

The Planned Past: Policy and (Ancient) Egypt¹

Introduction

The *Forming Material Egypt* conference asked for « practical policy outcomes » relating to the future of Egypt's ancient material past.² Yet how has policy relating to this past previously been made, and what have been its results? It seems essential to answer these questions before any future policy can be formulated. This paper (bearing in mind that the term “policy” is an anachronism, and inevitably glossing certain historical complexities for the sake of brevity) discusses this process during a period starting in the 1920s and continuing until the end of the 1950s. By doing so, it demonstrates that legislative practices relating to that past, whilst often linked to progressive modernist impulses, have actually aided the consolidation of a certain way of ordering Egypt and its population. This ordering resembles a high modernist authoritarianism,³ and is therefore open to question.

Instituting Antiquities and Ordering Egypt

Elliott Colla has demonstrated the importance of legislation relating to Egyptian antiquities, emphasising its role within discourses relating to the contested formation of a modern Egyptian nation-state.⁴ Indeed, Colla's work illustrates how control of the objects of an Egyptian past also led to control of the Egyptian present. Yet, beyond events surrounding the clearance of the tomb of Tutankhamun, he does not discuss how this legislative control was implemented during the period after 1922, when Egypt was granted nominal independence by the British and Egyptians took increasing control of their past. However, during this period, legislative and administrative practice relating to the (ancient) Egyptian past continued. Indeed, it was during this time that legal categories, institutions, and administrative

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² ANON., *IoA Annual Conference: Forming Material Egypt*, online at UCL Institute of Archaeology, <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/calendar/articles/20130520> (accessed 2/8/2013).

³ For which see J. SCOTT, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven, CT and London 1998.

⁴ E. COLLA, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, Durham, NC and London 2007.

hierarchies relating to the Egyptian past that are still in use today were originally consolidated. This section discusses this consolidation in order to demonstrate how the rationalist assumptions that lay behind it (and the contested social practices that were involved in its negotiation) ordered Egypt in a way that suited both international and local interests, and therefore also began to create the conditions for a later (rationally justified) authoritarianism.

Similar to the social sciences,⁵ post-1922 antiquities legislation in Egypt was produced in a context of complex international intellectual exchange and debate. Indeed, following its dialectical institution in the nineteenth century somewhere between European interests in Egypt and the consolidation of the rule of the Mehmed 'Ali dynasty,⁶ it is clear that this dialectic continued. There is not space to discuss the entirety of this process here. However, it is reasonable to state that both the foreign archaeologists and Egyptologists who were now looking for ways to secure their presence in politically charged parliamentary Egypt – and also Egyptians themselves – could derive benefit from this situation. To do so, they had to respond appropriately to the top-down assertion of certain (powerfully rationalist) modernising norms by newly appointed Egyptian ministers. Education, both as a practice and as an institution, was vital to this process.

Starting in 1929, the various bodies responsible for the care and administration of the Egyptian past were consolidated under the auspices of the country's Ministry of Education, signalling an official change in the role of antiquities. Modernist, top-down didacticism was the order of the day. For instance, in 1929, the Department of Egyptian Antiquities (or *Maslihat al-Athar al-Misriyya*), which was responsible for the country's archaeological sites and the Egyptian Museum (*al-Mathaf al-Misri*) in Cairo, was the first such body to move to the Ministry.⁷ Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, then Minister of Education, complained privately that the Department had previously been under the control of the Ministry of Public Works, because such a body « in all other countries is connected to ministries of [public] instruction ». ⁸ Consolidation under his Ministry therefore signified adherence to certain, apparently universal, governmental norms. It also signified the top-down acceptance of institutions that had often been set up somewhere between foreign and local impetuses;

⁵ For which see O. EL SHAKRY, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt*, Stanford, CA 2007.

⁶ COLLA, *Conflicted Antiquities* and D.M. REID, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA, and London 2002.

⁷ REID, *Whose Pharaohs?*, p. 175.

⁸ Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya (Egyptian National Archives, Cairo; hereafter DWQ): 0081-019102; al-Sayyid to unknown, 4/3/1929. The Arabic reads: «*fī jamī'a al-buldān al-ukhrā tāba 'a li-wizārat al-ma'ārif*».

indeed, it was now seen as rational to accept them. Legislative practice within nominally independent Egypt thus reified the knowledge historically connected to those institutions and, to some extent, justified the continued presence in Egypt of the foreign practitioners trained within that knowledge under the universal rubric of technical expertise.⁹ Indeed, whilst the presence of these foreign practitioners was subject to contestation, it is notable that the conceptual histories of the Egyptian institutions they continued to work for were not. These institutions were now represented as rationally justified; they just had to be moved within the correct Ministry.

