

DIALOGUES WITH THE DEAD

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Dialogues with the Dead

Egyptology in British Culture and Religion
1822–1922

DAVID GANGE

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And I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate, and her cities among the cities that are laid waste . . . and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations . . . And I will bring again the captivity of Egypt . . . It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they may no more rule above the nations.

Ezekiel

The Romans are thought to have learned from the Greeks, and the moderns of Europe from both: the Greek was a copy of the Egyptian, and even the Egyptian was an imitator, though we have lost sight of the model on which he was formed.

Adam Ferguson

How can it be possible that the same people who built the pyramids should worship beans, vetches, leeks, onions, and even cheese?

Newcastle Magazine

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Introduction: The Accession of Menes

In 1874, *The Academy*, one of Britain's leading journals of high culture, printed an oracular statement from one of Europe's most influential historical scholars, Ernest Renan. This read: 'a curious phenomenon is just now taking place in criticism. Egypt will soon be a beacon in the midst of the deep night of high antiquity'.¹ Renan's proclamation does not accord with our received understanding of the history of Egyptology: it seems to come either too late or too early. It was issued half a century after the hieroglyphs were deciphered, and still longer after the centuries of mystery that coalesced around Egypt's monuments had begun to be dispelled by the celebrated efforts of Napoleon's savants and their British, German, and Italian rivals.² These figures had brought Egypt tangibly and vividly into the realm of European culture so that, by 1874, the civilization was surely already standing beacon-like at the darkest extremities of historical time. On the other hand it seems too early, because it was only long after Renan that another great event—the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922—raised interest in Egypt to a fever pitch comparable to that of the age of Napoleon and the Rosetta Stone.

This book shows that Renan was right. In the quarter-century immediately after *The Academy* published his prophetic pronouncement, ancient Egypt gathered significance in British culture that few could have foreseen and few have subsequently recognized (although it was very widely appreciated at the time). It was in the 1870s and 1880s, not in the 1820s or 1830s, that the impact of decipherment

¹ Francois Lenormant, 'Schliemann's Excavations at Troy', *Academy* (1874), 343.

² The event usually credited as the denouement of decipherment is Champollion's *Lettre à M. Dacier relative à l'alphabet des hiéroglyphes phonétiques* dated 27 September 1822.

really began to make its presence felt and it was in the 1870s, not in the Napoleonic era, that Egyptologists found ways to communicate directly with the public and began to gain sustained interest and support from numerous reading Britons. Most importantly of all, it was in these late nineteenth-century decades that the developing meanings of ancient Egypt began to be rooted deep into British culture through their association with issues as culturally provocative as the nature of the Old Testament, the cultural status of classical literature, and the viability of evolution (Darwinian and otherwise).

Great discoveries such as the Rosetta Stone and King Tut's iconic death-mask gain all the Egyptological headlines, but it was in the decades of debate between these flashpoints that imagery of ancient Egypt was developed and redeveloped, and the forms and purposes of Near Eastern archaeology were built and extensively rebuilt. It was in these intervening decades that large numbers of scientific travellers and archaeologists descended on the ancient remains that scattered the region from the Mediterranean in the north, to the Gulf of Arabia and the Nile's famous cataracts in the east and south. If Italy was a 'marble wilderness', Egypt's 'ruin-strewn waste' on the periphery of the European world-view was still wilder, and its evocations—Old Testament as well as Graeco-Roman—could be even more intense and visceral. Armed with the first cameras, and potent new archaeological, topographical and linguistic techniques, these travellers were moved to explore by pious desires and scholarly muses, although they frequently did damage to both ancient structures and modern cultures. Almost every decade of the nineteenth century saw finds that were celebrated as 'a discovery of the order of the Rosetta Stone' but which are now almost entirely forgotten. These artefacts are still seen by visitors to museums across Egypt, Europe, and America, but the intense emotions inspired in Victorian Britons by objects such as the 'Pithom stele', (which was felt to mark a fixed point on the Exodus route), are now almost entirely forgotten. Echoes of the excitement they once generated reach modern museum visitors faintly, if it all.

