1939, 282, 283) sacrificing a goat whose head was placed on the prow the ships before launching was a practice for blessing which continued to be attested in many Arabian ports.

5. CEREMONIES OF LAUNCHING THE SHIPS IN GRÆCO-ROMAN EGYPT:

The tradition of adorning the prow of the boats, particularly the ceremonial divine barques, with the shape of sacred animals or heads of deities continued in Græco- Roman Egypt. For instance, On the eastern wall of the sanctuary of Denerah temple, lower register, the king is depicted burning incense to both the sacred barque of Hathour and the sacred barque of Horus Behdety (Kitat 2023, 73; Chassinat 2009: 33-34, pls. L, LV). Furthermore, the Open Court of Edfu Temple represent scenes of the Festival of the Divine Union.

Figure 2. Selection of scenes from the Beautiful Feast of Behdet, depicted on the walls of the open court, temple of Edfu.

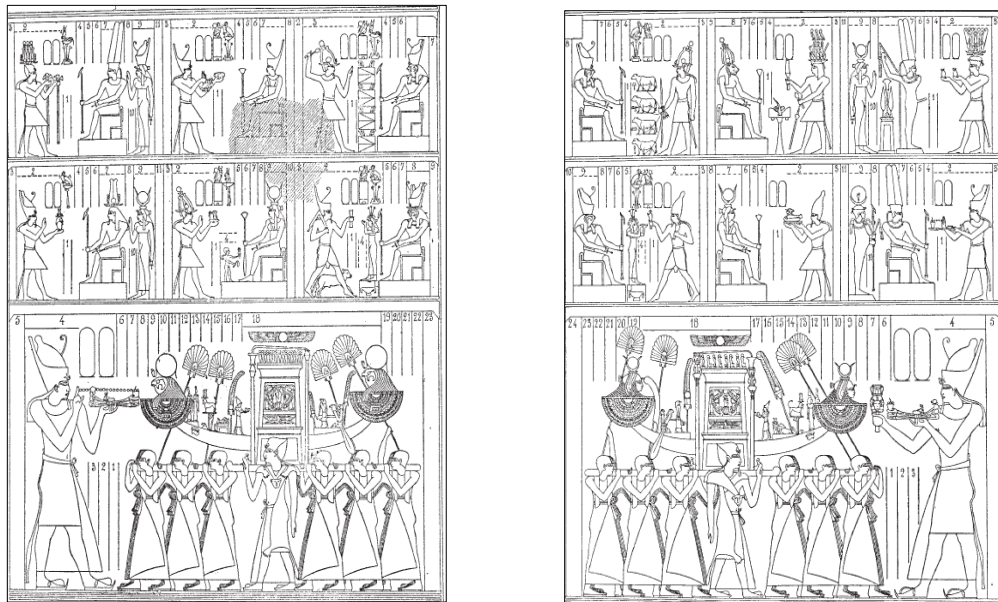


Source: Coppens 2009: 6, fig.7

The scenes depict the Nile voyage of Hathour from Dendera temple to meet her husband Horus Behdety in Edfu temple. The divine procession of Hathour is preceded by five sail boats in which the prows take the shape of Hathour; a woman wearing the Hathouric crown (Coppens 2009, 6, fig.7; Kitat 2023, 169). The same traditional scene was attested on the inner wall of the first pylon of Isis temple of Philae (Hölbl 2000, 64; Abdel el-Rahman 2021, 112-116; Kitat 2023, 295-296) (fig.2).

In the same temple, mainly on the northern wall of on the hall of Appearance, the sacred barks of Horus (left side western part) and Hathour (right side eastern part) are depicted. The prows of Hathour barks take the shape of the goddess, while the barks of Horus are adorned with the sacred flacon on both side of the barks (Chassinat 2009, IX, pl. XLf, XLg; Lotfy 2003, 71-91; Abdel el-Rahman 2021, 195-196; Kitat 2023, 187-188) (figs.3 a, b).

Figure 3 a, b. The sacred barks of Horus (left side western part) and Hathour (right side eastern part) are depicted, the northern wall of on the hall of Appearance, Edfu temple



Source: Chassinat, 2009 IX, pl. XLf, XLg reproduced by Kitat 2024: 188.

In the sanctuary of Edfu temple, a black granite naos which is four meters in height is found. The naos dates back to the reign of Nectanebo I of the 30th dynasty is preceded by an altar and the sacred bark of Horus which is adorned by the aegis taking the shape of the sacred falcon of Horus (Watterson 1998 :48; Scalf 2012, 33-35; Kitat 2023, 202) (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. The processional boat of Horus, sanctuary of Edfu Temple



Source: Kitat 2023, 2023

During the Greek Period, timbers were used in sliding the ships to be launched to the sea. The ancient Greek words *φάλαγγες* or *φάλαγγια* which usually mean a trunk or round piece of wood. Launching the Argo was mentioned by the name the word *φάλαγξ*. This launching was attested in two literary sources, namely Apollonius Rhodius (I: 375) and in the *Orphic Argonautica* (270). Based on these sources, the so-called Argonauts dug a launching a slide made of smooth timbers down the beach. The name of the ship was named on to the first timbers (Blackman 1995, 74).