For instance, beyond the Department of Egyptian Antiquities, the Arab (now Islamic) Art Museum (Dar al-Athar al-‘Arabiyya) became part of the Ministry of Education in 1929, the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe (or Lujnat Hafiz al-Athar al-‘Arabiyya) followed in 1936,¹⁰ and the Coptic Museum (al-Mathaf al-Qibti) officially became a state institution in 1931.¹¹ Meanwhile, in the second half of 1941, a different Minister of Education, Muhammad Hussain Haikal, attempted to take this process further. Writing to the Prime Minister, Hussain Sirri, Haikal noted that:

[T]his multiplicity [of institutions controlling antiquities] does not exist in Western countries, and in France for example there is one department which controls all the antiquities and all the archaeological museums in the country.¹²

Haikal was so impressed by this model that he suggested the foundation of an entirely new Egyptian organisation along these lines. Indeed, to aid the process, he suggested that this organisation should be called « the Department of Antiquities and Antiquity Museums » (« *mašliḥat al-āthār wa-l-matāḥif al-athariyya* »). He suggested that this Department should deal with all periods of Egyptian history, since they were all connected. However, he also

⁹ D.M. REID, *Nationalising the Pharaonic Past: Egyptology, Imperialism, and Egyptian Nationalism, 1922-1952*, in I. GERSHONI - J. JANKOWSKI (eds), *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, New York, NY 1997, pp. 127-49. See particularly p. 146.

¹⁰ DWQ: 0081-003916 contains information about these moves. Within, a memo from the Minister of Education to the Egyptian Cabinet, dated 27/7/1929, confirms how tied to perceptions of Western administrative rationality these moves were. It expressly states that « different museums in European countries are all under one administration » (« *fa-fī jam‘ia al-bilād al-awrūbiyya aslikat al-matāḥif al-mukhtalifa fī idāra wāḥida* »).

¹¹ I. ZAKI (translated by R. JAMES), *History of the Coptic Museum*, no date, online at the Coptic Museum website, <http://www.coptic-cairo.com/museum/about/about.html> (accessed 9/5/2013).

¹² DWQ: 0081-003917; Haikal to Sirri, unknown date in 1941. The Arabic reads: « *wa lā yūjid mathīl li-hadhā al-ta‘addud fī al-bilād al-gharbiyya, fa-fī faransā mathalan tūjid mašliḥa wāḥida tandamiju taḥt idāratihā kul al-āthār wa kul al-matāḥif al-athariyya fī hadhihī al-balad.* »

recounted the periodisations now formally written into state institutions: « ancient Egyptian antiquities came to us linked to Graeco-Roman antiquities, and also to Coptic and Arab antiquities ». ¹³ Ultimately, Haikal's attempt to found a new, rational Department failed. ¹⁴ However, in 1953, Law 22 of January 8th would eventually found what was known simply as the Maslihat al-Athar (or the Department of Antiquities) along the same lines. Apparently universal ideals of rational state control had therefore produced conditions within which a certain model of the Egyptian past, suited to both certain local and international interests, was dominant. However, it was the practice of educating the Egyptian people that really demonstrated this model's potential power.

Curricula promulgated across Egyptian primary (*ibtida'i*) and secondary (*thanawi*) schools during the period after 1929 emphasised Egypt's ancient past. ¹⁵ Yet it was at university level that the past was perhaps most powerfully used to foster Egyptian subjectivities. When the Egyptian (later Fu'ad, and now Cairo) University was (re-) founded in 1925, ¹⁶ it was as an avowedly secular state institution, dedicated to the formation of a modern Egyptian middle class. Somewhere within this process, any number of *effendi* students made their way through the institution's Qism al-Athar (the Department, and later Institute, of Antiquities). The *effendiyya* were a group who – along the lines of state ambitions relating to them – have often been equated to an Egyptian middle class. However, as Ryzova has demonstrated, ¹⁷ it is more helpful to understand them culturally, as a changing group of people whose practices sought upward mobility, yet not necessarily into any easily definable class category. They also often contested state policy and its backers (including the lingering British). Therefore, *effendi* mediation of what they were taught, like their mediation of the wider ways in which the state and others attempted to mobilise them, was vital to the acceptance of Egypt's increasingly consolidated antiquities legislation. The aspects of that legislation that they backed, like the aspects of the state that they supported or contested, was vital to its continued existence, and also to the continued possibility of non-Egyptian archaeological practitioners using their specialised knowledge to work in Egypt.