Renan was right to predict a new importance for Egyptology, but his assumptions about the cultural roles it would fulfil were entirely wrong. Notorious for his *Life of Jesus*, which argued that Christ's deeds should be treated with the sceptical detachment of any other biography, Renan was a key figure in the higher criticism. This was a major movement in nineteenth-century theology, initially issuing from the German states, which sought to historicize and demystify

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interpretation of the Bible.³ Historical critics like Renan saw the Old Testament as an anthology of ancient Near Eastern literature that could only be understood through meticulous scholarly reconstruction of the cultures in which it had been composed. The new Egyptology, they felt, would assist in undermining the Bible's claim to literal historical truth and would help reveal its nature as the product of human authors who employed mythological means to impose order on the convoluted reality of the Hebrew 'national past'.

In fact the Egyptology that quickly coalesced after 1874 ran exactly counter to these expectations. In the hands of some of Egyptology's greatest luminaries, including William Matthew Flinders Petrie, the discipline became a powerful tool in a broad fight-back of popular religion against the elite criticism championed by figures like Renan. Egyptology seemed to present proofs of the Bible so influential that the family of the Archbishop of Canterbury named their cat Ra in its honour, his devout daughter wrote of confessing sins to the sphinx, and dozens of popular pamphlets were issued claiming that excavators had discredited the authors of secularist tracts with titles like 'Moses Demolished' and 'Moses defied by History'.⁴ In this period Flinders Petrie was lionized from the pulpit as frequently as from the podium of the learned society. Conversely, radical scientists and poets now rallied under the banners of Darwin and Spencer to decry the idea that 'bibliolatry in Egyptology is putting out the eye of scholarship and causing confirmed strabismus'.⁵ These sceptics were a voice lost on the wind, however, as the public, and dozens of Egyptology's practitioners and popularizers, committed their support to the discipline's quest for illustration, evidence and elaboration of the biblical text. Almost every major figure of the second half of the nineteenth

³ There is a vast historiography on higher criticism; particularly relevant texts include: John Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth-Century: England and Germany* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Thomas Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); David Katz, *God's Last Words* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Michael Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and John Rogerson, *The Bible and Criticism in Victorian Britain* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

⁴ e.g. Charles Robinson, *The Pharaohs of the Bondage and the Exodus* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1887), 17.

⁵ Gerald Massey, 'A retort' in *Gerald Massey's lectures* (London: Private Edition, 1900), 250.

century, from Gladstone to Darwin, Ruskin and Morris, recorded their views on Egypt and Egyptologists.⁶

On these grounds, Egyptology stakes a strong claim to be treated alongside pursuits like geology, evolutionary theory, higher criticism and the comparative study of religions as a discipline of historical recovery that contributed to the shaping of modern European religious consciousness; its special importance derives from the fact that it so often challenged and undermined the impact of these other disciplines, and questioned the claims they made about the nature of ancient literature.

In order to reconstruct these roles of Egyptology in the cultural crucible that gave it form, we need to deconstruct much of what we think we know about the development of the discipline, and a wide range of evidence on Egyptology's past needs to be brought into play. Not just excavation reports and technical manuals, but popular pamphlets, correspondence, biblical commentaries, the periodical press, novels and even latter-day epic poems need to be put to use. Egyptology contributed to debates about the nature of time, the nature of history, and the nature of religions, and its role in these debates needs to be reconstructed with precision (and all the techniques of thick description). This means delving into the priorities of its practitioners and their public. The pertinent questions don't just relate to who the readers of Petrie's publications were, but also to precisely what they expected to gain from reading his work, and how Petrie himself responded to their desires. In this way we can show how readers felt that Petrie's exquisite conjuring of the life and thought of a long vanished civilization answered vital, even existential, questions in the present.

The following chapters aim towards this work of cultural reconstruction, and begin to investigate when and why Egyptologists chose to answer, ignore, or subvert the questions asked by their public. Egyptology has a notoriously complex and vexed history of interaction with the diverse concerns of its potential readership. Professionalized Egyptology has been (and remains) complicated not only by the range of amateur enthusiasms that it attracts but also by the

⁶ Many did so in anonymous reviews allowing their input to be ignored (one such example is the controversial theologian and Dean of St Paul's, Henry Hart Milman, who reviewed, anonymously, almost every major Egyptological work of the mid century for *The Quarterly*).

