Conflicted Antiquities
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Pharaonic Selves

In his account of student life in Paris, Rifa‘a Rafi‘ al-Tahtawi mentions ancient Egypt only in a few places and always in association with European scholarship.¹ The association between knowledge about ancient Egypt and European sciences was predictable. Tahtawi’s Paris curriculum had been designed by scholars whose careers were central to the emergence of Egyptology: he was directed on the one hand by Silvestre de Sacy, who had made critical contributions to the decipherment of the hieroglyphs, and on the other by one of Bonaparte’s former savants, Edmé-François Jomard, whose monumental work Description de l’Égypte fueled public interest in Pharaonic antiquities for decades.

Tahtawi’s remarks on Egyptology are remarkable not least because they show he was a quick study. He absorbed the most recent discoveries of the new science even while commenting critically on the acquisition regime underwriting it. At the same time, he began the process of translating the new science into terms that might be legible in Cairo. For example, in his inventory of the sciences and arts among the “Franks,” Tahtawi lists the Société Archéologique:

The Society for the Preservation of Relics of the Ancients is an organization dedicated to searching for, and preserving all the amazing relics of the ancients—buildings, mummies, garments and the like—in order to study the customs of those people. In that place, there are many precious items taken from the land of Egypt, such as the Dendera zodiac bas-relief. The French use it to understand the astronomy of the ancient Egyptians. The French take things like this without [paying] any compensation. They know well their value, and preserve them, and extract from them assorted conclusions and general benefits.²
Tahtawi’s description is noteworthy in that it links an appreciation of European science with an appraisal of the (immoral) political economy supporting it. It is true, he argues, that the Europeans have taken what does not belong to them. But, he concedes, they have made great use of the material. This argument resonates with the perspective of European contemporaries who lamented the abuses—and acknowledged the resemblance to theft—of museum acquisitions in Egypt even as they extolled its virtues. Later, on his journey home, Tahtawi again mentions the impressive knowledge the French had of ancient Egypt. Visiting a memorial that had been vandalized during the Revolution of 1830, Tahtawi compares the modern French culture of monument building to Pharaonic Egypt: “Inscriptions are a custom among the Europeans, who took their cue from the ancient Egyptians and others. Look at how the Egyptians erected temples and the Pyramids of Giza. They built them as monuments to be seen by those who would come after. We should mention the opinion that Europeans have of them after studying them thoroughly, so that you might compare the truth of what they say to what the fantasies [awham] of the [Arab] historians say about them.” Tahtawi continues with a brief summary of the most recent European theories of the history of the pyramids:

In brief, the Europeans say that it was the kings of Egypt who built the pyramids and temples. They differ among themselves as to the time of their construction: some claim they were built 3000 years ago, and that their builder was a king called “Khufu.” Others say the king who built them was called “Khamis” or “Cheops.” It is very clear that its stones were quarried in Upper Egypt, not in Giza. . . . They say these pyramids go back to one of the Pharaoh kings, that he prepared the great one to hold his corpse and the other two to bury his wife and daughter, but that he was not buried in it. . . . This is what the Europeans say about the pyramids.

The point is clear: the French know more about ancient Egypt than Arab historians. Yet there is something peculiar in Tahtawi’s account: while the name Cheops is derived from modern Egyptological sources, the detail about the king and his family comes from old Arabic sources, most likely that of Ibn al-Nadim. In short, Tahtawi leavens his account of “European knowledge” with significant amounts of the Arabic textual tradition.
What does it mean that Tahtawi would present a citation of Islamic tradition within his report of European science? If nothing else, it suggests the continuing relevance of Arabo-Islamic sources, even if their authority had been eclipsed by European sources. However, at times Tahtawi also cites Arab sources. Immediately after this passage, for instance, he cites lines ascribed to the classical poet ʿUmara al-Yamani (d. 1175 CE):

O my companions, do you know of any structures under heaven whose perfection resembles that of Egypt’s pyramids?
All on the face of Earth dread time’s oblivion, yet this is a structure that terrifies times itself.
My glance delights in the guile of its construction, even as my thinking fails to grasp their intention.

Like their medieval source, these lines gesture toward the same philosophical tradition on Pharaonic antiquities that Tahtawi dismisses elsewhere as fiction. Though Tahtawi was willing to concede the intellectual advancement of European Egyptologists, he insisted that this advantage did not translate into a superior moral right to treat Pharaonic monuments as European property. On the contrary, if Egyptian modernity was to be developed in relation to Pharaonic antiquity, Egyptians had to be able to control Pharaonic antiquities: “It is my opinion that just as Egypt is now emulating the civilization and instruction of European countries, it is more entitled to those things of beauty and craft left by its ancestors. Reasonable people consider their stripping away piece after piece to be like adorning oneself with jewelry taken from others. It is tantamount to theft!” The question of what should be done with the antiquities of Egypt had been raised by earlier generations of European travelers. As described in chapter 2, Europeans had long asserted that modern Egyptians were indifferent toward Pharaonic antiquities and that the objects were threatened by the neglect and greed of Egyptian peasants. Now Egyptians were asserting the same thing about Europeans.

In a way, these passages in Tahtawi mark a turning point in Egyptian thought on the Pharaonic past: on the one hand, the author describes the new Egyptology and emphatically associates it with European learning;
on the other hand, he blends this science with old literary and historio-
graphic tradition, sometimes with explicit citations, sometimes without.
Moreover, in Tahtawi’s account one sees, perhaps for the first time, a new
connection between the ancient Egyptian past and the Egyptian present
or, more precisely, the creation of an Egyptian modernity. In the old model,
vestiges of the ancient past were a lesson for the present to consider. But
the content of the Pharaonic past, insofar as its values had been abrogated
by the advent of Islam, offered little in terms of positive guidance for the
conduct of Muslims in the present. In contrast, the new attitude, com-
plete though not self-conscious in Tahtawi’s account, shifted focus from
the consideration of time in the abstract to the consideration of specific
historical periods arranged in a developmental sequence. In this account,
ancient history is not disconnected from the present. Moreover, Tahtawi
presents increasingly confident assertions about the manners and cus-
toms of the ancient Egyptians without moral evaluation. Thus the shape
of ideas that became readily accepted among later generations of Egyptian
intellectuals: that Islam’s relationship to the pagan past might be renegoti-
ated; that by absorbing the knowledge of modern European Egyptology,
Egyptians would learn about an ancient past that belongs rightly to them;
and that only by learning about their ancient past could Egyptians become
truly modern and authentically Egyptian.

It is impossible to exaggerate the place of Tahtawi in the development
of a self-conscious cultural modernism in Egypt. Arguably, what Tahtawi
did best of all was translate, not only concepts, but also institutional
structures. On his return to Cairo from Paris, Tahtawi was employed by
his patron, Mehmed ‘Ali, to serve as editor in chief of Egypt’s first news
gazette, al-Waqa‘i‘ al-Misriyya, director of schools, and state translator,
not to mention director of the first Egyptian antiquities museum. When
Mehmed ‘Ali’s grandson, ‘Abbas I, took power in 1850, he exiled Tahtawi
to Sudan. There, Tahtawi founded a school and continued to write and
translate. Upon his return to Cairo in 1854, Tahtawi again took up his
activities as educational deputy, was made editor in chief of a new journal,
Rawdat al-Madaris, and continued to translate. Paid a commission (in
land) for each book he translated into Arabic, Tahtawi bequeathed his
family a large fortune when he died. Translation of the Pharaonic past
played a critical role in his articulation of Egyptian modernity.
This chapter outlines three distinct moments in the history of the absorption of Egyptological thinking into Egyptian letters. What links them is that each moment attempted to connect the discoveries of Egyptology with the formulation of a modern, Egyptian national identity. The first is a syncretic moment along the lines one sees in the work of nineteenth-century intellectuals like Tahtawi and ‘Ali Mubarak, who also studied in Paris. Like Tahtawi, Mubarak synthesized aspects of older traditions of ancient Egypt with European Egyptology. While the source of modern Egyptology was European, the lessons offered by the Egyptian intellectuals rechanneled it toward other ends. Tahtawi, for example, was adamant that Pharaonic artifacts, part of Egypt’s patrimony, should remain in the country. For his part, Mubarak was not so concerned with the material possession of artifacts as with making the history of ancient Egypt an example for modern Egyptians. Together, Tahtawi’s and Mubarak’s writings reveal a powerful cluster of concepts and themes coupling ancient and modern Egypt: a new history that retains religious narratives about the past while adding to them information garnered from Egyptological discoveries about Pharaonic antiquity; new concepts of place, space, and community that subtly uncouple Egypt from the Islamic and regional traditions of cultural identity; the image of a bounded territory inhabited by a single people sharing a unified, transhistorical experience; and new practices, like preservation and sightseeing. These concepts and themes, made concrete in the material of antiquities and housed in the single institution of the museum, came to pose a tangible reality, one as immediate as it was timeless. The flexible, simultaneously abstract and concrete character of this new perspective on Pharaonic civilization contributed greatly to its rhetorical potential and explains why, many decades later, it would play a prominent role in the nationalist movement of the 1920s.

The second moment, marked by the dissemination of Egyptological history into Egyptian state schools, created a new generation of intellectuals who were much less interested in the Islamic tradition than they were in European knowledge and the culture of appreciation. Crucially, this moment of absorption, though located in Cairo rather than Paris, was less syncretic than that of Tahtawi. Drawing on elements from ‘Ali Mubarak and contemporary Egyptology, this generation talked about the ancient
past in a new way: asserting, for instance, that Pharaonic culture was originally monotheistic, that Egypt’s ancient empire should inspire modern Egyptian political ambitions, and that Egyptian intellectuals should feel ashamed of the supposed indifference and ignorance of most Egyptians toward the Pharaonic past. Significantly, this moment occurred as Egyptian elites first began to engage in domestic tourism.

The third moment was that of a new literary culture identified positively with the Pharaonic past in ways the Islamic tradition and the science of Egyptology never were. Egyptian intellectuals from the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth described the culture and politics of their day as *al-Nahda*, or “the Awakening” (or “Renaissance”). The word underscores the enlightenment response to the ruptures posed by the advent of modernity in the Arab world and describes the image of intellectual mobilization against Ottoman rule and Western colonialism. It also found strong echoes in the theme of the afterlife in ancient narratives like the Osiris myth, which inspired the Pharaonist literary school in Egypt. In this section, I focus on two representative texts, Tawfiq al-Hakim’s novel *Awdat al-ruh* (*Return of the Spirit*) (1932) and Ahmad Husayn’s memoir, *Imani* (*My Faith*) (1936), both of which present themes of national resurrection through an appreciation of the ancient past. In many ways, these two authors represent extreme poles of the nationalist movement. Hakim, a humanist educated in France, was associated with the most liberal elements of the Wafd Party, which dominated Egyptian parliamentary politics throughout the 1920s and 1930s. By contrast, Husayn modeled his small party, *Misr al-Fatat* (*Young Egypt*), on the Italian Fascists. Together, these two texts embrace the wide range of nationalist ideologies that made thematic use of ancient Egypt and demonstrate the flexibility of Pharaonist discourse and nationalism more generally.