¹³ The Arabic reads: « *hadhihī al-āthār al-miṣriyya taṣilu bi-nā ilā al-āthār al-yūnāniyya wa-l-rūmāniyya, wa hadhihī tantahā ilā al-āthār al-qibṭiyya fa-l-āthār al-'arabiyya* ».

¹⁴ cf. REID, *Nationalising the Pharaonic Past*, p. 146.

¹⁵ B.A. SALMONI, *Historical Consciousness for Modern Citizenship: Egyptian Schooling and the Lessons of History during the Constitutional Monarchy*, in A. GOLDSCHMIDT - A.J. JOHNSON - B.A. SALMONI (eds), *Re-Envisioning Egypt: 1919-1952*, Cairo and New York, NY 2005, pp. 164-93.

¹⁶ D.M. REID, *Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt*, « Cambridge Middle East Library » 23, Cambridge 1990.

¹⁷ L. RYZOVA, *Egyptianising Modernity through the 'New Effendiya': Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy*, in A. GOLDSCHMIDT - A.J. JOHNSON - B.A. SALMONI (eds), *Re-Envisioning Egypt: 1919-1952*, Cairo and New York, NY 2005, pp. 124-63.

It is therefore highly meaningful that their response to their (Egyptian and European) lecturers and professors seems to have been mostly positive. As far as it is possible to tell, following the modernising rationality of the Ministry of Education seems to have been a way into steady employment, and top-down concepts were put into practice as part of that process. As, from 1933 onwards, students were taught to categorise the Egyptian past into either (presumably ancient) « Egyptian antiquities » or « Islamic antiquities » (« *āthār miṣriyya* » or « *āthār islāmiyya* »),¹⁸ so the rational, vaguely historicist model put forward by al-Sayyid and Haikal, and echoed by institutions around the world, was put into bureaucratic practice across Egypt. For instance, in 1933, there were four graduates from the Institute of Antiquities. All four ended up working in the public sphere. Iskandar Rizk became an Inspector (a *Mufattish*) for the Ministry of Education, as did Mahmud Darwish Mustafa. Meanwhile, Azuz Muhammad al-Mursi became a teacher for the Ministry, whilst Fahmi Muhammad ‘Ali became Director of the Division of Culture (*Mudīr al-Sha‘ba al-Thaqāfiyya*) in the town of Shibin al-Kawm in the Nile Delta.¹⁹ Indeed, during the first twenty-five years of the University’s Department/Institute of Antiquities, the proportion of its graduates entering some sort of public cultural or educational service was overwhelming (see table 1). The Egyptian state’s rationalising message about its past, forever linked to knowledge constructed in a dialectic with Euro-American institutions, was now delivered across the country as one means to the further creation of a modern populace. It was also a prime source of stable employment. This process would dovetail with the 1950s rise of development work in Egypt so that such modernist paternalism became forever linked with rather more authoritarian practices.

¹⁸ FU’AD AL-AWWAL UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF ARTS, *Al-Kitab Al-Fiddi Li-Kulliyat Al-Adab 1925-1950 [The Silver Anniversary Volume of the Faculty of Arts 1925-1950]*, Cairo 1951, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 225.

Employment beyond graduation	Number of graduates (total = 212)
Department of Egyptian Antiquities and related	45
Ministry of Education	97
Academia and related	33
Other	37

Table 1: Graduates of the Department/Institute of Antiquities, Faculty of Arts, Egyptian/Fu'ad University, 1925-1950.²⁰

The Planned Past: Expertise and Egypt

After the Free Officers' coup of July 1952, modernisation and development projects became ever more visible in Egypt. Whilst modernisation work had clearly been on the Egyptian radar beforehand, the coup coincided with the early Cold War and attempts by both the United States and the Soviet Union to garner influence across what would later become the non-aligned world. Development projects were often the result, and Egypt was no exception to this rule.²¹ Notably, however, neither were the country's archaeological sites. During the 1950s, development work slowly became the prime way in which the Egyptians who now occupied the upper echelons of the Department of Antiquities could consolidate their position within the state. It was also the most effective way for foreign archaeologists and Egyptologists to continue working in Egypt. The rationality of these individuals confirmed by the modernist conceptual orientation of the antiquities institutions slowly consolidated since the 1920s, their archaeological and Egyptological *khibra* (expertise) was now of great potential value.

The final result of this process was the initiation of the UNESCO campaign in Nubia in 1959, presaged by the 1954 institution of the Markaz al-Tasjil al-Athar al-Misriyya (the Centre d'Étude et de Documentation sur l'Ancienne Égypte), set up under the auspices of the United Nations' Expanded Program of Technical Assistance.²² The UNESCO campaign was

²⁰ *Ibidem* is the source for this information.