Ceremonies of launching the ships was attested in the Greek and Roman world particularly in Egypt. Lucius threw the light on the ceremonies of the three initiation rites in the cult of Isis and Osiris. With much more emotional atmosphere, Apuleius in his *Metamorphoses* (XI, 5-7) give a full detail about the Isiac cult including launching her ship (Witt 1997, 158). The opening of the shipping season was celebrated on the fifth of March every year. In March, a small boat symbolically dedicated to Isis opened the season of navigation on the high seas under her protection. The ceremony was called *Navigium Isidis* (Kornelija 2013, 423; Bommas 2005, 271; Tomorad 2005, 250 -253; Griffiths 1975, 31-32; Tibiletti 1997, 653-661; Wild 1981, 101-113; Kitat 2010). Among the ceremonies of the launching the ships of Isis, the high priest purified the ship with a torch, an egg and sulphur, consecrated to the goddess. Then, the ship was loaded with various types of offerings (Kornelija 2013, 434; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, XI, 5-7; Kitat 2010).

This ceremonial launching was followed by ceremonies in the temple of Isis. Among the ceremonies of the *navigium Isidis*, the Isiac priestesses were described to be dressed in white dresses and crowned with headdresses and floral wreathes. As for the Isiac priests, they appeared with clean shaven heads. The Isiac procession was led by the priestesses while the priests were in charge of carrying cultic symbols such as; the sistra, the situla and the caduceus (Apelius *Metamorphoses*, XI, 16; Sarolta 2008, 73-87; Kornelija 2013, 434-435, fig. 5,6; Tibiletti 1997, 665). Other Isiac priestesses hold mirrors and combs, while others poured perfumes and ointments. The priestesses were followed by men and women carrying lanterns, torches and candles to lighten the way of the goddess. Musicians, singers participated in this great marine festival. After that, initiates came to the scene, dressed in white linen and either with veiled heads veiled if they were females and with shaven heads if they were men. Each one of them was involved in certain ritual; shaking her rattles (sistra), carrying a cultic object, or a lamp (Kornelija 2013, 434-435, fig. 5,6).

Moreover, several lamps were produced in the form of boats on which Isis was depicted. These lamps were used in the ceremonies of this festival (Bommas 2005, 271; Tomorad 2005, 250 -253; Griffiths 1975, 31-32; Tibiletti 1997, 653-661; Wild 1981, 101-113; Kitat 2010) (fig.5).

Figure 5. Relief from Rome showing four *oicials* of the Isiac cult carrying various sacred objects in procession. Museo Gregoriano Egizio, Roma



Source: Kornelija 2013: 435, fig. 6.

The Isiac procession continued in the sea, where the launch of the sacred vessel took occurred. The white sails were described to be decorated with prayers to Isis hoping for her divine protection of the sea voyages of the vessel. Milk was poured as a kind of sacred libation upon the waves (Kornelija 2013, 435-436, fig. 5,6). The ship's ropes were cut, and it fell into the ocean, gliding out to sea without a crew to steer it as it vanished into the distance. After state prayers, the phrase “*the ship has been let go*” was recited as an announcement of her sacred launching. (Hofmann, 1993, 42-227; Kornelija 2013, 435-436, fig. 7; Alföldy 1937, 46-56). After the launching of the Isiac ship, the chief priests entered the sanctuary of the temple and set up the “*living statues*.” A scribe stood at the entrance of the sanctuary and was responsible for summoning the *pastophori* and then reciting special prayers for the well-being of the emperor, the state, and seafarers. Then the priest scribe announced in Greek, and later in Latin, the launching of the ships. The crowd celebrated the ceremonial launching by carrying flowers, wreaths and branches and by kissing the feet of a silver statue of Isis attached to the temple-steps (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* XI, 11.17; Sarolta 2008, 73-87, pp. 84-85; Bommas 2005, 271; Tomorad 2005, 250 -253; Griffiths 1975, 31-32; Tibiletti 1997, 653-661; Wild 1981, 101-113).

Isiac processions are depicted in the paintings of Herculaneum and the sacrarium of the Isis temple at Pompeii. The sacrarium functioned as a sort of temple sacristy and as a gathering place for initiates. (Hofmann, 1993, 42-227; Kornelija 2013, 435-436, fig. 7; Alföldy, 1937, 46-56; Bommas 2005, 271; Tomorad 2005, 250 -253; Griffiths 1975, 31-32; Tibiletti 1997, 653-661) (fig.6). This festival was depicted on a bronze coin dating back to Antoninus Pius (138-161 AD.). It depicts the harbour of Cenchreae as a semi-circle place fronted by three ships. In the central part, Isis Pharia is depicted. It seems that this form of Isis had her own sanctuary in this place According to Berreth, he believes that the festival of “*navigium Isidis*” was merely celebrated in Corinth and not in Cenchreae. He depended in his opinion on the existence of two sanctuaries for Isis in this

city. The first was dedicated to Isis Pelagia and the other one to the Egyptian Isis. Moreover, two sanctuaries are dedicated to Serapis in this city (Griffiths 1975, 14-20).

Figure 6. Fresco painting from the Temple of Isis in Pompeii showing the boat of Isis, fourth style of Pompeian wall painting, Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 8929



Source: <https://shorturl.at/bYwUr> (accessed 22/4/2024, 2:10 AM)

The launching ceremony had definitely an ancient Egyptian origin as the procession comprised masked men and exotic animals revealing some apotropaic functions. Even judges, gladiators and philosophers shared in this marine carnival and were at the beginning of this procession (Kornelija 2013, 434-435, fig. 5,6). During the festival, the priests of goddess Isis carried vessels of the Nile water to represent the resurrection of her husband Osiris. Isis Pelagia was honoured during this festival (Tibiletti 1997, 653-661). This festival was celebrated on the honor of Isis Pelagia, mistress of the sea and the guardian of sailors. The festival seems to have had a broader meaning; it was not only the celebration of the reopening of navigation and the renewal of all nature, as mentioned by Apuleius (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, XI, 5-7; Kornelija 2013, 434).

