



OBELUS

Asaph Saif al-Haq **أسف سيف**
an abbreviated biography

alias: "Shermer" by G. Hornan

b. 1876 — *Damascus, Ottoman Syria*

d. 1955 — *Kingston, ON*

Asaph Saif al-Haq was born in Ottoman Syria in the Damascus Vilayet (ولاية دمشق). Young Asaph moved to Egypt to study, after which most of his professional life was spent in Cairo. Later, after emigrating to Canada, Saif al-Haq acted as Griff Hornan's archivist and office assistant from 1946 until his death in 1955 at age 76.



Asaph Saif al-Haq grew up and last lived on this Damascus street before leaving the area in March of 1909 to continue his education in Cairo, Egypt. Photo: The Bonfilis Collection [c. 1867-c. 1914]

As a young scholar, Asaph Saif al-Haq emigrated to Egypt just before the Hauran Massacre in 1909 to continue his education and ultimately find employment in Cairo. Pictured below (on a camel), Saif al-Haq was working in Egypt in 1930 as an adjunct surveyor with the Egyptian Ministry of Culture's Department of Antiquities. After establishing a promising career, he worked in quiet exile for the Wilbour Library of Egyptology at the Brooklyn Museum in the United States. After his sudden retirement as an assistant to the Honorary Curator of Egyptology in 1941, he emigrated to Kingston, Ontario, Canada to work with Gruffydd (Griff) Hornon on his magnum opus. His escape to relative obscurity has always been a mystery. It is possible that the scandal that erupted after his departure from his position in Brooklyn was in some way connected to his departure, but no clear evidence has ever been uncovered to support this conjecture.



Above: Asaph Saif al-Haq on an official Ministry visit to Giza in 1936, with his guide, right, and camelier, left. [Photographer unknown]

Hornon was very lucky to find such an experienced and knowledgeable assistant considering how isolated and low-profile his endeavor was. Although Saif al-Haq was treated with respect and friendliness, for some inexplicable and possibly mischievous reason, Hornon obstinately called Asaph Saif al-Haq by the nick-name "Shermer" (as in *preserved* in Hebrew, and possibly an accidental reference to Michael Shermer of the present-day Skeptics Society). As an aesthete and scholar, Saif al-Haq outstripped Hornon in all things historical, linguistic, taxonomic, archaeological, artistic and literary. In spite of his considerable expertise, he continued to serve as Hornon's taciturn and mistrusting Chief Assistant for unknown reasons; never really accepting Hornon's warped and naïve perspective on things. Saif al-Haq simply ignored Hornon's wild assertions and assumptions in an ultimately Quixotic attempt to preserve the truth and dignity of the subjects being researched. Saif al-Haq was a professional and maintained his integrity at all costs. He used a rubber stamp of Hornon's signature on most documents in order to avoid attaching his own name to anything he felt was beneath his own dignity. He managed to maintain his composure and proceeded to do his job as independently as he could. As he aged and became more infirm, he couldn't keep up



with the demands that flooded in from Hornon on a daily basis. Files and artifacts piled up, uncatalogued and in increasing disarray. Hornon didn't realize until too late, that his collections and archives were slowly disintegrating as Saif al-Haq became less able to function. His sudden but quiet death in 1955 was a complete shock to Hornon.

This booklet is part of an ongoing series of mini-biographies compiled by the research staff of OBELUS Publishing and printed by DeadCat Press at the Residue Press Printshop. Much of the material herein is from THE LYRIC CRANIUM archives, and was originally collected and catalogued by the late Griff Horman and his archivist, Asaph Saif al-Haq, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. All text, except where noted, is by David Morrish.

© 2018 OBELUS Publishing



OBELUS