Prince Hassan Aziz Hassan

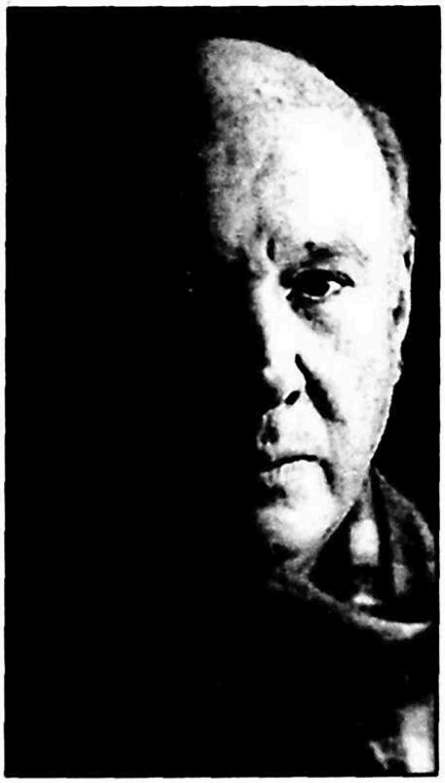
Egyptian prince who stayed on among his souvenirs after Nasser's revolution

PRINCE HASSAN AZIZ HASSAN, who has died in Cairo aged 76, was one of the few members of the Egyptian royal family to remain in Egypt after Nasser seized power and abolished the monarchy.

For nearly 50 years, Hassan Hassan lived as an impecunious artist, a chronicler and living symbol of the country's lost grandeur. In his recent memoir, *In the House of Muhammad Ali: a family album 1805 to 1952*, he recalls a childhood in Egypt's royal palaces and villas and evokes that era with a photographic memory for detail.

With great restraint, he argues that the Egyptian royal family were not the decadent pleasure-seekers history has portrayed, but dutiful servants of an ordered society.

He also finds time to comment on the houses that he knew from his youth. "The dining room," he wrote of his family's villa in the grounds of Shubra Palace on Cairo's northern outskirts, was "in hideous arabesque adapted to European forms in a merger that should never have occurred".



Hassan Hassan: café society

Hassan Hassan had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the history and architecture of Cairo, and was much consulted by writers in search of the flavour of the old order. He was a familiar figure in the city's cafés, where he would sit with his carved stick, acknowledging the greetings of people as they entered.

Too impractical for a conventional career, he eked out a slender living by selling his own abstract paintings.

The Cairo-based American writer Max Rodenbeck describes Hassan Hassan sitting on the terrace of the Gezira Sporting Club, a faded remnant of British colonialism. "Small, pale and baby-shaped, he wears an immaculate grey suit of 1940s' cut. His expression hints that an invisible pomander is floating somewhere near his noble nose. His mother may have been, as some say, a Spanish dancer, but the prince is still every inch a royal."

The monarchy was abolished in 1953, a year after King Farouk had been forced to abdicate in favour of his infant son and to leave Egypt for ever. Other members of the royal family sought refuge in Switzerland and France, but either through lack of means or lack of inclination, Hassan Hassan stayed on, quietly enduring the anti-royal zeal of Nasser's revolution.

In a final humiliation of the monarchy, the new government ordered the confiscation of all royal property. In the years that followed, Hassan Hassan lived in a small flat in the Garden City district of central Cairo, with a mismatched selection of such antiques and art treasures as the state Confiscation Committee allowed him to keep.

Once a year he was subjected to an inspection by officials who would hold him to account for every broken glass, lest he should seek to augment his meagre state pension by the sale of state property.

The Prince was born Nabil Hassan Aziz Hassan at San Remo, Italy, on February 22 1924, the youngest of four children.

His father, Prince General Aziz Hassan Pasha, commander-in-chief of the Ottoman Turkish cavalry, was a grandson of Khedive (Viceroy) Ismail of Egypt (ruled 1863-79), and a founder member of the Wafd, the political faction that pressed Britain to grant Egypt independence under a constitutional monarchy. The general was exiled to Spain where, during the First World War, he met a middle-class Spanish girl. He married her, as his second wife, at Kerman in Persia. She converted to Islam and took the names Ikbal Hanim.

Hassan Hassan was eight when his father died, ending a period of happiness and tranquillity. Thereafter, King Farouk's predecessor King Fuad (Khedive Ismail's sixth son and King of Egypt from 1922), ordered that because of their mother's commoner status, Hassan Hassan and his brother and sisters should be raised by Fuad's sister, their great-aunt Princess Nimetallah.

The children were taken from their mother and raised in Nimetallah's palace outside Cairo, on a vast estate with formal gardens, forests and villages. Here they were taught by tutors and governesses.

For 15 minutes each morning, they called on their great-aunt in her boudoir, a formality in which every step was laid down. The princess dispensed favour or disgrace to each child in turn.

Later, Hassan Hassan attended schools in Izmir, Beirut, and then in England, at Leighton Park, a Quaker school near Reading. He only returned to Egypt in 1939, with the outbreak of war. Once back in Cairo, he enrolled at the Conservatoire Tiegerman, where he studied the piano, becoming an accomplished performer.

In the late Forties, sensing that revolution might be around the corner and being uncertain whether he would be allowed to stay in Egypt, he commissioned a Russian photographer to record his favourite scenes and buildings. The precaution proved unnecessary, though the revolution turned him into an ordinary citizen of Egypt.

"That was the positive thing, I suppose," he reflected. "Before the revolution I had never met a real Egyptian. They are marvellous people, you know."

His sister Hadidjah, with whom he lived for many years, died in 1996, and his sister Aicha died in 1997. His brother Ismail, a pilot in the 1948 Palestine war, committed suicide in 1961. A number of his nieces and nephews still live in Cairo.

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