²¹ For this history, see e.g. J.B. ALTERMAN, *Egypt and American Foreign Assistance*, Basingstoke and New York, NY 2002, or D. EKBLADH, *The Great American Mission: Modernisation and the Construction of an American World Order*, Princeton, NJ and Oxford 2010.

²² For which history see C. DESROCHES NOBLECOURT, *La Grande Nubiade ou, le Parcours d'une Égyptologue*, Paris 1992.

part of a fundamentally high modernist project: it (alongside the construction of the Aswan High Dam) used the power of the increasingly centralised Egyptian state, alongside the modernising discourse of development work, to flood (and therefore shape) an entire region. Indeed, it forced a mass migration whose results are still felt today.²³ Authoritarian in result, the work in Nubia demonstrated how archaeological work tied to the ideals of development could increasingly be made a part of such highly planned practices. However, why had this situation come about? Why did an (often altruistic) desire on the behalf of archaeologists and Egyptologists to aid what they viewed as the positive modernisation of Egypt result in such socially destructive work?

It is clear that the conjunction of archaeological practice and development discourse produced the conditions within which such authoritarian projects could take place. The example of the collaborative work of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania and the Egyptian Department of Antiquities at the site of Mit Rahina, which was negotiated, took place, and terminated during the period from 1953 to 1957, is instructive here.²⁴ The excavation suggested the possibility that archaeological practices could shape land and bodies in the ways desired by those now in charge of Egypt, themselves often the product of *effendi* interaction with earlier processes of modernisation.²⁵ This modernist process of production was often also well-meaning, its proponents believing that they were constructing a new and better Egypt. However, its shaping practices also fit well with later, more authoritarian projects such as the one that took place in Nubia. The vested interests that the excavations aided also presumably did nothing to halt the movement towards this direction.

The Mit Rahina excavations were self-consciously modelled on the development projects taking place in Egypt at the time, to the intended benefit of both the University Museum and representatives of the Egyptian Department of Antiquities. Most obviously, they were semantically modelled after a land reclamation project called the Egyptian American Rural Improvement Service (EARIS) that was run by Point Four, the United States' technical assistance programme initiated by Truman in 1949.²⁶ Indeed, not particularly originally, the

²³ For the migration, see N. HOPKINS - S. MEHANNA (eds), *Nubian Encounters: the Story of the Nubian Ethnological Survey 1961-1964*, Cairo and New York, NY 2011.

²⁴ For the excavation reports, see R. ANTHES (with contributions by H.S.K. BAKRY - J. DIMICK - H.G. FISCHER - L. HABACHI - J. JACQUET), *Mit Rahineh 1955*, Philadelphia 1959, and R. ANTHES (with contributions by I. ABDEL AZIZ - H.S.K. BAKRY - H.G. FISCHER - L. HABACHI - J. JACQUET - W.K. SIMPSON - J. YOYOTTE), *Mit Rahineh 1956*, Philadelphia 1965.

²⁵ RYZOVA, *Egyptianising Modernity*.

²⁶ For EARIS, see ALTERMAN, *Egypt and American Foreign Assistance*, p. 28.

Mit Rahina excavations were formally known as the « Egyptian-American archaeological research programme ». ²⁷ More pertinently, however, the excavations also tallied with the manner in which such development programmes filtered into the Egypt of the time. Indeed, Egypt had set up its own, much more extensive, counterpart of the Egyptian American Rural Improvement Service. Tahrir (or Liberation) Province aimed to reclaim vast tracts of desert land and build the model, socialist population that would live and work on it. ²⁸ It represented a competing vision of land reclamation and community development to the American project, which instead sought to create citizens attuned to the model of liberal capitalism. In essence, then, competing visions of post-War modernity were operative simultaneously, and archaeological practice proved malleable to the situation.

Rudolf Anthes, the German Egyptologist in charge of the work for the University Museum, thought that he would be spending his time at Mit Rahina training Egyptians for their own good. Indeed, he wrote a letter in April 1954 stating that « the Egyptians [,] if they are going to be efficient [archaeologists] in the future ... can't do that without adapting themselves to the methods of European researchers ». ²⁹ The pay-off (or so the Museum Director, Froelich Rainey, hoped) was to be the return of artefacts excavated at the site to Philadelphia. ³⁰ Meanwhile, Egyptian officials from the Department of Antiquities bargained with Anthes to achieve their own ends. After meeting with Mustafa 'Amir, the new Director of the Department, to discuss which of a number of possible sites to excavate, Anthes noted of Mit Rahina that the «site anyhow must be done since the area is claimed by the peasants». ³¹ Official status would accrue if the state policy of re-modelling its poorest citizens and their land was to progress. Unsurprisingly, Mit Rahina was selected for archaeological intervention, and that policy (and certain officials) did progress.