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fact that so many of its professionals themselves have emerged from these enthusiasms. Practitioners today have the impossible task of negotiating with a wide range of movements, covering the full span from those such as Afrocentrism that draw on scholarly resources to pursue a serious intellectual purpose (whether historically justified or not), to those emerging from a mildly entertaining but madcap realm of fantasy in the guise of fact, such as the bestselling *Earth Chronicle* series by Zecharia Sitchin. Most Egyptologists maintain a wary distance from the many other interest groups that endeavour to claim Egypt's ancient splendour for their own. This disjunction is not limited to our own historical moment, but existed in comparable forms in the mid nineteenth century. In the 1840s and 1850s, elite commentators on the world of Egypt's early kings often scorned public desire for biblical illustrations and instead emphasized this culture's role as evidence for a long, apparently unbiblical, human history.

However, it is one of the many important and surprising features of Egyptology's history that between these two periods of scholarly and popular disengagement, a different set of relationships prevailed. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, what we might loosely term public and scholarly interests came to coincide much more closely than at any other time in modern history. The Egyptological community began to address its works to 'the church- and chapel-going English people' and to conceive its purpose as a missionary endeavour to shore up public faith in the Bible. Travel narratives were issued or reissued in ever-cheaper and more accessible forms, including serialization in the popular press. Leading textbooks that had previously been dominated by technical devices, such as parallel Greek texts, were reissued with scholarly apparatus removed and accessible non-specialist commentaries added in their place. Egyptologists used the notoriously highbrow *Academy* to communicate with their most learned readers, but also addressed similar reports of the same discoveries and developments to the very different readership of their favoured newspapers, the *Morning Post*, *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*.⁷ The widely circulated popular science journal, *Knowledge*, was peppered with the work of both amateur and professional Egyptologists, while its more expensive and salubrious rival

⁷ *The Daily Telegraph* of this period reached a relatively broad and cultured audience.

Nature also devoted space to similar reports of their activity. The two rival astronomers who edited these journals, Richard Proctor and J. Norman Lockyer, both published their own works on ancient Egypt, but addressed them to very different audiences and had very different ideological goals in mind; Proctor, a supporter of Herbert Spencer's controversial 'worship of the Unknowable', sought to rid study of Egypt of its commitment to the most literal forms of anthropomorphic religion. Lockyer, a marginally more orthodox Protestant, sought to find precursors to modern church architecture in Egypt's temples.⁸ A similar diversity of appeal can be found in theological culture. Renan and his fellow critics kept a close eye on Egyptological activity and put what they could of it to critical use, but Egyptology's influence was just as powerful in the village Sunday School as in the university or seminary: it entered devotional texts, biblical novels, illustrated Bibles, and even Welsh-language Methodist hymnody.⁹

This catholicity of influence has some serious intellectual implications. Biblical criticism and theological scholarship were professionalized over this century with the result that they became much more self-contained and less accessible to the general reader. At the same time vernacular religious cultures thrived, although their natures were never really stable. These complex and amorphous bodies of culture have proved difficult for historians to interconnect: it is notoriously difficult to say what effect developments in the austere and technical practice of hermeneutics had on the worldview of congregations in the thousands of small Nonconformist chapels dotted unevenly across England and Wales. Histories of biblical criticism therefore remain part of a different kind of scholarship from social histories of religion.

Egyptology, however, did act as a node between these cultures and it had an influence that is more easily traceable than the more rarefied realm of hermeneutics. These spheres were separated, but not entirely, and analysis of the bridges between them can show us not only

⁸ Richard Proctor, *The Great Pyramid* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1883); J. Norman Lockyer, *The Dawn of Astronomy* (London: Cassell, 1894).

⁹ The Welsh-language take-up of Egyptology is unique and demands its own treatment. Several leading Welsh intellectuals nurtured Egyptian obsessions in the mid century: John Parry's Welsh encyclopaedia, *Gwyddoniadur Cymreig* (Bala, 1862), is a monument to his enthusiasm; three entries of the first volume dwarf all others; Bardd (Bard), Beibl (Bible), and Aipht (Egypt): the latter is longer than those for Germany, France, Belgium, Assyria and Australia combined.