**THE SECOND ANTIQAKHANA**

There is perhaps no better way to see how the new science and old tradition were synthesized than to look at how the second Egyptological museum in Cairo was presented to the public. After the demise of the Ezbekiya Antiqakhana, the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette (1821–81) convinced Sa’id Pasha (who had succeeded ‘Abbas I as ruler) of the ur-
gency of preserving Egypt’s antiquities and creating a state museum for them. In 1858, Mariette was appointed director of a new state agency, the Antiquities Service (*Maslahat al-Athar*). The agreed-upon formula would last until after formal independence in 1952: the Antiquities Service was organized as an Egyptian state agency under European management.

Despite wavering support from the uncertain patrons Sa’id (r. 1854–63) and Isma’il (r. 1863–79), Mariette enjoyed a long tenure as director of the service and ensured the success of the infant governmental agency. In many ways, the agency’s existence was closely tied to the fortunes of its director, since Mariette was invested with unique powers, becoming “a bey, second class, with exclusive excavation rights throughout the country, a steamboat, and authorization to levy corvée labor.”\(^8\) In 1863, he opened the second Antiqakhana in Bulaq at great expense both to the state and to his own fortune.\(^9\) Crucially, Mariette wanted his museum to serve the interests of Egyptians:

The Museum of Cairo is not only intended for European travelers. It is the Viceroy’s intention that it should be above all accessible to the natives, to whom the Museum is entrusted in order to teach them the history of their country. I would not be maligning the civilization introduced to the banks of the Nile by the dynasty of Mehmed ‘Ali if I were to assert that Egypt is still too young in the new life which she has just received to have a public easily impressed in matters of archaeology and art. Not long ago, Egypt destroyed its monuments; today, it respects them; tomorrow it shall love them.\(^10\)

Egyptian enthusiasts of the museum presented Pharaonic culture in syncretic terms. Consider the rhetoric of the translation of his guidebook, which sought to introduce Egyptian readers to the museum and to the Pharaonic past more broadly. The first Arabic-language guide begins as follows:

*We praise You, God, You who are called a hidden treasure. And You answered that You would be known. So You created humankind and shared material blessing, so that they would know You and come to understand You. Thus reality became clear and apparent to all. We ask that God bless Muhammad and grant peace upon him, Your servant and prophet, whom You took to be a pure companion. He was loyal and beloved of You. He commanded people gently, and spread sincere truth among them.*

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became renowned and raised up his family as the most deserving of the beautiful reminders [athar], along with his companions, those of noble accounts [of the Prophet’s life], in which is a lesson [‘ibra] to those who would consider and a piece of knowledge for him who would transmit it.¹¹

The invocation of Furjat al-mutafarraj (The Viewer’s Pleasure) is admittedly not the work of its author, but of its translator, ‘Abdallah Abu al-Su‘ud, Mariette’s protégé. Its opening passages give some indication of how nineteenth-century Egyptian translators might adapt Egyptology and the museum to the sensibilities of the reading public in urban centers. In the prologue to Mariette’s description of the contents of the museum, Abu al-Su‘ud engages an idiom of Muslim lessons and reminders. The point is not rote piety, but rather a self-conscious effort to combine two divergent nineteenth-century cultural visions within a uniquely modern Egyptian discourse. His use of the word athar is especially revealing. By the late 1850s, athar had come to have the technical meaning of “antiquities,” as signaled in the Arabic name of the new Antiquities Service (Maslalhat al-Athar). However, Abu al-Su‘ud also plays with connotations that evoke the earlier semantic context.

Another aspect of Abu al-Su‘ud’s register is equally instructive. He writes that the guidebook is meant “to teach the sons of Egypt [abna’ Misr] and inform the people of this era about how their ancient forefathers lived.” In asserting a line of continuity between the past and the present, Abu al-Su‘ud’s language deviates from the orthodox register which distinguished between the pagan past and the monotheistic present. Likewise, whereas orientalist discourse sought to separate ancient Egypt from the lives of modern Egyptians, Abu al-Su‘ud in contrast asserts a patrilineal relation between past “fathers” and present “sons.” Abu al-Su‘ud goes on to suggest that there is no antagonism between Islamic culture and ancient Egypt, since

the ancestors of the people of Egypt believed in the existence of a single God [ilah wahid], seeing but unseen, worshipped as absolute [samad], ancient, eternal, with no beginning and no end. They considered Him holy, revering His sublime blessing and graciousness. They worshipped Him for the loveliness of His beautiful signs [athar], and drew close to Him by doing good deeds and avoiding sin. . . . It is known that the Egyp-
tians were advanced in the matter of divinity to the utmost. No other people were more developed in this regard than they.¹²

Abu al-Su'ud’s lexicon recalls lines of Sura 112 that express the basic elements of monotheism in Islam. His essay no doubt is one of the first attempts to assert a compatibility between Pharaonic religion and Islamic theology. Abu al-Su'ud also describes at length those aspects of the ancient Egyptian religion—from belief in the afterlife to the importance of burial—which most resemble Muslim faith and practice. By emphasizing the place of the god Amun within Pharaonic religion and by understating its polytheism, Abu al-Su'ud’s prologue describes ancient Egypt as an non-pagan, if not proto-Islamic form of monotheism. Abu al-Su'ud’s introduction to Mariette’s guidebook for the Bulaq Museum is remarkable because it reveals how the cultural significance of the antiquities collection was translated into an Egyptian idiom. The resulting discourse rendered an understanding of ancient Egypt that was neither quite that of Muslim tradition nor quite that of European Egyptology.

NEW HISTORY, NEW GEOGRAPHY, NEW COMMUNITY

The real patriot (watani) is justified when filling his heart with patriotism (hubb al-watan), for he has become one of its members.
—TAHTAWI, al-Murshid al-Amin li-l-banat wa-l-banin

Every lover of the beauty of civilization [‘umran], every one who smells the bouquet of this age’s wine, delights with happiness, his heart filling with joy, when he sees with a loving eye that Egypt’s ancient greatness has returned!
—TAHTAWI, Manahij al-albab al-Misriyya fi-mabahij al-adab al-'asriyya

For thinking through the connections between the ancient past and the modern present, the most subtle but powerful development in Tahtawi’s thought was perhaps his introduction, by way of French orientalists like de Sacy, to the historiography of Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406 CE). Ibn Khaldun’s Muqaddima does not so much write a history of human civilization as attempt to discover the rules underlying history itself.¹³ Moreover, the book
is not a study of historical events, but rather a preface (muqaddima) to his universal history Kitab al-‘ibar (Book of Instructive Lessons). Ibn Khaldun’s writing is a response to Muslim historiography, a tradition that was highly developed. Since the life of the Prophet Muhammad is the model for many aspects of Muslim practice, accurate knowledge of his biography has always been paramount to faith itself. The Muqaddima critiques this tradition of Islamic historiography by scrutinizing its method of placing as much emphasis on the reliability of transmitters of reports about the past as it does on the content of the reports themselves. Ibn Khaldun suggests that historians (as opposed to chroniclers) should look for patterns within the occurrence of events, and not just the forms by which news of events are transmitted to the present. Part of what Ibn Khaldun suggests is that one can read effectively for worldly patterns in the unfolding of history. Just as the history of the Prophet is instructive for living as a Muslim, so too might the history of cultural and political change be instructive.

Ibn Khaldun’s argument, in brief, is that society is composed of antagonistic factions, one sedentary, the other nomadic. Civilization (‘umran) is the product of the various ways of life—crafts, professions, habits—that make up a given society. It is not the case, in Ibn Khaldun’s model, that sedentary society is naturally superior or that by itself it marks an advancement over nomadic society. That is because nomadic society enjoys an especially developed sense of group solidarity (‘asabiyya), a civil virtue that becomes weakened by the more luxurious circumstances of the sedentary mode of existence. Over time, the sedentary segments of society tend to decay unless reinvigorated by this sense of group solidarity. Ibn Khaldun’s model of society remains as radical as it is powerful: conflict, being society’s engine, is natural and productive; civilization is a dialectical project without prescribed telos; the history of civilization moves in cycles of advancement, decline, and renewal.

Tahtawi’s interest in Ibn Khaldun led him to supervise the first edition of the Muqaddima published in Egypt, effectively introducing the philosopher to Arabic readers in the Levant for the first time in centuries. But while Tahtawi’s model of history incorporated elements of Ibn Khaldun’s thought (such as the idea of different stages of civilization), he emphatically excluded some of the philosopher’s most radical arguments, such as the notion that civilization moves within a dialectic without telos. Like the opening chapters of Ibn Khaldun’s Muqaddima,
Tahtawi’s first chapter discusses the civilizations of the world, ranking them by stage:

[We] can divide humanity into a number of stages. The first stage consists of savages. The second, of rough barbarians. The third, of the people who have reached the utmost of culture, refinement, sedentarism, civilization and urbanity. An example of the first stage are the savages of the Lands of the Blacks who are like the roaming herds of animals. . . . An example of the second are Bedouins of the desert who have a kind of human sociability . . . and who know right from wrong. . . . An example of the third stage are the countries of Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Byzantium, Persia, Europe, the Maghrib.14

Tahtawi continues in this vein, comparing the civilizational accomplishments of Europe (science and technology) with those of the Muslim world (law and linguistics).

