

# Orientalism in Sounds of *The Mummy*: Tracking changes in Orientalist attitudes through time

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**Research Question:** What role does the sonic representation of the Middle East in Hollywood play in perpetuating Orientalist attitudes through the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries?

## Why *The Mummy*?

- A uniquely *constructed* mythology inextricably linked to notions of Orientalism
- Many iterations over the course of Hollywood's history give many landmarks to observe over time
  - Three iterations chosen: 1938, 1999, 2017

## Historical Background:

- What makes a sound “exotic”?
- Drawing on preexisting literature focused on opera, the precursor to film soundtracks
  - *The Imperial Spectacle*, Edward Said
  - *Orientalism and Musical Style*, D.B. Scott
- Historical linking of the Orient to chaotic sound
  - *Egypt at the Exhibition*, Timothy Mitchell

## Defining the “Oriental Scale”:

- A quantitative framework for musical analysis
  - Based on the harmonic minor scale in Western musicology
  - Closely follows existing Arabic scales

## Discussion:

- *The Mummy* (1932): The West in the Orient
  - Re-contextualization of non-diegetic silence to modern audiences
  - Preoccupation with the preservation of the “authentic” Orient
- *The Mummy* (1999): The Orient Renewed
  - Insistence on its predecessor's conception of the Orient
  - Selecting and amplifying sonic elements to create another link in the chain of cultural Orientalism

- *The Mummy* (2017): The Orient Invades the West
  - Sounds of conflict in a post 9-11 world
  - The Mummy's theme as a weaponized adhan
  - Soundtrack reflects modern anxieties as the Middle East moves further from the idea of the Orient

**Conclusion:** Sound in Hollywood has not only helped to advance stereotypes of timelessness, exoticism, and adventure but facilitated their more recent development to that of violence and terror. Drawing attention to how this is accomplished and recognizing why it is effective will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of Orientalism in media.