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how they interacted but how they were constituted separately. Individual discoveries and specific ideas can be found in diverse areas of culture: commonalities or disjunctions in the interests of wildly different readers can be observed. The fourteen-year-old Herbert Champion, a Methodist chapel-goer in the bohemian streets of Chelsea, recorded following the excavations of the Swiss Egyptologist Edouard Naville in 1882 through exactly the same medium as did the Anglican Bishop of Bath and Wells, Lord Hervey: the novelist Amelia Edwards' extensive reports in the popular science magazine *Knowledge*. This confluence of religious cultures becomes especially obvious at the very end of the century, when excavations of predynastic Naqada culture provided conclusive evidence of prehistoric Egypt, and discoveries at Oxyrhynchus yielded important biblical, apocryphal and classical texts. Activity at these two Egyptian sites drove professional scholars and the authors of popular tracts, letters, articles, and sermons into equally frenzied excitement, but with very different results. Indeed, disagreement about the meanings of these discoveries eventually served to force a wedge between what had been, for a brief period, shared concerns throughout much of British culture.

Up until this point the broad dissemination of Egyptological ideas had produced some unexpected patterns. Remarkably, in the broadly consensual decades that preceded Naqada and Oxyrhynchus it had been ideas that bubbled up from the popular preachers of the mid century that seemed to win the minds of university scholars, not the other way round. At Oxford University, for instance, the first British Professor of Assyriology, Archibald Henry Sayce, and the Camden Professor of Ancient History, George Rawlinson, became key figures in the rising tide of reaction against the higher criticism. Their role as figureheads of popular involvement in Egyptology warns us that we don't have any precise objective categories to describe the multiple British cultures of this period: 'popular' and 'elite' are much like 'middle class' and 'working class' in being broad heuristic devices that are superficially useful but crumble when subjected to scrutiny or asked to serve as definition rather than illustration. They emphasize how intricate we need to make our analysis of the culture in which Egyptologists operated if we're to do its subtleties justice. The dichotomy between religious and secular has been still more damaging than that between high and low: there is no sensible way of reading the

period between the Rosetta Stone and Tutankhamun as a narrative of increasingly secular motives.

The deconstruction of these twin dichotomies demonstrates that it was rarely the most profound and original ideas that had the greatest effect on how British people read the Bible or Egyptology: *The History of Israel* by Julius Wellhausen is established as a path-breaking text in the canon of biblical criticism, but it reached many fewer readers, and was probably actually less heterodox, than many of the forgotten providential narratives of ancient history (some in the form of novels) that circulated widely through British culture. The popular authority of figures like Sayce and George Rawlinson also demonstrates that we need to look outside the usual cast list of heroic excavators if we're to rebuild the networks in which figures like Petrie acted, and ascertain where the public turned when they looked for authentic Egyptological knowledge.

Egyptologists who have written histories of their discipline have paradoxically tended to underestimate its historical importance. Histories of Egyptology have constructed the technical growth of a discipline, the conventions of its display in museums, and its role in the formation of ideas about race and empire. All of them mention the fact that nineteenth-century Egyptology was intertwined with contemporary perceptions of the status of the Bible and the classics. But none of them provides substantial analysis of how these important relationships worked, why they existed, or when and why they eventually subsided. As Colin Kidd has recently demonstrated, European conceptions of race remained so firmly rooted in scripture that the Bible's absence from many discussions of Egyptology's roles in orientalism and imperialism is itself surprising.¹⁰ The same is true of the immediate geopolitical contexts of Near Eastern archaeology, including the Eastern Question itself: in the post-1848 'infatuation about the prophecies', the survival or collapse of the Ottoman Empire—the 'grand, simple, violent world' of Kinglake's *Crimea*—was an event rendered biblical in connotation.¹¹

¹⁰ Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Robert Mackay, *The Rise and Progress of Christianity* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1854), vi; Alexander Kinglake, *The Invasion of the Crimea* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1863), 8:37.

The most persistently damaging teleology of the history of Egyptology comes when a straightforward link is assumed between technical development and the secularisation of Egyptological practices and institutions. As we will see, it was precisely because Egyptology was felt to have so powerful a role in accommodating the Bible to the needs of contemporary culture that its technical development was pushed forward rapidly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Bible provided the language and analogies through which Egyptologists communicated with their public, and also furnished the characters with which the novelists and artists who helped to popularize study of Egypt populated their reimagined landscapes. In order to understand how Egypt, the Bible, and contemporary culture were interlinked it is necessary to begin by investigating the roles of the past more broadly in nineteenth-century culture. As in so many other aspects of the century's history it is best to start with Thomas Carlyle.

