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Egypt yesterday and today in Yūsuf Zaydān's novels

The author of the paper will attempt to analyze comprehensively the image of contemporary Egypt in novels by Yūsuf Zaydān, a well-known Egyptian prose writer, against the background of his historiosophical concepts.

Yūsuf Zaydān was born in 1958. He is an Islamic philosopher and historian, but specializes in manuscript research. For many years he was director of the Manuscript Institute at the Museum of Manuscripts at the Alexandria Library. Over the past several years he has published many works and essays on the history of Islam, becoming one of the most recognizable figures in Egyptian intellectual life. Many of his statements in the Arabic media aroused controversy and opposition of the scholar and religious circles and general public. Zaydān undermined the historical credibility of the *sunna* and the location of Al-Aqsà Mosque. Moreover, he described Salāḥ ad-Dīn as one of the most contemptible figures in Egyptian history.

However, Yūsuf Zaydān has become really popular thanks to his prose. In 2006 he published his first novel, *Zill al-‘Afā* (“Snake’s Shadow”), which is set in the year 2020. In this work Zaydān takes up the issues of evolution of women’s role in history, as well as their social position in contemporary Egypt. Two years later, he published the novel *Azāzīl* (“Azazel”), which was awarded the prestigious International Prize for Arabic Fiction (Arabic Booker) in 2009. The book – a chronicle of the difficult crystallization of the Christian doctrine and the disputes led between the Council of Nice (325) and the Council of Ephesus (431) – sparked controversy and loud opposition of the Coptic Church in Egypt. In his next novel, *An-Nabaḩī* (“Nabatean”), published in 2010, the author continues to cover the historical themes. The plot of the book is set just before the military intrusion of ‘Amr Ibn al-‘Āṣ in Egypt. In 2012 Zaydān abandoned the historical themes and started to write the trilogy: *Muḩāl* (2012), *Guwwantanāmū* (2014) and *Nūr* (2016). The cycle shows the complicated fate of a young generation embroiled in the political turmoil at the turn of the second and third millennium.

The canvas of these novels gave the author an opportunity to present his own historical concepts and to look for the answers to the question whether Egypt still has a significant influence on the shape of the Arab-Muslim civilization.