6. CEREMONIES OF LAUNCHING THE SHIPS IN EGYPT AFTER CHRISTIANITY

By the time, the festival of “*navigium Isidis*” experienced some modifications. Its rituals were celebrated on January 3rd instead of March 5th. Thus, the festival seemed to gain new significance and had nothing to do with the start of the navigation season. In this vein, Alföldy (1937, 46–56) refers to specific coins from the fourth century AD that bear scenes for Isis on her sacred boat raising the sail with her hands or the Nile reclining and holding the sacred boat. The scenes, which refer to *navigium Isidis* and rather here relevant to the *vota publica* legend, which reflects the emperor's wishes for prosperity. In other words, it could be assumed that *Navigium Isidis* was modified to coincide with the emperor's *vota publica* celebration on the first day of the New Year. Through this modification in the date of this marine festival, the celebration's original intent-wishing successful pagan cults was lost (Kornelija 2013, 435-437).

With each new issuance of festival coinage declaring open warfare against the church of Christ, the boat of Isis launched repeatedly. An intriguing theory links the festival of the *Navigium Isidis*, or *carrus navalis*, which is associated with the *vota publica* celebration, to the beginnings of the festival (Kornelija 2013, 436-437; Arslan, 1997, 139; Witt, 1997, 179-180; Bricault, 2006, 152-176). After the spread of Christianity in Egypt, the cult of Isis continued to have a strong influence on the Egyptians and their new religious beliefs. One of the titles of Virgin Mary was “Stela Marris” meaning “*the star of the sea*”; a title that was strongly related to Virgin Mary in the 9th century AD. This title was also attested under the name *Ursae Minoris* or *Polaris*, meaning the “guiding star”, which was used during the celestial marine navigation in antiquity. All these titles reflect the Christians belief in the role of Virgin Mary as a protector of the sailors and their voyages. By the 9th century AD, prayers were recited to conduct successful navigation in the way to the Christ (Kornelija 2013, 437). Additionally, there are traces of the rite being carried out during Christian celebrations like the Feast of St. Agatha in Sicily and the Blessing of the Feet. The Festival of Lights and the Epiphany of the Christian and Coptic people are two more closely related celebrations. Recalling the *Navigium Isidis*, Muslims set out in small boats on the second day of the Eid el-Adha feast and take to the waters (Kornelija 2013, 437; Hodgkinson 2024).

During the Byzantine Period, there was much interest in showing the glorious appearance of the emperor aboard his ships. This obvious care resulted in affirming the imperial ceremonies particularly those connected with the marine port. By the time, the imperial *dromon* referring to the vessel of the emperor was repetitively attested according to the historiographical sources in addition to smaller boats (Dominik & Simeonov 2018, 222; Hodgkinson 2024). Among the significant Byzantine court ceremonies were the ceremonies of launching a new ship. The new vessel was launched through the “*baptism with red wine*”, a practice that was associated with prayers, blessings conducted by the priest or even by a Mass. The new boat was decorated with many elements such as; flowers (rivers Minho and Douro, Aveiro), olive branches (Povoa de Varzim, river Douro) and of spurge-laurel or holly (Viana do Castelo), with pennants and flags (Aveiro) (Blackman 1995, 150; Filgueiras 1978, 29, 30; Hodgkinson 2024).

A bottle of wine was broken against the stern of the ship. This tradition was attested and studied by Amades who threw the light on launching the ships in Catalonia. The “*Godmother*”, usually the *mestra*, was responsible for conducting this ritual, and the craft was launched. The wine bottle was broken on the stern of the Catalonian fishing boats were given a feminine name. After that, the sailors got in the ship to check the stability of her building. During this initial navigation of the ship, they sacrificed a cock and its blood was spilt over the deck. The first voyage of the launched ship ended ashore with a supper (Blackman 1995, 150)

7. CEREMONIES OF LAUNCHING SHIPS IN EGYPT DURING THE ISLAMIC TIMES

Despite of having two major centres for manufacturing ships in Egypt, namely Alexandria and Damietta, there is an obvious lack of the historical sources of launching ships in Egypt during the Islamic period. El-Maqirizi described the flourishing of the Egyptian navy during the Fatimid period. A third factory for manufacturing ships was established during the reign of Mu'iz in Max in addition to those located in el-Ruda and Fustat. The Egyptian historian Ezz el-Malik el Masbahi mentioned that about six hundred ships were established in these two factories in order to control over Jerusalem. According to el-Maqirizi, there was a commander of the navy forces in Egypt during the Fatimid period and was named in Arabic “*the prince of armies*” (Amir el-Geyoush). He

described that the departure and arrival of the Egyptian naval ships was highly celebrated in Egypt. These ceremonies were even attended by the Fatimid Caliph and his dignitaries. During these ceremonies, prayers were recited wishing victory for the naval forces in their battles. After that, the ships sailed to Damietta then to the open sea (Maher 1967: 97-98; el-Maqrizi part 2: 368).

The available sources describe reciting Quranic verses before launching the ships during that the Mamluk period. The Mamluks apparently tried to regain the naval power of Egypt especially after the decline of manufacturing ships during the Ayyub Period. Thus, the Mamluk Caliphs attended in person the launching of the ships. El-Maqrizi described that Ashraf ibn Qalawun in 692 Hijri ordered his vizier Shams el-Din Ibn Sal’usi to prepare manufacturing great naval ships called in Arabic “*Shona*” till they succeeded in making about sixty ships of the *shouna* model. The vizier equipped the ships with weapons and sufficient number of Mamluk navy soldiers. El-Maqrizi described how the common people were keen in witnessing the great naval fleet and crowded on the banks of the Nile three days before the arrival of the Sultan. After that, the Sultan Qaitebey went from Qal’et el-Jabal to Bustan el-Khassab in Bulaq (now Garden City in Cairo) where the Sultan stood with his delegate Baydar and the other Mamluk princes to attend the launching of the great *shawani* ships. Then, Ibn Moussa el-Ra’i appeared on a Nile boat to open the ceremonies by reciting verse 41 of Surah Houd in Quran; “*bismillahi mojraha wa moursaha*” meaning “*embark therein; in the name of Allah will be its (moving) course and its (resting) anchorage*” and Surah “*El-Mulk*”. The Sultan attended the ceremonies till Duhr prayer then he went back to Qal’et el- Jabal. Being impressed by the grandeur of *shawani* ships, the common people celebrated the launching of such ships for the rest of the day (Maher 1967: 117-118; el- Maqrizi part 2: 195).