Another element of Ibn Khaldun’s history that is apparent in Tahtawi’s thought is the insistence on reading the events of world history as occurrences whose causes are of a worldly rather than divine origin. Like Ibn Khaldun, Tahtawi divides the study of history into two parts: the first, the history of world events as narrated in the sacred texts of the monotheistic religions; the second, the history of the world as narrated in the best textual sources, regardless of origin. It is the latter form of history with which Tahtawi concerned himself in his final years, especially when he wrote accounts for popular audiences and school curricula. The following categorization of history appears in Anwar Tawfiq al-Jalil:

Egypt’s general history, from the ancient age to our present one, can be divided into two essential categories. The first period being what came before Islam; the second, what came after. The first period can be separated into two branches: the first being the pre-Islamic period [al-Jahiliyya]; the second, the propagation of the Christian religion by the official decree of the Roman Caesar, Theodosius. Pre-Islamic was essentially the time when Egypt was addicted to the worship of idols [awthan wa-asnami]. After that it adhered to Christianity.15

By separating the study of the ancient past from sources whose message contained a kind of moralism, Tahtawi opened up a new way of thinking about ancient Egypt. True, in Tahtawi’s account the pagan character of
Pharaonic Egypt was indelible, but at the same time its civilizational accomplishments could be discussed on their own terms. Thus, despite its pagan character, he would boast, “Egypt contended with the ancients of the nations, and they conceded that, next to Egypt, they were less important. None surpassed her in the matter of civilization [tamadduniyya], and in the field of legislation and executing civil justice, no nation [umma] or community [milla] rejected the blessing of borrowing from Egypt’s sciences. No state or kingdom failed to seek the light of Egypt’s lamp.”16

Welding the Khaldunian historiographical theme of decline and renewal to new developments in the Egyptological accounts of ancient Egyptian history, Tahtawi arrived at a new understanding of the Pharaonic past. The point of appreciating the scientific and engineering accomplishments of ancient Egypt and its political and military strength was thus not merely a lesson about the past, but an image of glory to which the present should aspire. He asserts, for instance, that “in the time of the Pharaohs, Egypt was the mother of the world’s nations [umam al-dunya] and the barb of its weapon was strong.”17 At the same time, his assessment of more recent history was explicitly bleak: for him, Egypt in modern times was clearly in decline. How did Egypt lose “the virtues and prosperity of ancient times”? On this, the great historian of the modern Middle East, Albert Hourani, wrote, “It was, Tahtawi maintains, because of the historical accident of foreign rule: the rule of the Mamelukes in the later Middle Ages and then, after a brief revival under the early Ottoman sultans, the long misrule of the Circassians. In saying this he echoed the proclamations of Bonaparte.”18 In appearance, Tahtawi’s argument about the decline of the present resembles colonial discourse on modern Egypt. Yet, being also informed by Ibn Khaldun’s cyclical model, Tahtawi’s understanding of decline is charged with the opportunity for renewal of past greatness. Here the image of ancient Egypt becomes quite powerful, suggesting that current decline is not the essential state of Egyptian civilization, but rather a moment to be followed by renewal. In more than one instance, Tahtawi makes this point explicitly, arguing that with Mehmed ‘Ali’s rule, “Egypt’s ancient grandeur had returned.”19 In such arguments lie the beginnings of a new way of conceiving Egyptian modernity: as a return of the distant past.

At the same time Tahtawi was creating a new historical model for Egypt, he and others were linking the new history to new concepts of place and
community. For instance, in his introduction to the museum guidebook, Abu al-Su’ud insists that a unique connection exists between ancient and modern Egyptians. Abu al-Su’ud’s privileged term “the people of Egypt” (ahl Misr) does not distinguish between ancients and moderns but suggests that together they form a continuous whole. The historical distance between modern and ancient Egyptians might suggest differences between them, but such differences are, in Abu al-Su’ud’s account, not essential. What joins the people of Egypt together is the shared experience of living within “the Egyptian territories” (al-diyar al-Misriyya). This conceptual link between community and territory is especially keen in Tahtawi. In Manahij al-albab al-Misriyya fi-mabahij al-adab al-'asriyya (The Paths of Egyptian Hearts in the Splendors of Contemporary Morals) Tahtawi builds on the classical fada’il genre by developing the concept of merits. In terms derived from French political economy, he discusses public benefit (al-manafi’ al-‘umumiyya)—commerce, industry, and agriculture—with special emphasis on land as a source of wealth. In doing so, he develops a concept that links land and community: al-watan (homeland, patrie). In Tahtawi’s account, the connection Egyptians feel for the land and for each other is innate, though not passive. True, the land of Egypt has its natural advantages (fada’il), enjoyed by all those who inhabit it. At the same time, Tahtawi urges his readers to cultivate an active sense of attachment to their country—in short, patriotism, or “love of homeland” (hubb al-watan). The concept shares much with Ibn Khaldun’s notion of “group solidarity” (’asabiyya) in that it describes a kind of sociability that is inherited, but whose existence needs to be actively expressed: if taken for granted and unpracticed, this kind of solidarity weakens in time. Unlike Ibn Khaldun’s concept, however, with its emphasis on tribal bonds, Tahtawi’s sense of solidarity exists in relation to a particular geographical territory. The patriot (watani) is a member of the national community because he loves the land (watan). The semantic shift is significant in that it marks a new way of describing Egyptian sociability that is distinct from the more sedimented concepts of religious, sectarian, and ethnic community (umma, milla, and qawm).

Moreover, the new concept of watan was one whose significance, though historical, was nearly timeless. On this point, the link to the changing perception of Pharaonic Egypt is essential. The rediscovery of the historical sources of Pharaonic Egypt provided Tahtawi with another way to
formulate a concept of “modern Egypt” that was not broken into disconnected religious sects or historical periods. As a concept of territory, Egypt in this account extended naturally from the Mediterranean to well below the second cataract, in present-day Sudan. Paradoxically, the discovery of ancient Egyptian history allowed for the creation of a concept of Egyptian national identity that transcended history itself, since, as Tahtawi argued, “the physical constitution of the people of these times is exactly that of the peoples of times past, and their disposition is one and the same.”

What is this natural community, this *watan* to which Tahtawi refers? It is Egyptian and not Arab. In his thought there is indeed some shadowy idea of Arabism, but it belongs to the old rather than the new element in it. He praises and defends the part played by the Arabs in the history of Islam; when he talks of patriotism, however, he does not mean the feeling shared by all those who speak Arabic, but that shared by those who live in the land of Egypt. Egypt for him is something distinct, and also something historically continuous. Modern Egypt is the legitimate descendent of the land of the Pharaohs.

The shift in the vocabulary of community was one of the most productive consequences of the shift in perception toward the ancient past. For Tahtawi and Abu al-Su‘ud, as opposed to Muslim writers before them, Pharaonic history was not cut off from the present by the advent of Islam, but made part of a history that was continuous and accretive. Moreover, insofar as Pharaonic civilization appeared as the most advanced and developed of the ancient world, its image could represent a potential future just as it portrayed the fact of Egypt’s past. For contemporary European writers, ancient Egypt was increasingly understood as an origin of Western civilization, even while its geographic location outside of Europe complicated this notion. In contrast, for Egyptian intellectuals, Pharaonic civilization was now becoming inextricably linked to the land of Egypt and seen as the unique product of its geography. This shift, from understanding Pharaonic Egypt as a distinct historical period to conceiving it as a shared experience of place, was crucial for reaching across time and for creating a new sense of national patrimony.
The issue of national patrimony looms large in Tahtawi’s writings, and Pharaonic objects function as the material proof of his categories of history, community, and place. In this regard, his reflections on the Bulaq Antiqakhanahana, published at the same time as the guidebook in which Abu al-Su’ud’s introduction first appeared, are instructive:

These ancient monuments [athar] are called “antiquities” [antika]. Mehmed ‘Ali issued orders . . . to preserve them; that whatever was excavated from their site would be kept in the Antiquities [Museum] in Cairo; that nothing would be allowed to be taken from [the collection] for export abroad. For these antiquities [antikat] are the ornament of Egypt, and it should not be allowed that Egypt be stripped of its finery by sightseers [mutafarrajin] from any country in the world. There is still a special, well-ordered antiquities storehouse in Bulaq. But foreigners still take whatever they can get their hands on, by buying images and mummies, i.e., preserved, embalmed body parts. . . . These monuments [athar] remain a history awakening all to the past ages, and a witness to the books of revelation. The Qur’an mentions them and their people. To see these monuments is to experience a report from the Prophet’s time, it is to confirm Islamic tradition. Another advantage to preserving the monuments is that they tell us something of the condition of those who lived before, and they present their sciences and the purity of their thought. 23

In these last sentences, we see Tahtawi balancing the two measures of history, divine revelation versus the worldly. Tahtawi’s vocabulary attests to this split: his use of the classical term athar carries within it the classical sense of monuments as reminders, whereas the neologism antika carries the stamp of Egyptology’s origins in antiquarianism. Again, Tahtawi did not oppose these two ways of understanding the past, but rather developed them in tandem as part of a single modern Egyptian attitude toward Pharaonic civilization, one that was simultaneously Muslim and Egyptological. Besides elaborating these two models of history, this passage defends the state’s preservationist policies, an argument Tahtawi would extend elsewhere. In Tahtawi’s later writings, one finds the beginning of a formidable tautology: the Egyptian nation is composed of a people sharing the experience of living in the land of Egypt; Pharaonic monuments are
material signs of transhistorical character of the Egyptian nation (watan); by protecting Pharaonic monuments, the Egyptian state preserves the identity of the nation; individuals who work to preserve the monuments are engaging in a form of patriotism (hubb al-watan).

ANCIENT LAND, NEW ORDER

We have found no one among the sons of Egypt who can . . . guide us aright in understanding the country’s notable monuments. We look upon these works but do not know the circumstances of their creation, we wander through them but do not know who made them. . . . But it is our duty to know these things, for it is not fitting for us to remain in ignorance of our country or to neglect the monuments of our ancestors. They are a moral lesson to the reflective mind, a memorial to the thoughtful soul. . . . For what our ancestors have left behind stirs in us the desire to follow in their footsteps, and to produce for our times what they produced in theirs.

—‘ALI MUBARAK, as quoted by Michael J. Reimer

Like Tahtawi, ‘Ali Mubarak (1823–93) had been sent to study in Paris (1844–49) and was employed by the state upon his return. As minister of education, Mubarak founded schools (including the teachers’ college, Dar al-‘Ulum) and the first national library (later Dar al-Kutub). Appointed minister of public works after visiting Paris in 1868, Mubarak set out to re-create Cairo and the Egyptian countryside. By this time, Egypt was already a vital agricultural and transportation center of the global economy: the railroad linking Alexandria and Cairo was opened in 1856 (Mubarak served also as director-general of state railways); by the 1870s, the entire Nile Valley, from Alexandria and Port Said to Aswan and beyond, would be traversed by rail. Steamship lines linked Egypt ever more directly with Europe and, after the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, with points east. Telegraph lines connected Cairo to the Egyptian countryside by 1883.