THE HISTORICIZING CULTURE OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

In 1829, the young Carlyle, a jobbing journalist from Ecclefechan in Dumfries, depicted the kingdom of the pharaohs as 'buried deep in the wrecks of time', yet he went on to demonstrate that this obscurity was partial and illusory. He showed that, through the figure of Moses, the world in which Egypt's early kings had acted still lived, not amongst one tribe or state, and not just amongst antiquity hunters or dry-as-dust scholars, but in 'the hearts and daily business of all civilized nations'.¹² He credited that age with mystical significance as the world in which 'religions took their rise', and great leaders appeared not merely as teachers and philosophers, but also as priests and prophets.¹³ It is typical of Egypt's use in this early period that these statements were not laid out in one of Carlyle's many discourses on ancient history, but come from a study of eighteenth-century radical scepticism, approached through the minacious figure of Voltaire.

¹² Thomas Carlyle, 'Voltaire' in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, (London: Chapman & Hall, 1839), 1:120–83; first printed as a comparative review in *Foreign and Quarterly Review*, 6 (1829).

¹³ *Ibid.* 131–2.

Carlyle used the distant past, from which the rivalry of Pharaoh and Moses echoed down through time, as a historical mirror with which to reflect negatively on the unbelievers of the present day.¹⁴

Soon, immersed in reading German histories, Carlyle had grown in confidence and authority. He had conceived his first popular masterpiece, *Sartor Resartus* (completed in 1831, published 1833) and was on the way to becoming one of the most influential cultural commentators of Victorian Britain. In his essays of the early 1830s he began to expand his mystical, almost megalomaniac vision of the importance of the past to incorporate not just the second millennium BC, but the whole of recorded time. In his typically heightened, infectious prose he told his rapt readership that every one of them was a historian; he showed them how their identities and very modes of speech were intrinsically historical. The past, he claimed, was newly elevated from the role of ‘minstrel and story-teller’ to be an inspired sage whose ‘lessons are the true basis of wisdom’.¹⁵

Poetry, Divinity, Politics, Physics, have each their adherents and adversaries; each little guild supporting a defensive and offensive war for its own special domain; while the domain of History is as a Free Emporium, where all these belligerents peaceably meet and furnish themselves: Sentimentalist and Utilitarian, Sceptic and Theologian, with one voice advise us: Examine History, for it is ‘Philosophy teaching by Experience’.¹⁶

Over recent decades historians have come to recognize how significant and ubiquitous this role of the past in British culture really was. David Lowenthal has demonstrated that after 1800 the past ‘came to be cherished as a heritage that validated and exalted the present’.¹⁷ The German philosopher of history Reinhart Koselleck has shown how people’s understanding of historical time was transformed and

¹⁴ Cf. Carlyle’s use of Egypt to reflect negatively on the poetry of the present in ‘Signs of the Times’: ‘Is it a tone of the Memnon Statue, breathing music as the light first touches it? A “liquid wisdom”, disclosing to our sense the deep, infinite harmonies of Nature and man’s soul? Alas, no! It is not a matin or vesper hymn to the Spirit of Beauty, but a fierce clashing of cymbals, and shouting of multitudes, as children pass through the fire to Moloch Poetry itself has no eye for the Invisible’; *Edinburgh Review*, 49 (1829), 441.

¹⁵ Thomas Carlyle, ‘On History’, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1838), 2:253–64; first printed in *Frazer’s Magazine*, 2 (1830).

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 253.

¹⁷ David Lowenthal, *The past is a foreign country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xvi.

extended.¹⁸ Peter Fritzsche has argued that ‘to be cast in the new time of the nineteenth century was to recognise the weird shapes of historical change’; for the first time, he goes on, ‘tracing the scars of history . . . ordinary home dwellers took a passionate, even flamboyant interest in the past’.¹⁹ Before them, Karl Löwith used the case of the nineteenth century to suggest that history had become ‘the last religion of the educated’.²⁰ As social and economic change gradually gathered speed in the wake of the industrial revolution, and people ceased to find their own futures foreshadowed in the similar experience of immediate ancestors, more and more effort was expended to interpret the broad patterns of historical change that led from the ancients to the present and beyond.²¹ As George Eliot put it in 1840 (deep in the age of political and economic revolutions), ‘events are now so momentous, and the elements of society in so chemically critical a state that a drop seems enough to change its whole form’; writing and reading history became a heroic act, mapping the volatile chemical reactions and transmutations that would allow a newly galvanized society to transcend its convulsions in the present.