8. CEREMONIES OF LAUNCHING SHIPS IN OTTOMAN EGYPT

Similar to the Byzantine Empire, many ceremonies and protocols were conducted by the Ottoman court particularly those relevant to the marine activity. For instance, there were special ceremonies for the reception of foreign envoys and ambassadors, the sailing off and returning of the royal navy, the start of a military campaign, sending gifts by ships to the holy city of Mecca, and launching of a new ship (Zorlu 2008, 55).

Zorlu (2008) gives a comprehensive account about launching ceremonies of Ottoman ships. Concerning the day of launching a new ship, it was usually determined by a chief-astronomer (*müneccimbaşı*) who was in charge for all Ottoman formal ceremonies. Ottoman documents mentioned that Kapudân Pasha asked the Sultan Mahmud II for permission to start of furnishing, adorning and setting sail on a frigate. In return, the Sultan ordered him to bring a horoscope from the chief astronomer in order to launch the ships on a happy day. Determining a certain day by the chief astronomer was also applied for marking of a ship's sternpost during the construction and launching of the ship. The same document says: “*In a petition, I inquired as to which day—tomorrow, Monday, or the seventh Thursday of the holy month of Sha’ban—the Sultan the Majesty preferred for the placement of the sternpost, and he ruled that the honorable/auspicious one should be chosen. This date was selected because it was the auspicious/honorable time—the seventh Thursday of the Arabic month of Sha’bân*” (Zorlu 2008, 55-56).

Despite of this Ottoman protocol for launching the ships, determining the day of launching by an astronomer was not followed by certain Sultans such as; Sultan Abdulhamid I and Selim III who apparently did not believe in astrology. One of the Ottoman Prime Ministerial Archives recorded the rites of launching one of the Imperial Naval Arsenal called “Tersâne-i Âmire” in 1208 Hijri / 1794 AD. According to this document, a sheikh named Mardîni Şeyh (Sheikh from the city of Mardin) recited prayers before ship launching. Moreover, presents and clothes were given as gifts to the workers and engineers who were in charge of constructing the ship. Among the workers were the French engineer, the deputy of chief architect (Nikoli Kalfa) and two carpenters who were all given presents and clothes. The cost of the presents was estimated to reach 522.5 kuruş (BOA; Cevdet-Bahriye, no. 7210; Zorlu 2008, 55-56).

Ceremonies of launching a new Ottoman ship was witnessed by the Sultan in addition to other dignitaries. There was a law which stated that the attendance of the Ottoman Sultan during the ceremonies of ship launching became obligatory. This law was issued during the reign of Süleyman the Lawgiver and continued in use during the reign of by Selim II and Murad III. Preparing for the naval arrival of the Sultan, his throne was elaborated with precious cloths. For instance, red broadcloth, cotton for cushions as well as pink fabric for furnishing the throne of the Sultan were bought to celebrate launching ceremony of a three-decked galleon. The cost of such clothes was estimated to 380.5 kuruş in 1217 Hijri/1802-03 AD (Zorlu 2008, 57).

The Grand Vizier (Sadrazam) sent invitations to the dignitaries to attend this significant marine occasion. For instance, The Ottoman Sheikh el-Islam known as “Şeyhülislam”, the Grand admiral “Kapudân Pasha” attended the ceremonies of launching ships. Every arsenal settled in his special tent and the clothes presented as gifts were displayed on the hull of the ships. They were divided according to the receiver of the gift including all the crew of manufacturing the ships; architects, foreman as well as workers. During this grandeur occasion, Sheikh el-Islam recited prayers before the launch process hoping for divine blessings and protection. Launching an Ottoman galleon “*the Bed’-i Nusret*” was attended by the Sultan Abdulhamid I, the Grand Vizier, the Sheikh el-Islam and the Grand Admiral Gazi Hasan Pasha on Thursday, the 2nd of July 1785 Ad, the 24th of Rajab 1199/2 Hijri. Verse 41 of Surah Houd in Quran was recited; “*bismillahi mojraha wa moursaha*” meaning “... *embark therein; in the name of Allah will be its (moving) course and its (resting) anchorage*”. This verse, which was recited ten times, refers to Prophet Noah and his ship during Flood. After reciting the prayers and the Quran verse, the ship was launched through slipways. Animals were sacrificed and a great banquet was held in which all participants were invited (Zorlu 2008, 57-58).