Indeed, it is worth noting that this process would involve intervention in its most material sense. Occurring at a time when archaeologists were developing an increasing awareness of the importance of the shaping of the earth itself for their work, ³² it is notable that Anthes stated that

²⁷ Archives of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, PA (hereafter UMA): Rudolf Anthes Memphis (Mit Rahineh) expedition records; Correspondence; Rainey to Ghurbal, 21/4/1953.

²⁸ EL SHAKRY, *The Great Social Laboratory*, p. 212.

²⁹ UMA: Rudolf Anthes Memphis (Mit Rahineh) expedition records; Field Notes; Anthes' diary, 1954, entry for 12/4/1954.

³⁰ *Supra* note 27.

³¹ *Supra* note 29, entry for 11/4/1954.

³² See e.g. M. WHEELER, *Archaeology from the Earth*, Oxford 1954.

we learned by our own experience the fact which is elementary outside of Egypt, that only a coordinated system of horizontal and vertical cuts [in the ground] is adequate for the understanding of a site which has accumulated under changing living conditions ...³³

Excavation was work that could quite literally shape the revolutionary Egyptian state being constructed under the Free Officers. There is not space here to illustrate how this possibility was made manifest after the work at Mit Rahina was terminated. However, the sense of possibility present in archaeological work to produce the sort of vast geographical and populational re-shaping visible in Nubia is clear, and should provide food for thought. Neither members of the Egyptian Department of Antiquities nor foreign archaeologists or Egyptologists would offer much opposition to the continuation of this process, sharing both a modernising outlook that had germinated since the 1920s and a vested interest in continuing this style of work in Egypt. However, what price development?

Conclusion: Towards a More Inclusive Future?

This paper has presented a somewhat pessimistic viewpoint. During a period starting after 1922, legislative practices related to the administration and institutionalisation of Egypt's (ancient) past ultimately led to increased state control over the Egyptian people. Contestations of this control also certainly occurred. However, an authoritarian, high modernist strain to proceedings was becoming increasingly visible by 1959. This authoritarianism has arguably persisted to the present day.³⁴ Indeed, witness only the protests surrounding the eventual departure of Zahi Hawass from office after the events of January 2011: here was a government official explicitly identified by many as a 'mini-Mubarak', emblematic of the top-down, centralising, and all powerful apparatus of an authoritarian state.³⁵ Yet conversely, many from outside Egypt trumpeted their collaboration with the Supreme Council of Antiquities as it existed under Hawass' control. Doing so, they used the

³³ ANTHES, *Mit Rahineh 1956*, p. 2.

³⁴ M. ELSHAHED, *The Case Against the Grand Egyptian Museum*, 2011, online at *Jadaliyya*, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2152/the-case-against-the-grand-egyptian-museum>, (accessed 9/5/2013).

³⁵ See e.g. the archaeologist quoted in J. SHENKER, *Egypt's Man from the Past Who Insists He Has a Future*, published online by *The Guardian* 19/5/2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/19/the-new-egypt-100-days-on> (accessed 9/5/2013).

same development-style rhetoric that had first been operative in the 1950s.³⁶ Here was a continued way of making Egypt appropriately modern. However, what social damage did that collaboration conceal?

It is not the place of this paper to answer that question, although clearly the consolidation of authoritarian power structures did not benefit anyone in Egypt apart from those at the very top of them. Indeed, at the time of writing, the country is still undergoing the fall-out that eventual revolt against the existence of those structures caused. In this context, and narrowing the conversation to the small world of archaeology and Egyptology, one can only hope that a more inclusive future will be the result. It would be ludicrous for anyone from outside Egypt to try to impose ways that such inclusivity might take form; at this point in time, it is no one's place to do so. However, if archaeological and Egyptological practitioners from outside Egypt are to have a continued role in the country's past (and this situation does currently seem to be the case), they might do well to examine the assumptions that guide what it is that they do. Given their apparently vexed history, do current development-style and training projects actually serve the people they purport to help? This question is difficult. However, if future (archaeological or Egyptological) policy is to be considered, now is the time to answer it.

³⁶ See e.g. the comments in ANON., *A Harvard Egyptologist on Repatriation and the Future of Egyptian Archaeology*, online at Harvard University, <http://www.extension.harvard.edu/hub/blog/extension-blog/harvard-egyptologist-repatriation-future-egyptian-archaeology> (accessed 9/5/2013).