All the above writers confirm Carlyle’s assessment that the study of the past united the work of many of the period’s greatest minds with the concerns of many ordinary readers, but they have also shown just how wrong he was to suggest that anything about this historical endeavour was ‘peaceable’. Modern history was volatile enough. Teaching the seventeenth century in universities, for instance, was famously discouraged because it was too disruptive of contemporary politics.²² As Timothy Lang has demonstrated, the denominational conflict of the present was interpreted through analysis of the categories and cleavages of Stuart Britain. Peter Mandler has shown how popular obsession with the Tudor period reached such a pitch that elite architects who wished to emulate the styles of other historical

¹⁸ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: on the semantics of historical time* (trans. Keith Tribe, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

²⁰ Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: the Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

²¹ This is a phenomenon on which Koselleck, *Futures Past*, ch. 1: ‘Modernity and the Planes of Historicity’ is particularly authoritative.

²² J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

periods (in the looming Gothic hulks of Robert Smirke, for instance, or the symmetrical Palladian boxes beloved of Jane Austen) considered themselves 'held to ransom' by the Olden Time tastes of their public.²³ Writers, readers, artists and artisans claimed to locate the origin or golden age of modern institutions and ideas in the developments of British history between the Reformation and 1688.

But when origins were the order of the day the ancient world contained volcanic potential with which more recent pasts simply could not compete. Archaeological and philological endeavour carried 'history' back to 'a time that the boldest imagination could never have dreamed of reaching'. This book will recount lifelong enmities, broken families, shattered friendships and physical fights all resulting from conflicting interpretations of early Egyptian history. For Josiah Conder, founding father of the Congregationalist denomination, the ancient world was where the tendencies of religious thought and the actions of the sacred in human history could be most easily identified and anatomized.²⁴ To Samuel Sharpe, a leading figure in Britain's most controversial Christian denomination, the Unitarian movement, the various mixtures of truth and error that defined diverse forms of modern Christianity could be traced back to the interaction of multiple cultures in the political and intellectual maelstrom of ancient Alexandria.²⁵

To countless statesmen speaking in the House of Commons the ancient world underscored the disagreements that defined current political hostilities. Uses of Homeric epic, Thucydidian history, Platonic dialogue and Pindaric verse were celebrated and condemned from both sides of the house. To the paternalistic Ruskin, Homer was one of the great Tory authors; to liberals like William Gladstone the *Iliad* provided authority for the religious inclusivity that drove an increasingly permissive attitude towards dissent after 1870.²⁶ Gladstone's intense moral eloquence and famously explosive rhetoric were practiced and perfected

²³ Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 7–16.

²⁴ Josiah Conder, *The Modern Traveller . . . Egypt, Nubia and Abyssinia* (London: James Duncan, 1829–30), 1:1–3; 59–91.

²⁵ Samuel Sharpe, *The History of Egypt from the Earliest Times till the Conquest by the Arabs* (London: George Bell, 1846), 1:240–302.

²⁶ John Ruskin, *Praeterita* (London: George Allen, 1885–9), 3:xiii: 'I am, and my father was before me, a violent Tory of the old school;—Walter Scott's school, that is to say, and Homer's'.

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in the host of historical texts he wrote on everything from Egyptian chronology to the question of whether Dante had studied at Oxford. He devoted an enormous outpouring of energy to the idea that the world in which preclassical poets composed was politically, culturally, racially and even theologically, almost exactly identical with modern Britain.