At the same time, the very geography of the cities and the countryside was targeted for rapid change. With inspiration from Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s Paris and backing from Isma’il, Mubarak supervised the construction of modern Cairo. In his description of Mubarak’s development projects, in some ways the continuation of efforts started under the rule
of Mehmed ‘Ali, Timothy Mitchell has emphasized the visual character of the new order, or *tanzim* (literally: “ordering”), and its deep links with the nineteenth-century cultural phenomenon of the exhibition. Noting the intensely visual character of the many nineteenth-century European descriptions of Egypt—maps, charts, drawings, paintings, photographs as well as panoramas, museum exhibitions, and world expositions—Mitchell elaborates on how they framed Egypt as an object to be looked at and also positioned the European viewing subject opposite the object of the exhibitionary gaze. Mitchell notes that for Mubarak it was crucial that “the world was something to be constructed and ordered according to an equivalent distinction between physical ‘things’ and their non-material structure,”24 since that meant one could apply the conceptual separation so as to ignore, transform, destroy, or replace the physical realm of Egypt. By all accounts, Mubarak’s modernization plans, which not only constructed new roads and quarters but destroyed old ones in the process, were based on a long series of conceptual oppositions: the modern versus the old; progress versus stagnation; order versus chaos. In reshaping the city of Cairo, for instance, his intention was to create a rational topography, “an appearance of order” clearer and more hygienic than the older quarters, whose layout was now associated with all that was backward about Egypt. Mitchell writes,

There followed the greatest period of construction and demolition in the city since the growth of Mameluke Cairo in the 1300s. A new structure was laid out between the northern and western edges of the existing city and its new gateway from Alexandria and Europe, the railway station, with plots made available to anyone who would construct a building with a European façade. “The transformation of the city of Cairo from an aesthetic point of view . . .” required “the filling in and leveling of the waste land around the city, the opening up of main streets and new arteries, the creation of squares and open places, the planting of trees, the surfacing of roads, the construction of drains, and regular cleaning and watering.” From Khedive Isma‘il’s new palace of ‘Abdin . . . the Boulevard Muhammad Ali was ploughed diagonally through the old city. It was two kilometers long, and in its path stood almost four hundred large houses, three hundred smaller ones, and a great number of mosques, mills, bakeries and bath-houses. These were all destroyed, or cut in half and left standing.
like dolls’ houses with no outer wall, so that when the road was completed
the scene resembled “a city that has recently been shelled—houses in all
stages of dilapidation, though still inhabited, giving most odd views of
domestic interiors, frowning down upon you.”

At the same time Mubarak was reordering Egypt, he was busy depicting its
geography in his monumental work *al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyya*. It is perhaps
more accurate to say he was preserving a representation of the very geog-
raphy he was transforming. The title of Mubarak’s geography is a citation
of Taqiy al-Din al-Maqrizi’s fifteenth-century compendium on Egypt, but it
also signals the central place that plans (*khitat*) had in Mubarak’s thinking.

Antiquities figure significantly in the text and shed light on the issue
of the new order simply because they are relegated to a place beyond the
scope of the binaries of modernity/tradition, progress/stagnation, and
order/chaos that structure Mubarak’s presentation. Volume 16 of the work
contains a long discourse on the Pyramids of Giza in which the author
synthesizes contemporary and ancient Western accounts with Islamic
tradition. Citing Herodotus directly, Mubarak states that “Egyptians had
an intense hatred for the kings” Cheops and Chephren, builders of the two
large pyramids, “so much so that they avoided mentioning their names.”
But, he adds, “what Mariette Bey has to say about the matter contradicts
this assertion. He says that the monuments that remain from their time
until the present suggest that the kings Cheops and Shifra [Chephren]
enjoyed a special sacred status with the people.” In this way, Mubarak
reproduces many of the Islamic legends surrounding the history of the
pyramids but juxtaposes them with accounts from modern antiquarians,
orientalists, and Egyptologists, from de Sacy and Belzoni to Champollion
and others. As Darrell Dykstra observes, the one subject where Mubarak
rejects the accounts of Arabs and the ancients in favor of those of mod-
ern Europeans is measurement: the precision of the Europeans is not just
indisputable, it is unsynthesizable with incorrect measurements. The
sum effect is a syncretic account that mixes the best modern scholarship,
drawn from the contemporary study of hieroglyphs, with ancient authori-
ties, both those from Europe (Herodotus and Strabo are on equal footing
here with Champollion and Mariette) and those from the Arab world.
The resulting portrayal of Pharaonic Egypt is richly ambiguous, since
Mubarak does not privilege either source of knowledge but rather brings them together in a single assemblage.

In contrast, Mubarak’s lengthy fictional work ‘Alam al-Din presents a different version of the interpretation of ancient Egypt and of the issue of order. Whereas al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyya follows the generic contours of the medieval compendium, ‘Alam al-Din is structured around conversations (musamarat). In Mubarak’s story, the Egyptian protagonist ‘Alam al-Din is an al-Azhar graduate hired to aid an Englishman who is editing an edition of the great lexicon of the Arabic language, Lisan al-‘Arab. As part of their agreement ‘Alam al-Din agrees to travel to Europe with his patron. The bulk of the plot follows the travels of the Englishman, ‘Alam al-Din, and ‘Alam’s son, Burhan al-Din, as they go West. The small group first travels through Egypt to Alexandria, and then, on their voyage to Marseilles, they are joined by an English sailor, James. The rest of the book charts their journey to Paris and their adventures and informal discussions in that city. The work is structured as an ongoing conversation and a series of cultural and scientific comparisons: a comparison of West to East, then East to West, and so on.28

The primary concern voiced in ‘Alam al-Din is a practical one: its lessons are not for the sake of knowledge itself, but rather about their application to the development of Egypt. Much of the text is dedicated to explaining projects to build Egypt’s economic infrastructure. In particular, the conversations return often to the theme of developing Egypt’s industrial and water resources. But it is the theme of terrain, the land of Egypt, expressed through a variety of terms (such as qatr Misr and ard Misr), that is the real focus of discussions, many of which return to topics like land reclamation, irrigation, and repopulation. Land in this fiction connotes not merely place, but also people and their special tie to the country. In this respect, the term watan plays as important role in Mubarak’s writing as it does in Tahtawi’s. In his introduction, Mubarak writes often of Egypt in terms of watan, and the term implies not only a form of community tied to a territory, but also, more important, a community with an ethical duty both to develop its own social capacity and the capacity of the land. He draws an analogy between the Egyptian who would seek to benefit the land of Egypt and a landowner (sahib al-ard) by whose care and actions the land would be improved.29 Importantly, it is ancient Egyptians who
provide the best model for how modern Egyptians should care for the lands of their country.

To make this point, the work stages a series of lessons in which modern Egyptians learn to recognize the extent of the Pharaonic legacy. For instance, while traveling to Alexandria, the group stops in the town of Tanta, where the famous saint’s festival takes place. The British orientalist uses the occasion to educate ‘Alam al-Din as to the Pharaonic origins of the name of the town. As the Azhari sheikh explains the Muslim origins of the saint and of saints’ festivals more widely, the Englishman corrects him, arguing that they derive from Coptic festivals that in turn derive from ancient celebrations related, perhaps, to the Osiris myth. In Paris, the discussions of ancient Egypt intensify. During one session ‘Alam al-Din meets an Englishman at the Société Orientale, who impresses him with his knowledge of Oriental languages and his experiences traveling in the East. The Englishman then lectures on ancient Egypt: “All the useful sciences in our countries [of Europe] come from Egypt, by way of the Romans and others. The progress about which we brag in our countries has its origin in Egypt. For that reason, Egypt has a privileged place with us, indeed, with all the inhabitants of the world. All that we enjoy of progress and wealth is due to the Egyptians. . . . If not for the Egyptians, we would be until today drowning in a sea of ignorance, wandering lost in the valleys of error.”

In the course of his speech, which covers topics ancient and modern, the Englishman reproduces descriptions taken straight from al-Maqrizi and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti as well as vocabulary (such as al-i’tibar) from the Islamic tradition. Through these conversations, there is no attempt to resolve the contradictions between modern European accounts and those of medieval Muslims—and in that sense the text shares in the syncretism of Tahtawi’s writings. Moreover, the consideration of ancient Egypt is never abstract but related to the development of the modern country. In one conversation, the Englishman and the Azhari sheikh converse about the population of Egypt and its arable lands: “You know well that what happened in the land of Egypt after the demise of the Pharaohs, when it was taken over by foreign rulers. This is one of the causes of its backwardness, its lack of order. This led to the abandonment of the land, its neglect, and the flight of its people, so that much of the country was in ruin.” The contours of this narrative should be familiar because they replicate the
logic of colonial accounts that described present-day Egypt in terms of decline. In truth, the new knowledge provided by Egyptology may have lent some validity to such comparisons between the state of the country in ancient and in modern times. Comparing statistics compiled in ancient, medieval, and modern times, the Englishman tells the sheikh, “Based on our calculations, the arable land in ancient times was close to 700,000 feddans. By the time of the French occupation, only about half of that was being cultivated.” When the sheikh exclaims that development projects launched by Mehmed ‘Ali had begun to reclaim lost lands and irrigate others, the Englishman answers optimistically, “Accomplishing development in Egypt is a certainty. The land of Egypt can be cultivated twice as much as it is at present, and more. If the land is taken care of, it is possible that it could be farmed as it once was, and that the land of Egypt could return to its ancient affluence.” As in colonial accounts, ancient Egypt functions as a point of comparison for judging the governance of modern Egypt, and again, the comparison hinges upon the question of land use. However, in Mubarak’s account the land in question belongs unquestionably to Egyptians who, when they learn from the example of their ancient ancestors, promise to restore it to its full potential. In this model, to modernize the use of land in Egypt, to give it order, is not an innovation, but a return to the country’s ancient level of civilization.

The differences between Mubarak’s representation of Pharaonic culture and those that came before are apparent. Within the earlier tradition of writing on ancient Egypt, the remnants of the past were a lesson encouraging one to consider one’s place with respect to the world and its Creator. Even when considered wondrous, they were an inextricable part of the contemporary landscape of Muslim Egypt and indeed one of its defining features and merits (fada’il). Tahtawi sought to bring Pharaonic history into conversation with the present in order to forge a national identity based on the shared experience of living in the land of Egypt. In this sense, the past was not a model that existed apart from how people lived in the present. Importantly, the image of the past was not a plan that Egyptians could emulate, let alone apply. Rather, it was organically part of what living as Egyptians meant. For Tahtawi, the discussion of ancient Egypt was colored by his reading of Ibn Khaldun, for whom the concept of civilization (al-‘umran) was never separate from the particularities of a given culture. This point is crucial for recognizing the novel significance Pharaonic
civilization had for ‘Ali Mubarak: no less than the designs drawn up to reorganize the modern city of Cairo, the features of ancient Egyptian civilization had become a plan to organize modernity.

**PHARAONIC PEDAGOGY**

Why isn’t Egyptology studied in Egypt the way it is in England? Every educated Egyptian stands before Egyptian monuments knowing nothing more about them but what any ordinary, uneducated person would.