Regardless the strict launching ceremonies in Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman empire, such elaborate ceremonies were not celebrated on a great scale in Egypt during that time. According to el-Maqrizi, Selim I controlled over Egypt after defeating the Mamluks in the battle of Marj Dabeq in Allepo in 1516 AD. After that, he forced the Egyptian craftsmen including the sailors and shipbuilders to leave Egypt and to go to Constantinople. This forced displacement resulted in the decline of many crafts and manufacture centers in Egypt including manufacturing new boats and ships. The major arsenals in Egypt were consequently closed. However, Khaier Beik, who was appointed by Selim I to be the Ottoman provincial governor of Egypt, restored the Nilotic ships in Egypt after the decline of the Egyptian navy during that time. After that, his interest in retaining the naval power of Egypt obviously increased in order to face any dangers. Thus, Khayer Beik ordered to build a new arsenal in Bulaq. Ibn Eyas mentioned that the new ships were

launched in 1520 AD /962 H by the presence by Khair Beik who was described to be delighted with such achievement (Maher 1976: 135-137; el-Maqrizi part 2: 69; Ebn Eyas part 3: 214).

The new arsenal in Bulaq was described to be a major center which was equipped with a mill house, ovens, cisterns and horse stables. It seems that Khayer Beik attended launching of the ships in Bulaq. For instance, Ali Mubarak mentioned that Khayer Beik ordered Nazer el-Dashisha (one of his dignitaries) to build a big ship which reached 120 arm scale in length (ca. 74.2 m). The manufacture of the ship was in Bulaq and her launching was inaugurated by Khayer Beik by himself (Maher 1976: 135-137; Mubarak, part 12: 70; Ebn Eyas part 3: 274). Additionally, during the reign of Abdel Hamid Khan I, Serhank mentioned that after the naval battle between both Murad Bek and Ibrahim Bek against the Ottoman naval power led by Qaputan Ibrahim el-Gazayerly, the latter built a new arsenal (Tersana) in Giza. Furthermore, the Ottoman Sultan Selim III paid a special interested in ship manufacture in Egypt. He ordered to build different types of naval ships in Egypt such as; *Fergata* ships, *Shaydeya* ships and *Galea* (galley ships) . Part of such ships were used to pacify the northern sea borders of Egypt against the dangers of the French naval powers during that time (Maher 1976: 142-143; Serhank, part 3: 43).

9. CURRENT SITUATION OF MARINE LAUNCHING CEREMONIES IN THE CONTEXT OF EGYPTIAN HERITAGE

The profound cultural and spiritual heritage of ancient Egypt was intricately relevant to the celebrations surrounding ship launches. Shipbuilding held significant importance within Egyptian society, accompanied by various practices that ranged from formal protocols to traditional ceremonies. These maritime customs often incorporated religious rites aimed at ensuring the safety and success of the vessel. Beyond their spiritual significance, these rituals also portrayed the ship as a symbol of wealth and prestige. The event of launching a new ship was marked by communal feasting, music, and religious observances that honoured the commencement of the ship's journey, drawing participation from both the general populace and the elite, who collectively shared a sense of optimism.

Through the application of a combination of internal and external strategies, alongside both digital and traditional publishing methods, the primary aim is to highlight marine launching ceremonies in Egypt as an essential component of the nation's intangible cultural heritage. This initiative is expected to promote the revitalization of these ceremonies, particularly within the tourism sector, thereby fulfilling the objectives of cultural preservation.

Maritime launching ceremonies are definitely a remarkable part of the intangible cultural heritage in Egypt. This importance is because of involving many aspects of intangible cultural heritage; performing arts including traditional music and dance, oral traditions and linguistic expressions, social practices, rituals and festivals, and traditional craftsmen (Ballard 2008: 75). Furthermore, intangible cultural heritage is defined to be transmitted from generation to generation by communities and groups in response to their environment and their history. Maritime intangible heritage also includes a historical component as it involves the preservation of boats and ships, building heritage on coastal land and in intertidal zones, legacy within museums, coastal architecture (also known as “*sea spaces*”), and traditional and indigenous knowledge (UNESCO 2003; Bender 2014).

In modern times, ceremonies of launching ships in Egypt are obviously diverse according to the size of the ship. In the case of launching yachts and military and commercial vessels, ceremonies were practiced but in more official context due to the development of air transportation. Despite of the current emphasis on technological innovations and financial successes, such celebrations preserve a feeling of heritage and cultural pride. Ceremonial launching of these ships is made through parades. In contemporary festivities, the national Egyptian anthem, official musical performances, speeches by dignitaries, and other updated customs are frequently included to honor Egypt's rich maritime history. This fusion of the ancient and the modern keeps the rich maritime heritage of Egypt intact reflecting the country's dynamic culture and unwavering ties to its nautical past (fig.7).

Fig.7. Launching the Egyptian Commercial ship “*Valley of the Kings*” attended by the President of Egypt and the dignitaries, Thursday, 15th June, 2023



Source: shorturl.at/shldi (accessed 10/11/2024, 10:10 PM)

On the other hand, boats and small ships were launched through more folkloric performances regaining the legacy of its past. Many interviews were conducted with shipbuilders in Alexandria, and Damietta. They stated that launching small ships and boats are celebrated in a more folkloric ceremonies which are inherited by the descendants of seaman of the same families. Ships were manufactured and launched in small workshops overlooking the sea called “el azaa’ الأزأ” which is driven from a slang Egyptian verb “yezou’ يزوء” meaning “to push”. These workshops are centralized in el-Anfushi, Bahari and el-Max in Alexandria (figs. 8, 9,10) and Ezbet el-Nakhl and Ras el-Bar in Damietta (figs 11,12). During launching the ships, verses of holy Quran are recited hoping for divine blessing and protection. Furthermore, Islamic religious verses and quotes are painted on the external surface for the same purpose, namely to guarantee blessing to the newly launched boats. In addition, the name of the boat’s owner, the name of the boat, linear decoration and decorative motives are painted on the hull of boats. The most common verses, quotes and decoration for the ships and boats in Egypt are listed in table 1.

Table 1. Table indicating the most common phrases and decoration painted on the ships and boats in Alexandria and Damietta.

