

Ossama, Bahaa Ed-Din (2015). *Kilma Hilwa: Egyptian Colloquial Arabic through Songs. Intermediate Level*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 229 pp.

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The book *Kilma Hilwa: Egyptian Colloquial Arabic through Songs. Intermediate Level* is an anthology and textbook of Egyptian songs that allows users to explore the realm of Egyptian music, cinema and culture. The author, who teaches Arabic to foreign learners in Cairo, affirms in his introduction that songs are not only didactic tools: “they are more than this, they are the receptacle of a culture (*wi'ā' taqāfa*), people's thoughts and are comparable to poetry and prose”.

According to Bahaa Ed-Din Ossama, the idea of drafting a didactic anthology of Egyptian songs sprang from two motives: the lack of a dedicated textbook and the fact that he wanted to insert songs in his lessons to provide learners with authentic texts composed in Arabic for Arabs. Therefore, *Kilma Hilwa* can be used as a reference textbook by both teachers and students of Egyptian Arabic, which is used by the author in the whole work. In this light, the book is targeted for learners of Egyptian Arabic as a Foreign Language (EAFL), even though the author hopes for its adoption also in Egyptian schools to preserve Egyptian culture, art forms and heritage. The book is organized in 20 units, each corresponding to a song carefully selected among a large musical production that goes from the year 1949 to 2010, covering more than sixty years of Egyptian music. The singers, musicians and songwriters considered are the most disparate: from the prominent Mohammed Abdel Wahab to the superstar Leila Mourad, both singers and actors; from Mohammed Fawzi to the ‘King of the Oud’ Farid al-Atrash; from the world renown Umm Kulthum to the Lebanese Sabah, both awarded with the title of ‘Diva of Music’, etc.

Each unit opens with a comic strip either dedicated to the main topic of a song or evoking a specific verse of the song itself in a humorous way; then the lyrics are presented. The book displays various types of texts, e.g. ‘classical’ Arab pop songs, but also more hybrid ones like Dalida's *Helwa ya baladi* (You're Beautiful, My Country) and the very famous quatrains (*rubā'iyāt*) by Mohammed Mounir. The verses encompass a wide range

of themes. Songwriters describe the romantic love for their sweetheart, kindness, passion; they formulate teachings for kids, but also speak about nostalgia for the country (*ḥanīn*) and the past (*nūstālġyā*), social problems like violence, hardship, poverty, selfishness, etc.

The new vocabulary is then presented, followed by a brief written comment by the author on the song, its lyrics and atmosphere, while also providing information on Egyptian culture, history, cuisine, cinema, television series, theatrical plays, etc. With this in mind, the book focuses the study of the language within Egyptian culture and the country's recent history. The author, in fact, encourages the study of culture and art along with language, a position that links Ossama to other Arab scholars of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL), who stressed the bond between language and culture in the past and maintained that culture is a fundamental aspect in language learning. Hence, when commenting the recent success by Reham Abd Elhakim *Bi-l-waraqā wa-l-qalam* (By Paper and Pen), the author takes advantage of the lyrics stressing certain distinctive cultural traits of Egypt such as hospitality (*diyāfa*) and kindness (*karam*). Through other songs, he highlights some happenings that marked Egypt's recent history, e.g. the Suez Canal nationalization, population explosion, etc. Moreover, at the beginning of each unit, QR codes allow users to quickly find the songs on SoundCloud and their videos on YouTube. Through this, students are encouraged to practice pronunciation, but can also actually watch what has been described in the song's comment, gaining insight on Egyptian cinema, television series and theatrical plays. For instance, the second unit features the song *Alf layla wa-layla* (A Thousand and One Nights), which is both a hit by Samira Said and the theme song of the television series (*musalsala*) starring Naglaa Fathi in the role of Shahrazad, first broadcasted in 1981. This can easily bring students to gain access to other authentic texts that are not only songs but also movies, soap operas, videos on the internet, etc.

After that, observations on lexicon, grammar and – again – culture are given, followed by a series of exercises: e.g. written comprehension, true or false, cloze, multiple choice, grammar check, oral (*munāqaša*) and written production activities. As a whole, the book can be used in classroom practice but also for self-study, even though keys to exercises are not included at the end of the book. A series of appendices (short biographies of singers, musicians and songwriters; English translations of the songs; a short list of references and the links to the songs on YouTube and SoundCloud) concludes the volume.

Kilma Hilwa appears a well-structured textbook. Songs are introduced gradually, from the easiest to the most difficult; nonetheless, as Ossama affirms, one can also study them chronologically thanks to the timeline in which songs are organized from the oldest to the most recent.

We should note that this second option is demanding for intermediate

learners of EAFL, since the most difficult texts would be studied randomly and without graduation, thus making the learning process challenging. The text is certainly good, but some improvements could be suggested. Exercise keys for instance would have been a welcome addition. Furthermore, teachers that plan to use *Kilma Hilwa* in class may consider anticipating some information concerning both the lexicon and contents of songs before reading or listening to them. Indeed, pre-input activities that help learners focus on the main topics and issues of songs, such as key words, vocabulary lists and comments, come after the lyrics.

This textbook is an excellent contribution to the field of teaching EAFL and AFL in general: AFL learners are not usually exposed to such a profusion of information and details on culture, which is, nonetheless, fertile ground for their curiosity and vital in quenching their thirst for knowledge. Through this volume students can be nourished with real, lively and highly interesting aspects related to their language of study. Accessing culture through music can engage language learners and make them experience pleasure in learning, which is the best fuel for language progress. This is a most valid reason to recommend this textbook to teachers, students, but also to interested users who aim to teach or learn Egyptian Arabic and Egyptian culture.