—AHMAD LUTFI AL-SAYYID, “al-Athar al-qadima,” al-Jarida 1744 (December 8, 1912) in *Ta’ammulat fi-l-falsafa*

The truth is that we know less of the value and glory of our country than the tourists do!—AHMAD LUTFI AL-SAYYID, “Athar al-jamal wa-jamal al-athar,” al-Jarida 1748 (December 12, 1912) in *Ta’ammulat fi-l-falsafa*

In 1869, ‘Ali Mubarak and his patron, Isma’il Pasha, hired the renowned German scholar Heinrich Brugsch to open a school to train Egyptian Egyptologists. According to Donald Malcolm Reid, the school’s life was short, and its legacy far from clear. Only a handful of students ever enrolled in the School of Ancient Language (*Madrasat al-Lisan al-Qadim*). Instructions had been given to recruit dark-skinned Egyptian students from the south on the assumption that they were racially closest to the ancient inhabitants of the country.34 Accounts of the filthy, dilapidated condition of the building in which the school was housed suggest that it was not a high priority for the Ministry of Education, even though Mubarak was a sponsor. In the long run, official neglect would not matter. Following the Franco-Prussian war of 1871, French Egyptologists made it increasingly difficult for German scholars to work in the country: by 1874, Brugsch’s school was closed and its pupils dispersed to posts in state bureaucracies. Reid observes that Brugsch’s final report placed blame for the failure of the school on Mariette, the director of the Antiquities Service. Brugsch writes, “The Viceroy [Isma’il Pasha] was highly satisfied with my work, the minister of education [‘Ali Mubarak] was delighted, and the director of government schools almost burst with envy . . . my old friend Mariette worried that it might lead the Viceroy to have it up his sleeve to
appoint officials who had studied hieroglyphics to his museum. No matter how much I tried to set his mind at ease, he remained so suspicious that he gave the order to museum officials that no native be allowed to copy hieroglyphic inscriptions.”

Even if the school was short-lived, two of its students, Ahmad Najib and Ahmad Kamal, later went on to work in the Antiquities Service, where, despite the systematic discrimination they suffered, their careers would have an impact.

Nonetheless, the founding of the school marks a starting point for a new public pedagogy on ancient Egypt, one whose curriculum included studies in history and ancient religion. It is true that the bulk of Egyptian scholars and students (who continued to work in religious institutions such as al-Azhar) were not addressed, let alone affected by the new pedagogy. Yet, in the new elite government schools opened by Mubarak and others, such as the new teachers’ college (Dar al-‘Ulum, founded in 1871), ancient Egypt entered the curriculum. Moreover, the new pedagogy was not limited to schoolwork: it also began to appear in the press.

These developments were not enough, for the call continued for more Egyptians to learn about the Pharaonic past since they, unlike Europeans, were organically connected with the material of the past. As one writer put it,

Not a year goes by without us hearing about an Egyptian discovery that lifts the lid off the past for us. . . . But it is a cause of regret that most of those working to solve the riddles of the past, to uncover what is hidden there, are Westerners. They have written books on the history of the ancient Egyptians, their monuments, their customs, morals, language—everything having to do with them. And they continue to work toward this goal. Still, we see that some of our Egyptian brothers have undertaken the study of these artifacts. . . . In our opinion, they are more capable than Westerners to engage in this study because of their connection to those ancient peoples, and the familiarity of their customs.

Significantly, the new pedagogy included lessons in experience. This was illustrated most vividly in the growing practice among elites to tour the Egyptian countryside and, like European tourists, to make pilgrimages to important Pharaonic antiquities sites. Thus, learning about ancient Egypt was not just about facts, it was also fundamental to an emerging set of national ethics. From the 1880s on, a new attitude—thematized in terms of
shame and resurrection—arose among Egyptian intellectuals, especially those who studied at the School of Ancient Language or in Europe. Earlier writers noted the disparity between European and Egyptian learning on the subject, but none had described it in terms of shame. The feeling of shame described by the new generation of intellectuals was not just the sentiment of a few cranks. Rather, it was part of a wider ethical message directed at all modern Egyptians, namely, that the shame of their ignorance of the ancient past should spur them to educate themselves. However, while there was a certain degree of negativity in these accounts, they also offered something positive in compensation. The rewards of learning were considerable because knowing about the Pharaonic past would create the conditions under which modern Egyptians would begin to experience national renaissance.

As for the new history presented in schools and in the press, much of it consisted of translating European sources directly into Arabic: the names of important Pharaonic rulers; the dates of the dynasties; descriptions of periods in which Egypt expanded its empire or was dominated by foreign rulers. At the same time, premodern Muslim sources were relegated to a lower status and less often cited in scholarly and popular essays on ancient Egypt. Not surprisingly, the presentation of historical and cultural information in schoolbooks and guidebooks is dry and pedantic. For instance, a textbook from the 1890s presents the facts of ancient Egypt in a series of questions and answers:

Q. How many historical periods does Egypt have?
A. The history of Egypt is divided into three stages: the pagan (*al-Jahiliyya*); the Christian; and the Muslim.

Q. How many periods are there in the pagan stage?
A. With regard to Egypt’s strength and its decline, there are four phases: the first lasted 1940 years, beginning with the rule of Mena (Misra’im) in 5004 B.C., and ending with the demise of the Tenth Dynasty; the second lasted 1361 years, beginning with the Eleventh Dynasty and ending with the collapse of the Seventeenth Dynasty; the third lasted 1371 years, beginning with the Eighteenth Dynasty and ending with the Thirty-First Dynasty, that is, the triumph of the Persians over Egypt; the fourth phase lasted 713 years, beginning with Alexander the Macedonian and ending with the Roman ruler Theodosius, who issued the order forbidding the
worship of idols, who destroyed temples and shrines, and who ordered the implementation of law according to Jesus (Peace be upon him), in the year 241 before A.H.\textsuperscript{38}

The new pedagogy was marked by a new form of address: writers like Tahtawi and Mubarak asserted the relevance of the ancient past by way of explicit argument; now, relevance could be assumed as if it were a point of factual information. Despite the references to the paganism of pre-Christian Egypt, much of the textbook presentation accentuates and even invents similarities between modern, Islamic Egypt and the ancient past. In this regard, Donald Reid notes that as director of the Egyptian school of Egyptology, Brugsch “tried to make the Egyptian pantheon palatable to Muslims. Finding that some epithets of Amon of Thebes, Ptah of Memphis, and other divinities were identical to Islam’s ninety-nine ‘names’ or attributes of God, he emphasized that a single being underlay the surface pluralism of the ancient religion.”\textsuperscript{39} This did not mean the taint of paganism was forgotten: it was just recontextualized. For instance, an article from the early 1880s discusses the topic of Pharaonic polytheism with great delicacy: “Polytheism [\textit{shirk}], i.e., the belief in many gods, has been at all times more widespread than monotheism [\textit{tawhid}]. According to historians who have informed us about the ancient Egyptians, and to what the ancients left behind, their religion was clearly polytheistic, that is, they worshipped many gods. In his \textit{Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians}, the English Egyptologist, Wilkinson, mentions seventy-three gods.”\textsuperscript{40} Besides historicizing Pharaonic beliefs, the author concludes by stressing the prevalence of monotheism among Egyptians: “Their wise men were monotheists, believing in one God, the Single Creator of all that is in heaven and on earth, the Uncreated One, the One Real God, the Necessary, Who-Exists-Unto-Himself from Eternity.”\textsuperscript{41} Along these same lines, the textbook cited above states,

The priests of the Egyptians worshipped God the Almighty, praise to Him! And they acknowledged God’s oneness. But they hid that from others in order to protect their leadership position. For others, the priests placed statues [\textit{tamathil}] by whose worship they drew near to God. As time passed, their belief in the oneness of God dissipated, and they began to take the idols [\textit{asnam}] as gods. Thus, they worshipped Amun, Ptah, Osiris (the Sun), Isis (the Moon), the Sphinx, dogs, crocodiles, cats,
scarab beetles, and the greatest of their gods, the calf Ibis. For these deities, they built sanctuaries and temples.42

As a story about the development of religion among the ancient Egyptians, this account is fascinating because it places the exceptional moment of Akhenaton’s monotheistic heresy at the origin of Pharaonic culture. The point is to assert that the original religion of the Pharaohs was monotheistic and was corrupted only with the passing of time. The language of this passage is also striking in that it reveals a shift in the terminology used to describe this class of artifacts from the pagan past. The less freighted word, *timthal* (likeness, statue), had a long pedigree, appearing in the Qur’an and also in the earliest geographical descriptions of Egypt’s wonders. Yet, for the most part, the ancient statuary of Egypt had been most often described as *asnam* (idols, sing. *sanam*) in classical texts. Jabarti, as noted, referred to ancient statuary by this word, with all of its negative cultural connotations. Yet, in the mid-nineteenth century, the word *timthal* began to appear more commonly.43 In ‘Alam al-Din, Mubarak uses the two words interchangeably, as when he describes the idol worship of the Hindus, Chinese, and pre-Islamic Arab tribes.44 In one of his first published pieces, the Egyptian Egyptologist Ahmad Kamal also uses both words, as do other authors.45 Tahtawi was perhaps the first modern to consistently use *timthal* when discussing statuary.46 The force of the new usage is manifest because it dissociated the objects from the negative connotations of the older, more common word. By the early 1900s, guidebooks, textbooks, and newspaper accounts had completely replaced the term *sanam* with *timthal*.47 The language used to describe the stuff of ancient Egypt, even those artifacts most implicated in pagan worship, was being stripped of its negative associations: much of the negative pagan imprint ancient Egypt had in the mid-nineteenth century was now gone for some Egyptian intellectuals.

In time, claims about Pharaonic monotheism would become quite common. For instance, the Pharaonic-themed journal *Ra’msis* (Ramses) wrote often on the subject during the 1910s and 1920s, asserting that “like the high priests, Pharaoh believed in the existence of a living god, like our God. This is confirmed in an ancient psalm discovered by Egyptologists and translated by the famous English historian, Wilkinson. It says: ‘God is one, the One, with no equal. God is one, He is the One who created
Figure 7. Map from al-Sayyid 'Azmi, *Ithaf abna al-'asr bi-dhikr qudama' muluk Misr* (Bulaq: al-Matba’a al-Amiriyya, 1900). Caption reads: “Map of the actual territories of Egypt, along with its subject countries, from ancient times during the period of its great power, the 18th, 19th, and 20th Dynasties.” Note the absence of borders to the south of present-day Egypt.
every thing.” Over the next decade, the journal would repeat the same assertion almost verbatim: “The ancient Egyptians believed in a single god. This explains the strength of their faith in the afterlife, the care with which they preserved the bodies of the dead, and erected timeless monuments like the pyramids.”

Besides teaching that Pharaonic religion was not quite pagan, the new pedagogy emphasized the imperial power of ancient Egypt. The 1890s textbook cited above presents ancient Egypt as the most powerful nation in the known world. Its detailed list of Pharaonic dynasties pays particular attention to periods of expansion and contraction, explaining that only when Egyptians worked together were they strong and that it was civil wars or treachery that led to Egypt’s downfall.

Textbook maps of ancient Egypt show its reach southward through Sudan and Ethiopia and east into Palestine and beyond. Such borders were not just images of the past. It is hard to read such maps of Pharaonic empire during this period—of the joint British-Egyptian imperial venture into Sudan—without considering how they might explain to readers Egypt’s nineteenth-century ambitions to dominate its southern neighbor. Echoing the expansionist message of Cairo elites, this same textbook claims that the natural geographic borders of Egypt extended beyond the second cataract.