<i>Type of Phrases and Decoration painted on Boats and Ships in Alexandria and Damietta</i>			
	Number of Verse and Surah	Verse translated in English	Verse in Arabic
<i>Verses of Quran</i>	Verse 1 of Fateha (1)	In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful	بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
	Part of verse 41 of Surah Houd (11)	“Embark therein: in the Name of Allah will be its (moving) course and its (resting) anchorage. Surely, my Lord is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”	وَقَالَ ارْكَبُوا فِيهَا بِسْمِ اللَّهِ مَجْرَاهَا وَمُرْسَاهَا إِنَّ رَبِّي لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ
	Part of Verse 21 of Surah Yusuf (12)	“God always prevails in His purpose, though most people do not realize it”.	وَاللَّهُ غَالِبٌ عَلَىٰ أَمْرِهِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ
	Part of Verse 39 of Surah Al-Kahf (18)	And why did you, when you entered your garden, not say, ‘What Allah willed [has occurred]; there is no power except in Allah ‘?	وَلَوْلَا إِذْ دَخَلْتَ جَنَّتَكَ قُلْتَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ
	Verse 22 of Surah el -Dhareyat (51)	“And in heaven is your provision and also what you are being promised.”	وَفِي السَّمَاءِ رِزْقُكُمْ وَمَا تُوعَدُونَ
	Verse 1 of Surah el-Fath (48)	“Indeed, We have given you, [O Muhammad], a clear conquest”	إِنَّا فَتَحْنَا لَكَ فَتْحًا مُّبِينًا
	Verse 1 of Surah el-Falaq (113)	“I seek refuge in the Lord of daybreak.”	قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ
	<i>Islamic quotes</i>		Allah is Great
		there is no God except Allah, Muhammad is His bondman and Messenger	لا إله إلا الله محمداً رسول الله
		We trust in Allah	توكلنا على الله
<i>Name of the owner of the ship</i>		The boat belongs to.....	مركب ملك.....
<i>Names of the Ship</i>	The name of the ship is always referred to it as feminine in Arabic	The beautiful one Is called	الحلوة اسمها.....
		The authentic one is called.....	أصيلة يا
<i>Decoration</i>	Linear Decoration		
	<p>Figures like: Ship Hull of the ship Eye Fish (dolphin / shark) Eagle Dragon Floral Decoration</p>		

Source: Author

Figure 8, 9, 10. The shape of modern ships in Alexandria before launching to the sea



Source: Author

Despite the detailed ceremonies of the past, launching the ship ceremonies are now more limited in time and are basically attended by the seamen and shipbuilders who inherited this manufacture from their parents. In addition, the name of the owner is painted on the hull of the ship. The shape of the eye is sometimes painted to ward off any evil eye; a practice that might be inspired for the ancient Egyptian wedjat eye of God Horus². In addition, the shape of the falcon spreading its wings is sometimes painted on the prow of the ship. As previously mentioned, the falcon was the sign of the Egyptian god Horus. It was also highly venerated by the Egyptian because of its physical strength and its remarkable flying speed (Scalf 2012, 33-34).

Having the same name of their workshops, limited groups of workers are responsible for launching the small and medium-sized boats in such workshops. This group is named “el azaa’ الأزرأ” and the leader of this group is responsible for organizing the team work. Motivating yelling is heard every now and then to encourage the team to accomplish their work. Like the traditional slipways used in antiquity, the workers use wooden slipways to slide the newly-launched ship on it. The slideways are now called Falankat and are sometimes coated with oil to facilitate sliding the ship down to the sea easily.

Such ceremonies of launching ships were fortunately documented in Egyptian cinematic heritage in the context of a famous Egyptian movie called “Ibn Hamido”. The movie, which was directed by Fateen Abdel el-Wahab in 1957, talks about two undercover police officers who were on secret mission. They disguised themselves as fishermen in Suez port to catch drug dealers there. Among the scenes of this comic movie, folkloric ceremonies were shown during launching one of the ships including dancing, Islamic prayers and breaking a vessel among the bow of the ship which was named as “Normandy 2” (figs 13, a, b) (Armes 2008, 20; Ginsberg & Lippard 2010, 463-464). Breaking a bottle on the hull of the ship became a major ritual during launching ships in Europe by the 18th century AD (Blackman 1995, 150; Hodgkinson 2024).


² The eye of Horus: The name of this eye wDA_t (irt)  means the uninjured eye of Horus. The injured eye of Horus was a very important subject in art creating one of the most effective of the protective amulets from the Old Kingdom onwards. The enormous number of the udjat amulets, which has been discovered in tombs, reflects the great popularity of this kind of amulets. The Egyptians wore the utchat amulet to provide them with strength, protection, and good health. Moreover, this eye became basis for geometric progression of unitary fraction (1/2 to 1/64) used for the dosage of the drugs. It was identified with the medical instruments used for the eyes. This kind of amulets was made of various materials. They could be made of cornelian, moulded glazed compositions, granite, hematite, lapis lazuli, porcelain, wood and wax. Gold examples are also well attested from the First Intermediate Period onwards; Kitat, 2006, 54; Faulkner 1964, 75; Müller-Winkler 1986, 829; Nunn 2002, 101; Griffiths 1960, 34; Andrews, 1994, 44.