The imperial Pharaonic past was also a rich source for thinking about Egypt’s own ambiguous status as an unofficial British colony following military occupation in 1881. Writing some years later, the influential journalist Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid would make this association in unambiguous terms in his influential newspaper *al-Jarida*: “Egypt possessed such greatness in that bygone time that the [Pharaoh] king had approximately twelve princes and others who saw to state protocol. The ambassadors of other kingdoms came to him prostrate, rubbing their noses in the dirt, supplicating before him in hushed voices from fear of the king and his majesty.” During a moment when modern Egyptians were attempting to understand their relation to the imperial British crown, such comparisons powerfully implied that the relation could be reversed. Al-Sayyid continues in this vein:

The Egyptians formed an important expansionist nation, proceeding in its empire along the most modern lines of European colonialism today.
When emissaries went forth from Egypt to different regions in Africa they brought with them strong-scented perfume and brightly colored textiles and such, just as Europeans in this era do for the inhabitants of the remote areas of Africa. The object of the art of travel for the ancient Egyptians was not limited to commercial profit. Those travelers won for their country the same benefits that England concealed in the East India Company before it conquered India. Or like Cecil Rhodes. Or what France gained from its missions to the Congo and Sudan. When these emissaries returned to Egypt, they described those countries, and they entrusted the information they had gathered to their government. The Egyptian army would soon follow to conquer those wild countries, conquered easily thanks to the information provided by Egyptian travelers.52

In contrast, presumably to the British empire, al-Sayyid describes the Pharaonic empire as one that was tolerant, decentralized, and promoted free trade.

Narratives of history, of course, are never merely about the past. This is especially true of the new Egyptian pedagogy on Pharaonic Egypt at the turn of the century. Authors writing in different media and genres—newspapers, textbooks, guidebooks—would repeatedly and explicitly announce that the point of modern Egyptians’ learning about ancient Egypt was that they would learn about themselves. This lesson—that the history of ancient Egypt was the history of the modern Egyptian patriots—was an innovation: relying on European Egyptology, Egyptian intellectuals in different fields transformed that knowledge into something new. The most important aspect of this innovation was that it was not about an object of knowledge that lay outside of Egyptians: in fact, it was more about self-identity than about pieces of information. This chain of reasoning is clearest in the journalism of al-Sayyid during the 1910s. Al-Sayyid is perhaps the first Egyptian intellectual to organize into a single narrative the elements explored in this chapter, bringing the materiality of ancient artifacts and the factual information provided by Egyptological study to bear on the concept of the territorial nation (watan) and the feelings, duties, and identity of the patriot (watani). He wrote,

Our nation today does not exist independently from the nation of our past. The nation is a single unbroken, unbreakable whole. It is a nation whose social body was created on the day this bounded territorial
nation became independent, it possessed a recognizable social order. Then it began to swing from health to sickness, and from sickness to health, until it became what it is today. It is impossible for Egyptians who want to elevate their country to succeed in realizing this wish of theirs if they do not know the reality of their country. Egypt’s reality is both its past and its present.53

One striking element of the argument linking knowledge of ancient Egypt to the modern, nationalist formulation of Egyptian identity is its rhetoric of shame. That is, it is intended to shame its Egyptian audience by implying that if they have not studied ancient history, they are not authentically Egyptian. He writes, “The patriotism of a person is not complete until he knows his nation, both its ancient past and its present. Whoever is ignorant [jahala] of its ancient past is feigning his patriotism, for he who is ignorant of something is treating it with scorn.”54 The innovation of this statement is striking, for only decades earlier Pharaonic civilization had been associated with the ignorance of the pagan era (al-Jahiliyya). In al-Sayyid’s hands, the terms have been reversed: now any lack of interest in the ancient past has become a sign of ignorance. Thus shame and ignorance became dominant themes in the writing on ancient Egypt by the generation of elite Egyptians who trained in the schools Mubarak and Tahtawi had established. Part of this may have to do with the relationship between the new generation of Egyptian scholars and the Islamic tradition regarding ancient Egypt. Unlike Tahtawi and Mubarak and their contemporaries, who synthesized aspects of older traditions of Pharaonic Egypt with the new science of Egyptology, the new generation ignored or were openly antagonistic toward it.

Although the new discourse relied heavily on the invocation of ignorance and shame, it also offered rewards. In al-Sayyid, to learn about Egypt’s glorious past was to set out on the path of national liberation:

Surely, if Egyptians knew these facts recorded in approximately 3500 BC, they would leave behind their depressed self to elevate Egypt, and to show how silly are the opinions of those who suppose that Egypt is naturally incapable of independence and sovereignty. . . . Without a doubt, Egyptians, even educated Egyptians, have so little interest in knowing about ancient Egypt that we are denied the pleasure we once enjoyed. We are denied also the pleasure of persevering in the work of hastening the
outcome of our destiny—so that this miserable present might pass, and so that our Egypt might be returned to its ancient past.55

The connection between knowledge of the glorious ancient past and a brighter future recurs elsewhere, as when al-Sayyid writes, “The benefit of understanding the ancient Pharaonic and Arab monuments . . . is not limited to the pleasure of seeing the beautiful monuments and achieving a feeling of greatness in the remembrance of Egypt’s glorious past. There is an even more powerful benefit, and that is to use knowledge of the past to heal the present, and to replace it with an auspicious future.”56

Although the Pharaonic past was crucial in Mubarak’s formulation of Egyptian modernity, his formulation of knowledge was limited to scholarly learning. For the generation of al-Sayyid, knowledge was something more holistic, involving not just objective facts about the past but their incorporation into personal experience. In this regard, al-Sayyid asserts, “The best model for cultivating taste, to grasp the effects of beauty, is to gaze steadily at the beauty of ruins.” In other words, to be real patriots, Egyptians needed to learn to feel their ancient history. That is, they needed to visit museums and put themselves in a position to experience their country’s ancient monuments. In short, Egyptians were called upon to become tourists in their own country. Earlier writers had made the same plea, arguing that by not touring the countryside of Upper Egypt, Egyptians did not know their own “abode.” Ahmad Najib, one of the best-known students from the short-lived School of Ancient Language, was working as antiquities inspector in Upper Egypt by the 1890s. One of the goals of his book al-Athar al-jalil li-l-qudama' wadi al-Nil (The Precious Trace of the Ancients of the Nile Valley) was to push Egyptians to tour Upper Egypt. Like al-Sayyid and others after him, he connects a number of themes—ignorance of the past, shame of the present, possibility for the future. He writes, “For us [ancient Egypt] is not a distant subject, but one closer than our own jugular. We are the most deserving to study these things, since the owner of the house should best know its condition. It is thus incumbent upon us to be reborn [nahda] boldly to ancient Egypt’s learning.”57 As we shall see, the language of renaissance (nahda) continued to have powerful political and cultural connotations in later decades.

The call for domestic tourism was complicated. The institutions and cultural orientation of tourism in Egypt were largely associated with
foreign practices and colonial privileges. Although (or perhaps because) Egyptians had long been exposed to tourists from abroad, the benefits of tourism to Egyptians could not be taken for granted. In the 1890s, authors attempted to explain the merits of antiquities curatorship and foreign tourism. Najib pedantically asserts that there were two benefits to foreign tourism, material and moral:

As for the material benefits, it is the monuments’ fame which has enlarged Egypt’s name throughout the world, and attracted so many of the best classes from all over. They are the reason that Egypt has become like a Ka’ba compelling travelers to visit. The travelers spend money as they tour. All types mingle in Egypt’s lands, Westerners and Arabs, and foreigners descend on Egypt from the ends of the earth, expending their energy and wealth to see Thebes and Memphis. Commerce spreads through tourism, and the economic situation improves, reinvigorated by the money. Jobs multiply as do opportunities. The face of fate smiles on the poor man. After frowning and distress, his days become seasons of smiles.  

Foreign tourism is, in this account, vital to the economic development of the south, a claim that persists to the present. Najib continues, “The people of Upper Egypt liken the season of foreign tourists to the season of the holy pilgrimage in Mecca. What the Antiquities Service receives from tourist expenses visiting museums and monument sites is then spent on the upkeep of the monuments. This sum ends up in the hands of the native Egyptians, since the contractors, agents and laborers are all native Egyptians. It is as if this money no sooner leaves the hand of the foreigner than it goes into the pocket of the native Egyptian.” If the benefits of the tourism industry catering to foreigners were largely material, the benefits of Egyptian domestic tourism were deeply moral. Again, Najib writes, “The monuments are Egypt’s pride and ornament, and under no circumstance should she be allowed to be stripped of her finery. Moreover, the monuments are like a scroll. . . . You find all that is written on the heart of the stones, as if they were books of the Bible. They are a guide to the sciences of the most ancient of peoples, and reports of a past that had been buried in oblivion. Now, European scientists have nourished us—their writings call out to us.”
Figure 8. Front page of Wafd Party news organ, *al-Balagh al-Ushbi*, April 20, 1928. Caption reads: “Before the Saqqara Monuments: His Highness King Fu’ad, holding an umbrella in front of the monuments of Saqqara. Behind him stands his excellency Yahya Pasha, Chief Aide-de-Camp. To his left stands the Honorable Mr. Lacau, Director of the Antiquities Service, His Excellency Sa’id Zulfiqar Pasha, Cabinet Chief, and His Excellency Sadiq Khalusi Bey, Governor of Giza.”
Egyptian elites did not immediately take up the call to visit museums and tour Pharaonic sites in Upper Egypt, but some, notably the Turko-Circassian royalty, did. Whereas Isma’il Pasha had famously refrained from entering the Antiqakhana when it opened in 1863 (owing, it is said, to his queasy feelings about being in a room with mummies), his successor Tawfiq (r. 1879–92) toured Theban ruins in 1890 and again the following year. By the time of Fu’ad (r. 1923–36) the habit of royal Pharaonic tourism was often reported as news of national importance.