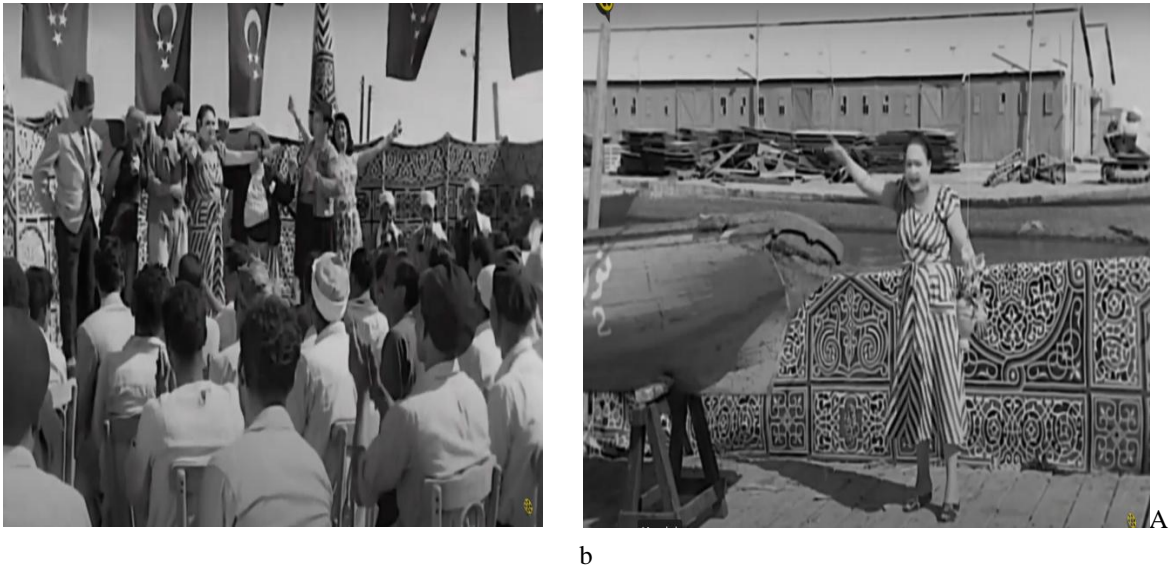
Figure 11, 12. The shape of modern ships in Ezbet el-Nakhl in Damietta ³



Source: Author

³ I am grateful to Mrs. Kholoud Ghena who kindly provided me with these pictures.

Figure 13 a,b. Scene of Egyptian movie showing ceremonies of launching the ship, “Ibn Hamido movie,” directed by Fatin Abdel el-Wahab in 1957



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBJfAzHzhkQ> (accessed 3/5/2024, 14:10 PM)

10. EGYPTIAN SHIP LAUNCHING CEREMONIES AS AN EFFECTIVE PROMOTING TOOL FOR THE EGYPTIAN MARINE HERITAGE

Admittedly, launching practices in maritime communities could be utilized as means of promoting tourism in Egyptian ports. Through the reenactment of ship-launching ceremonies, Egypt merges its cultural heritage with engaging experiences, allowing visitors to gain an authentic insight into its illustrious history. The incorporation of sound and light displays, alongside narrative performances, can create a dramatic setting that enhances the authenticity of these events, showcasing the traditions in diverse manners. By utilizing historically accurate attire, music, and vessels, visitors are afforded a unique chance to immerse themselves in a practice that has been celebrated for millennia.

From a tourism promotion perspective, these ceremonial reenactments complement Egypt's larger marketing campaign to showcase its rich cultural maritime past. They could be a crucial and effective way in grab the attention of tourists who are interested in history, culture, and in-depth, hands-on tours, particularly in the port areas of Egypt. To give tourists a genuine experience, marine communities' involvement in these places should be given careful thought. To spark potential tourists' interest, the events can be promoted via a variety of platforms, such as; social media, museums and galleries, and travel agencies. By drawing attention to these marine customs, Egypt ensures that respect for its long-standing customs endures and not only protects its cultural legacy but also uses it as a powerful tool to grow its tourism sector. Being a part of the intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO 2015), the engagement of local communities in utilizing their traditional launching ceremonies in the field of tourism will lead to the sustainable development

of such communities in addition to preserving their authenticity and traditions facing the rapid danger of urbanization (Kim et al. 2019; Giliberto & Labadi 2021).

11. EMPIRICAL STUDY

11.1. Sampling:

To collect the required data for the current study, interviews were conducted with 120 shipbuilders in Alexandria and Damietta. They are categorized according to their geographical location, age, gender as well as education according to the following table (table 2).

Table 2. showing the primary data of ship builders being interviewed including demographic characteristics of shipbuilders

Geographical location	Alexandria	56 shipbuilders 46.7%		Damietta	64 shipbuilders 53.3%
Age	18- 25 years 24 (20 %)	26-35 years 36 (30 %)	36-45 years 40 (33.3 %)	46- 55 years 14 (11.7 %)	Over 56 years 6 (5 %)
Gender	Male 120 (100 %)				
Education	illiterate 10 (8.3%)	Primary School 34 (28.3%)	Secondary School 28 (23.3 %)	High School 22 (18.3 %)	Graduated 16 (13.3 %)

Source: Author

According to the data presented in Table 1, which outlines the demographic characteristics of the respondents, the majority of shipbuilders fall within the middle-aged category, specifically those aged between 36 and 45 years, constituting 33.3% of the total. Following this group, young shipbuilders, numbering 36 individuals, represent 30% of the respondents. In terms of gender distribution, all shipbuilders are male. Furthermore, a significant portion of the builders has completed only primary education, accounting for 28.3%, while those who visited secondary school make up 23.3% of the total.

11.2. Results: Level of Egyptian shipbuilders’ potential to be engaged in tourism sector:

Based on the results of the interviews, 78.3% of the interviewed person agree to be part of tourist performances to show launching ceremonies to the audience. 21.7 % believe that it is hard to involve common people in attending these ceremonies because of the critical dangerous work place of such practices. On the other hand, 88.3% of the interviewed shipbuilders agree that documenting their practices while launching ships through multimedia sources, brochures and booklets, as well as platforms is mandatory to achieve the sustainability of their craft and accompanying intangible traditions. They believe that such practices could be later involved in

workshops, exhibitions and museum display to the audience in museums, cultural centers and heritage sites. In addition, 92.5 % of the interviewed workmen agree to have certain organizational support for their traditional craft and accompanied traditional practices. They believe that this will surely lead to sustainable development of their communities particularly in the field of education, training, health care and insurance. On the other hand, a minor sector of the respondents did not agree of having any institutional sponsorship (table 3).

Table 3. Table showing the Level of Egyptian shipbuilders’ potential to be engaged in tourism sector

Shipbuilders’ involvement in Tourist activities		
	Frequency	Percent
No	26	21.7 %
Yes	94	78.3%
Total	120	100
Documentation of marine launching ceremonies		
	Frequency	Percent
No	14	11.7%
Yes	106	88.3%
Total	120	100
Governmental and Institutional Support		
	Frequency	Percent
No	9	7.5%
Yes	111	92.5%
Total	120	100

Source: Author

11.3. SWOT Analysis:

According to the previous study, ship launching ceremonies could indisputably play a crucial role in promoting for the intangible marine heritage in Egyptian ports. Approaching a better understating of ceremonies of ship launching in the context of cultural heritage and tourism, a SWOT analysis is conducted to make a better a framework to identify and analyse the ship launching ceremonies in Egypt (table 4).

Table.4. SWOT Analysis revealing the role of launching ceremonies in the Egyptian Marine Heritage

Strength	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ship launching ceremonies are diverse due to the richness of the ancient Egyptian history and civilization. • Oral traditions of launching ships are deeply relevant to the ecosystem of these communities. • Ship launching ceremonies reflect the cultural and ideological identity of the Egyptian society along its long history. • Ship launching practices are a crucial part of the folkloric ceremonies of seamen and shipbuilders in Egyptian ports. • Ship launching ceremonies reflect the authenticity of local communities in the coastal regions of Egypt. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ship launching ceremonies are not systematically documented through organizations. • The lack of historical resources did not give a full account about ship launching ceremonies in Egypt particularly during Islamic and modern times. • International initiatives related to intangible cultural heritage of marine launching ceremonies are currently not effectively organized by the government, social groups, individual citizen participation, and the heritage and folklore researchers, all of which should support the cohesion of local communities (Kim et al. 2019; Obradović et al. 2022). • In Egypt, the preservation and transference of marine intangible cultural resources remain inadequate and unsystematic. There are insufficient studies and research work on Egyptian intangible cultural legacy up to now, and it is extremely harder to locate systematic works on intangible cultural heritage of marine launching ceremonies in Egypt.

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ship launching ceremonies are a crucial part of the intangible marine heritage in Egypt that should be utilized in the field of tourism. • Many non-organizations may have the motivation to document ship launching ceremonies. For instance, The Raquda Foundation for Art and Heritage in Alexandria leads now a promising project for rescuing the area of el-Max in Alexandria which is a prominent fishing and maritime community in the city https://raqudafoundation.org/projects/el-max/ The project could involve the traditional practices which accompanied launching fishing boats in such area. • Ship launching ceremonies could be part in promoting for Egyptian marine heritage. • Ship launching ceremonies could be involved in the context of Egyptian museums through storytelling, workshops and children’s activities. • Promoting for ships launching ceremonies will offer a good opportunity for engaging the local maritime communities in preserving their traditions and for promoting for it in the field of tourism. • Through the application of a combination of internal and external strategies, alongside both digital and traditional publishing methods, the primary aim is to highlight marine launching ceremonies in Egypt as an essential component of the nation's intangible cultural heritage. This initiative is expected to promote the revitalization of these ceremonies, particularly within the tourism sector, thereby fulfilling the objectives of cultural preservation. • Being part of the marine heritage of local communities in Alexandria and Damietta, the preservation of marine launching ceremonies will guarantee the sustainable development in relevant local communities (Giliberto & Labadi 2021). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional launching ceremonies could face distinction since they are inherited from one generation to one generation and they are not systematically documented. • The rapid devolvement of technology as well as the dominance of air transportation threaten such traditional ceremonies. • The absence of official recognition and support from the different organizations causes hardship for these traditional groups and the preservation of their inherited ceremonies and traditions.

Source: Author

12. CONCLUSION

Ceremonies of launching ships and boats represent the inherited marine heritage of any country. Having a rich history and long history and civilization, Egyptian ceremonies of launching ships and boats passed through various stages all of which were mainly based on religious concept. Regardless the obvious change of the religious beliefs and transformation that occurred in Egypt, the Egyptians mainly aimed to guarantee a divine protection for their marine voyage through such ceremonies. The inheritance and protection of intangible cultural heritage in the time domain of Egyptian ports is imminent as the living space of intangible cultural heritage handed down to the people has been compressed due to the country's rapid urbanization, the inheritors currently possessing little cultural background, and the group of shipbuilders is ageing significantly. Thus, documenting folkloric ceremonies in Egypt will be worthy particularly for the fishing ships and will preserve a crucial aspect of the intangible marine heritage of Egypt. Displaying such scenes in museums, cultural centers and heritage sites should be one of the potentials for conserving these ceremonies. These ceremonial reenactments complement Egypt's larger marketing campaign to showcase its rich cultural past from the standpoint of tourism promotion. They are an effective means of drawing in tourists who are interested in culture, history, and in-depth, hands-on excursions. To generate interest in the events among potential tourists, various media platforms can be utilized for promotion, including social media, sound and light displays, storytelling performances, as well as museums and exhibitions.

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