Such tours were sometimes linked to school curricula. In 1891, a group of fifty students from the Teachers’ College (Dar al-’Ulum) were taken on a tour of Upper Egypt to study ancient monuments. Their host, John Cook (son of Thomas Cook, founder of the tour company), was “hopeful that ‘Abbas II would continue to favor his company,” which had operated steamships on the Nile since 1870 and since 1880 had enjoyed an exclusive concession for steamship travel from Cairo to Aswan and Wadi Halfa. Inviting the Egyptians on board the steamer ‘Abbas (named for the new ruler of Egypt), Cook spoke to them: “I met the late Khedive [Tawfiq] and found him very sorry for the Egyptians who thru their good education and knowledge have been appointed in high positions and on account of time the[y] could not voyage in upper-Egypt to visit the monuments and he informed me that very few from the Egyptians [had] voyaged in the country, while we see that tourists come from America and Europe to visit these monuments . . . you must therefore know the history of your ancestors so that you can manage your work after what you have picked up of their good example.” As the director of the school, Ibrahim Mustafa, argued, tourism (siyaha) was an important part of education because it exposed students to physical creations of the past and to the sciences, culture, and customs of the people who made them. In other words, it brought students into direct contact with history. For these reasons, Mustafa argues that tourism was an essential component of civilizational progress, “Tourism is the basis of development and civilization [‘umran] . . . no country can wear greatness and refinement without it.” But, Mustafa notes, Egyptians have a special responsibility to begin their travels in their own country, for becoming a tourist of Upper Egypt was the duty of any serious Egyptian patriot. As a reviewer of the description of the tour would write, its authors “clarified the necessity of traveling first domestically in the traveler’s own country.” Mustafa writes that the students of Dar
al-’Ulum traveled south “to see what the ancient[s] had left for us in the way of monuments, towering structures, fine engravings and skilled frescoes, and to see what secrets they had hidden for us in those monuments. It is a fact that Southern Egypt is like the family home as far as all Egyptians are concerned. And a person ought not to be ignorant of his own house, or stay away from it too long, lest the foreigner come to know it better than he.” Touring the sites of southern Egypt, Ibrahim’s students would have direct experiences of and form attachments to the places, monuments, and artifacts of ancient Egypt. Tourism enabled individuals to connect with and make claims upon the material culture of ancient Egypt—and in so doing, cultivate patriotic sensibilities.

ANCIENT OBJECTS, MODERN SELVES

The new pedagogy involved more than book learning. Its most powerful lessons were intended to help create Egyptian identity itself. And there are good reasons to believe the lessons offered were incorporated by the following generation of Egyptian elites. In memoirs and Bildungsroman novels from the 1920s and 1930s, the themes of shame and ignorance, knowledge and resurrection, the ancient Egyptian past and the emerging Egyptian modernity came together to form a new literary culture, commonly referred to by its Arabic name, al-Fir’awniyya (Pharaonism). Much of this body of work forms the foundation for the canon of modern Egyptian Arabic literature for the period of the Nahda (renaissance). As we shall see, the pedagogy described in the previous pages enabled a coherent and powerful literary narrative of a rebirth that was as personal as it was communal.

The education offered by the tour was crucial to the intellectual formation of Salama Musa (1887–58), whose sponsorship of Pharaonic-themed literature in the 1930s was formidable, as we shall see in the next chapter. As a Copt who became a Fabian as a student in England during the early 1900s and who translated Friedrich Nietzsche, George Bernard Shaw, and others into Arabic, Musa was a central character in Egyptian letters during the 1930s and 1940s. In his autobiography, Musa tells how upon his return to Egypt in 1909, after having spent a year in France, he visited the Thomas Cook travel agency in Alexandria and booked a place on
one of their sightseeing tours in Upper Egypt. Because the Thomas Cook Company had, as noted, a monopoly on steamboat travel on the Nile, potential Egyptian tourists had few choices but to visit Upper Egypt on their steamboats. The tour is an important moment in the story of Musa’s education, and, in his words, the appreciation of Pharaonic artifacts became more than simply a matter of good taste: it served as the necessary precondition for becoming a modern Egyptian patriot. Musa writes, “I was motivated to take this trip [to Upper Egypt] for rather painful, even shameful reasons. In Europe, whenever I met someone, I was immediately asked questions about the history of the Pharaohs, but I had no answers. We had completely ignored this history, because the English had felt it had better be left unstudied by the twentieth-century descendants of the ancient Egyptians as it might incite in them an undue sense of pride and glory, and even feed our demand for independence.”69 This chain of reasoning expands on that of earlier texts. Musa’s account begins with the shameful admission that ancient Egypt has come to belong to Europe, at least morally speaking. This recognition generates a desire to recover that lost tradition. Because this tradition is, in Musa’s account, a rightful inheritance, there emerges a powerful sense of self-identification with Pharaonic civilization: learning about the distant Pharaonic past becomes tantamount to learning about himself. This generates a shift from self to community, seen in the pronoun shift from “I” to “we.” In other words, Musa’s discovery of his Pharaonic self implies that his personal Pharaonic experience is (or should be) typical of his generation, and thus the recovery of the self is tantamount to the recovery of Egyptian community. Finally, this recovery leads inevitably to a sense of patriotism opposed to the English occupation. The most striking element here may be the contexts in which Musa’s motivation develops. His interest in ancient Egypt first arises in the context of his colonial encounter with France, where he is asked about ancient Egypt but is unable to answer. Musa claims to be motivated by shame, the result of his ignorance of European knowledge. He even attributes the general ignorance of Egyptians to the scheming of the colonial power. And finally, there is the obvious irony: even as he says it is the English colonial regime that prevented him from learning about ancient Egypt, it is an English tour company which takes him on his tour.
These sentiments are expanded even further in the experiences described by the Egyptian nationalist Ahmad Husayn. Husayn's political party, Misr al-Fatat (Young Egypt), was heavily invested in the idea of resurrecting the glory of the ancient Egyptian dynasties. His memoir describes how as a youth he toured southern Egypt in 1928 and constantly connects the grandeur of the monuments to the power of the Egyptian folk, the peasantry. Learning and teaching this connection becomes especially imperative for Husayn, but he focuses on the fact that for most Egyptians outside the elite the tie between ancient and modern Egypt was neither obvious nor especially relevant. Husayn's tone is emphatic as he admonishes his fellow countrymen: “Egyptians have cut their ties to their ancestors, and they talk about them and look at their accomplishments exactly as tourists and foreigners do. God forbid! Egyptians look upon them with less awe and respect than tourists do!” His condemnation is so strong that it makes of Egyptians who ignore or deny the connection in effect traitors to the nation, obstacles to its progress: “Nothing distinguishes us [as a nation] so much as one thing. This is what keeps us undeveloped. It keeps us in a wretched condition, tortures us, leads us off the right path. This thing is ignorance, ignorance of our country, ignorance of our history, ignorance of ourselves and our potential.”

Husayn's memoir describes his conversion into a Pharaonist, and this censure is key to how he narrates the process. Significantly his personal transformation occurs in relation to Egyptian monuments and artifacts: concrete objects, the frescoes of tombs, temple walls, and columns. This process (according to Husayn) is spontaneous and intuitive but not untutored. It reaches a climax when his group visits the Luxor Temple at night:

Everything that surrounded us filled our souls with enchantment. The moon, the silence and those walls. Even the place itself, in whose shadow tens of thousands of people had once stood to touch the [sacred] pool and ask blessings of God. This place has witnessed the triumphant armies of Egypt departing, filled with strength and spirit, only to return, singing songs of victory. . . . Suddenly, powerful feelings overcame me and I launched into some songs from The Glory of Ramses. . . . I began to shout from the depths of my soul, while some of my companions who knew the words joined me: “Carry on in the face of passing time, O Egypt,
O beautiful homeland! Destroy your enemy on Judgment Day! Heed the call and sacrifice yourselves!”

The process of becoming a self for Husayn involves a double possession: he lays claim to the Pharaonic objects around him only insofar as they too lay claim to him. This sense of possession increases as Husayn’s tour group enters the temple complex:

My blood was burning in my veins from the anthems we had been singing. My heart was beating on account of my passing into this solemn monument that I had heard about for so long. I wanted to swallow everything around me. I wanted to carry it with me and hide it in the folds of my soul. . . . I stood while my companions marveled at the extraordinary expertise which had raised these walls and which had righted these cloud-scrapping columns. We stood next to these columns, when suddenly the place engulfed us and we almost lost consciousness of our own existence.

After standing dumbfounded by the sublimity of the temple, Husayn goes on to say, he suddenly stood on a rock and, in a scene that prefigures his career as a public speaker, used the example of the antiquities to exhort his companions to (re)build the Egyptian nation: “This greatness which surrounds you should not seem foreign to you. Those who have built it have bequeathed upon you their determination and strength. And Egypt, which at one time carried the banner of humanity, should be resurrected anew and returned to her original path. We need to shake off the dust of indifference and sloth. We need to fill ourselves with faith and determination. We need to gird ourselves with inner strength. We need to labor until Egypt is reborn with her strength, with all her sublimity and greatness.” Husayn concludes his account of Luxor Temple by describing it as a personal rebirth that could become the model for a national renaissance: “I was reborn, a new creature. . . . I had been resurrected. And in this way every young man in Egypt ought to be resurrected. I had been created anew, just like every young man in Egypt ought to be created. I [now] saw the columns of Karnak and its monuments, not as ruins, but as if they were a living thing that spoke. . . . I stood there as if I were receiving orders and instructions.” This passage further illuminates the theme of double possession. Husayn’s account features the relationship between
patriot and ancient monument as more than merely that between a living subject and an inanimate object. Insofar as the objects of his description remain as active as his human subjects, Husayn suggests that subjects and objects relate in a fully dynamic and animate fashion. In this memoir, as elsewhere, the material culture of ancient Egypt was not just a backdrop for literature. The objects themselves provided tangible proof of the sorts of civilizational claims Egyptian intellectuals were posing, concrete indicators that the imaginary community of Egypt was not merely a recent fiction.

Experience figured prominently not only in Pharaonist memoirs, but also in novels. Of these, the most emblematic text of the Pharaonist movement is Tawfiq al-Hakim’s ‘Awdat al-ruh. The novel tells the story of the popular Revolution of 1919 as seen through the eyes of a young boy, Muhsin, whose identity is torn between his loyalty to his Egyptian father, who is of humble peasant origins, and his aristocratic Turkish mother. In one particularly rich segment of the novel, Muhsin returns from studying in the capital to his family’s provincial home. Immediately he finds himself alienated from his bickering parents and, acknowledging his attraction to the peasants, takes to wandering among them, all the while wearing the clothes of the effendi class of educated urban elites. In a scene that exemplifies the novel’s attempts to imagine a natural alliance between the urban middle class and the peasantry, Muhsin wanders out into the fields and arrives at a primitive hut. Curious, he gazes into the dwelling and sees a cow nursing her calf. Muhsin is astonished to see a tiny child pushing against the calf, struggling to reach the cow’s udder. This pastoral image precipitates a transformation within the character of Muhsin himself:

Muhsin marveled at this scene and felt deep, powerful emotions. His mind, however, had nothing to add to that deep feeling. Emotion is the knowledge of the angels, whereas rational logic is human knowledge. If one wanted to translate his feelings into the language of reason and intellect, then it’d be said that he responded in his soul to that union between the two different creatures joined together by purity and innocence. . . . Although Muhsin did not yet know this with his tender intellect . . . he did perceive with his heart and inner eye. . . . But there was one thing Muhsin was able to grasp with his intellect and that was thanks to his study of ancient Egyptian history: this scene reminded him
suddenly, for no particularly strong reason, that the ancient Egyptians worshipped animals, or at least portrayed the one God with images of different animals.  

Along with his sense of alienation, Muhsin struggles throughout the novel with his ability to understand without feeling and to feel without understanding. It is a tension that remains unresolved until, well into the second half of the novel, the theme of ancient Egypt suddenly intrudes. The ability of the ancient to unite the apparent differences of the modern and to synthesize feeling and understanding is precisely what the Pharaonic signifies in the remainder of the novel: “Didn’t the ancient Egyptians know that unity of existence and that union that transcended the different groups of creatures? Aren’t all these creatures God’s creation? The feeling of being merged with existence—of being merged in God—that was the feeling of that child and calf suckling together. It was the feeling of that ancient, deeply rooted Egyptian people. Wasn’t there an angelic, pure-hearted Egypt that survived in Egypt? Egypt had inherited, over the passing generations, a feeling of union, but without knowing it.”  

Soon after this scene, Muhsin passes through a village inhabited by peasants who work for his father. When he overhears that feuding neighbors have poisoned a water buffalo, he draws near. The entire village mourns the loss of the animal as if it were human. Slaughtering the animal, the peasants split up the meat to share among themselves. The scene is important because it prompts Muhsin to begin to think of himself as part of a nation of peasants inextricably rooted in the past. Moreover, this new identification finds its expression as a resurrection after death:

That luminous happiness, the essence of which was unknowable for him, returned to him. It came back to him . . . like life coming from death. What an amazing nation these Egyptian farmers were. Could such a beautiful sense of solidarity and feeling of unity still exist in this world? The next day . . . for the first time, he felt the beauty of life deep within him. For the first time, he perceived that spirit which pervades Creation. . . . An obscure, buried feeling welled up in him: eternity was an extension of just such a moment. And Muhsin’s intuition was sound. If he had known more about the history of the Nile Valley, he would have understood that its ancient inhabitants had believed that there was no paradise
beyond theirs and no other form of eternity, that God had not created any paradise save Egypt.\textsuperscript{80}

If he had any doubts about whose child he was, they are dispelled: from this point on he feels descended from the peasantry, descended from the ancient Egyptians, and thus truly Egyptian. With this transformation, the novel's references to the Osiris myth become slightly more overt: the figure of resurrection expresses Muhsin's identification with the peasant nation of Egypt, the recovery of his authentic self, and the nation's uprising against colonial rule.\textsuperscript{81}

Here the text changes course, transforming this intuitive identification with the Pharaonic past into a self-conscious one. The patriotic feeling of unity with the Pharaonic past is not complete until it is also explicitly known. At this point in the narrative, Muhsin's parents entertain a British inspector and a French archaeologist while Muhsin is treated to a lesson about the history and relevance of ancient Egypt. The scene begins when, relaxing after lunch, the French expert criticizes the British colonial figure for not giving Egyptian peasants the respect they deserve: “These ‘ignorant’ people know more than we do! . . . It's a truth that unfortunately Europe doesn't understand. This people, whom you consider ignorant, does know many things. It knows by means of the heart, not Reason. Supreme wisdom is in their blood although they do not [consciously] know it. There is a force within them of which they are not aware.”\textsuperscript{82} The irony is unequivocal. In a story about how Egyptians become conscious of their true self, conscious of the ancient spirit of Egypt and, in this consciousness, rise up against the oppression of colonial rule, it is a French Egyptologist who connects the dots for the protagonist. The European archaeological expert becomes the central figure in articulating the notion of an unconscious connection to the past, a force which lies buried in the identification with ancient Egypt: “Yes, the Egyptian may not know it, but there are brief moments when that knowledge and experience surface to assist him even without him knowing their source. For us Europeans, this explains those moments of history when we see Egypt leap forward quickly. . . . You don't imagine, Mr. Black, that the thousands of years in Egypt’s past have disappeared and left no trace in these descendants?”\textsuperscript{83}

The statement that “the Egyptian may not know it” lends urgency to the project to make explicit what is now merely latent. Later the French
Egyptologist adds that Egyptians “don’t know the treasures they possess.”84 The interpretive authority of European characters in this passage is significant and surfaces throughout the literature of Pharaonism. Despite its apparent affirmation of Europeans’ scientific superiority, this literature poses an essential difference between the superficial quality of their knowledge about ancient Egypt and the deeper knowledge of ancient Egypt that only modern Egyptians can directly experience. Hakim’s novel presents two colonial figures in discussion of the possibilities if modern Egyptians would only remember their distant past: how they would re-inherit their land and modernize and increase its productive capacities. As Muhsin listens and groups of peasants continue to work outside the window, the French Egyptologist tells the British official,

There is definitely a tie [between modern and ancient Egypt]! Those peasants singing in unison represent individuals who, by faith and feeling, have merged into a single social body. Here today these grandchildren, these peasants, feel the unity which surrounds them . . . . It was such feeling which built the Pyramids . . . . How do you suppose this people was able to build such an edifice unless they transformed themselves into a single human mass enduring pain for a single goal? . . . Don’t look down on those poor people today. The force lies buried within them . . . . Don’t be surprised if . . . they bring forth another miracle besides the Pyramids.85

Muhsin then returns to study in Cairo, where he now not only knows what patriotism is, but feels it, and he joins the revolution when it breaks out. The revolution in the novel is channeled through these assertions about ancient Egypt: the Pharaonic represents the eternal soul of the Egyptian and remains an enduring source of national strength, even under colonial rule.

Admittedly, Hakim’s novel does not know what to do about the colonial, mediating role played by Europeans. Europeans separate modern Egyptians from their ancient past and also rejoin them. Just as much as those of the nineteenth century, twentieth-century Egyptian intellectuals coming to terms with the ancient past would be confronted by European domination of the field of Egyptology. Pharaonist enthusiasts and nationalists alike had no choice but to read texts composed by European authors, conduct tours of their own country via European transportation networks,
and study under European Egyptologists. European Egyptologists were as much a sign of colonial rule as they were the key to modern Egyptian self-discovery, renaissance, and revolution. Still, if the lessons of Egyptology could be used by people like Cromer to colonize Egypt, they could also be transformed in the hands of nationalists to contest colonial rule.

From the mid-nineteenth century, Egyptological discourse on Pharaonic antiquity had enabled European archaeologists and curators, administrators and casual tourists to make informed statements about ancient Egypt that were also claims on modern Egypt. Now, as Egyptian elites began to take this discourse to heart, it became a powerful language for articulating a new sense of Egyptian identity, encompassing experiences and aspirations that were profoundly personal and collective. Inescapable are the ironies of the process of cultural translation which allowed the same group of cultural artifacts, narratives, and images to mean such different things to different actors: Pharaonic Egypt was no less a source for contesting colonial hegemony than it had been for legitimating it. In the work of Tahtawi and 'Ali Mubarak, cultural Pharaonism was central to Egyptian responses to growing European power in the Middle East even before direct colonial rule. In the autobiographies and fictions of nationalist intellectuals growing up during the British occupation of Egypt (1882–1956), the significance of ancient Egypt expanded even further: to know and feel ancient Egypt was crucial to national liberation.

The theme of resurrection, inspired in part by the Osiris myth, dominated Pharaonist literary and political culture. Yet this theme recurred throughout Nahda culture, and Pharaonism pointed to only one of the classical pasts that could be brought back to life. Indeed, social and cultural modernists of the period attempted to resurrect pasts that were variably Islamic, Coptic, Arab, or Ottoman in orientation. During the early 1900s, there was a wide variety of cultural-political symbolic systems from which Egyptian intellectuals might draw inspiration. There were images of Islamic civilization institutionalized locally in neighborhood mosques and in regionwide religious brotherhoods. The enduring legacy of the Islamic past was broadly deliberated throughout the region, as in the press debates about the Umma, or the Caliphate. In this period pan-Arabism had wide circulation in the Levant and to the east, first in order to contest Ottoman rule and, later, French and British domination.
As an ideology, Pharaonism differed from other ideologies in that it was grounded in images of territory and civilization that were simultaneously concrete and abstract, both familiar and distant. In fact, its very distance from the modern period made it quite flexible. The Pharaonic past allowed for an image of Egyptian nationalism that transcended and reconciled existing class, regional, and, especially, sectarian differences. That early proponents of Egyptian territorial nationalism embraced Pharaonism was no accident. The monuments were undeniably present in the Egyptian countryside, and their ubiquitous local visibility lent the Pharaonic past a sense of concreteness and familiarity. Also, contrary to Islamist and pan-Arab concepts of community, Pharaonism was wholly indigenous to the Nile River Valley. This allowed for a distinct territorial nationalism in Egypt—an image of Egyptian community that was rooted in the landscape of Egypt. Moreover, Pharaonism was flexible enough to represent the particularity of local landscapes of Egypt while also general enough to transcend the actual social divisions within these landscapes. It was this local visibility, combined with its strategic distance from the antagonisms of modern society, that made Pharaonism so powerful to this generation of Egyptian intellectuals.

Given the century of distance between them, there is no straight line from Tahtawi’s studies in Paris to al-Hakim’s novel. But the theme of national rebirth through an informed appreciation of the past, originally championed by Tahtawi and Mubarak and then transformed by a later generation, remained basically the same. However, as the source of what counted as authoritative learning and science changed, what it meant to be informed also changed. For the first Egyptian intellectuals confronting the West during the colonial period, this meant synthesizing Arabo-Islamic scholarship on the ancient past with European knowledge and science. For later generations, it meant increasingly ignoring the former while absorbing more and more of the latter. Along with this shift in knowledge came shifting notions of what it meant to appreciate. By the early 1900s, as authors insisted that Egyptian patriots internalize the kind of knowledge they were learning about the Pharaonic past, the notion of appreciation was also changing, taking on a personal tone that was often linked to feelings of shame. The rhetorical power of shame discourse and pedagogy lay in its ability to challenge and convert negative moral judgments into positive knowledge of the self. Indeed, the theme of res-
urerion hinged on the understanding that pedagogy would transform Egyptian ignorance into enlightenment, backwardness into development, stagnation into dynamism, weakness into strength, and so on. In this way, learning to appreciate artifacts of the ancient past was tantamount to learning to recognize one’s true self and community, and the repossession of the past was also the repossession of the present. For all these reasons, it is tempting to read the rise of Pharaonism in its own terms, that is, as an uncomplicated narrative of gradual enlightenment culminating in national liberation. As we shall see in the next chapters, such a reading is only preliminary, since the terms of Pharaonism were more ambivalent and contested than this initial presentation makes them out to be.
Figure 9. Abu Naddara Zara'a 3:11 (May 30, 1879). French caption reads: “After having sold the harvests of seven fat years as futures, Pharaoh auctions off the Pyramids.” Colloquial Egyptian Arabic caption reads: “Pharaoh calls out: Hey tourists! Step on up to an auction! Hey antiquities lovers! The Sphinx. Stones from the Pyramids. The sale’s in cash, and pounds are our currency, though not brass ones. A one and a two—let’s go! Start your bids, people!”