Not everyone was pleased with this extravagant valorization of profane pre-Christian authors. William Smith in the *Quarterly Review* questioned the ‘kind of halo’ allowed to rest on ancient history which made it almost as presumptuous to question classical authors as to challenge the authority of the Bible.²⁷ Gladstone’s endeavours to show the gods of the ancients to be synonymous with the God of the Bible were subjected to Mortimer Collins’ caustic verse in the ‘The Age of the Bore’:

Poseidon, Aides, and Zeus, are the Trinity
According to Gladstone – a comical caper;
If he wants to print more of such Heathen divinity,
Why there’s plenty of paper, there’s plenty of paper

Latona was Eve, or the Virgin: how rich!
And Gladstone, of marvellous theories shaper,
Perhaps in his kindness will now tell us which,
For there’s plenty of paper, there’s plenty of paper

Few ages have ever produced such a gem as his
‘Studies on Homer’, all vagueness and vapour;
But he cannot disprove the existence of Nemesis,
Though there’s plenty of paper, there’s plenty of paper.²⁸

In fiction, including *Dombey and Son*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch*, the ancients similarly became symbols of cant. The Graeco-Roman canon was, increasingly, fought over as well as appealed to; and the gradual insinuation of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia—into debates over ‘authority’ and ‘taste’—marked new

²⁷ William Smith, ‘Bunsen’s Egypt and the Chronology of the Bible’, *Quarterly Review*, 105, (1859), 382.

²⁸ Mortimer Collins, ‘Political Pasquinade’, *Dublin University Magazine* (October 1863), 372; recognized as a major periodical of the United Kingdom—styled as the ‘shamrock’ to the ‘rose’ of *Frazer’s* and the ‘thistle’ of *Blackwoods*—this journal aimed to reach a London market (complete with advertisements for London booksellers and trades).

developments in the reception history of all societies of the ancient world. In 1820s Newcastle and 1840s London, the ‘most ancient classics’ were already weapons with which radicals and dissenters could challenge the establishment fixation with Athens and Sparta.²⁹

The literary scholar Herbert Tucker has recently approached aspects of this culture of ancient history in ways that show the inestimable difference between our aesthetic priorities and those of Victorian readers. These are aesthetic differences that make it problematic for us to reconstruct the nineteenth century through our own canon of authors, and which must influence the syncretic aims of any cultural history of Egyptology. In *Epic: Britain’s Heroic Muse* (2009), Tucker shows how huge didactic poems, imitating the conventions of Homer and Virgil and speaking directly to the apocalyptic imagination, could galvanize surprisingly large audiences. Edward Bickersteth’s *Yesterday, Today and Forever* extrapolated the history of humanity, from Creation to the Last Judgement and beyond, over 332 pages of elaborate epic verse. It sold a staggering 80,000 copies. The sales of Edwin Atherstone’s epics of ancient history, including *The Fall of Nineveh* (1847–61) and *Israel in Egypt* (1861), were less prodigious, although the earliest drafts of the former influenced the powerful biblical scenes constructed by his friend, the painter John Martin. Nicholas Michell’s huge descriptive poems, *Ruins of Many Lands* (1849), *Spirits of the Past* (1853) and *The Poetry of Creation* (1856), also ran rapidly into multiple editions. Author after author looked to the illustrative potential of Egyptology and Assyriology when they pursued the dramatic possibilities of ‘primeval civilizations’ in verse.

Several great figures of the age, including the much-loved radical politician and co-founder of the Anti-Corn Law League, John Bright, recorded their devotion to this literature. Bright noted his attempts to evangelize the virtues of modern-day Christian epics to George Eliot, and even, during fraught deliberations on the Eastern Question in 1877, to Gladstone.³⁰ At the funeral of his Anti-Corn-Law colleague, Richard Cobden, Bright quoted at length from his personal favourite, Lewis Morris’s *The Epic of Hades* (1877). This poem, which equated Jupiter with Jehovah, made Morris a candidate to succeed Tennyson

²⁹ This was a phrase used to denote Egypt in the 1820s and 1830s; increasingly a catch-all term for Egypt and Mesopotamia thereafter.

³⁰ Keith Robins, *John Bright* (London: Routledge, 1979), 226.

as poet Laureate, despite the fact that a literary critic would have to work very hard indeed to draw out its moments of literary merit.³¹

Many of these poems, including Michell's *Ruins of Many Lands*, aimed to shepherd their readers through the salient meanings of discoveries made by archaeologists like Austen Henry Layard. Michell, son of the Cornish captain of the tin industry John Michell, rebelliously used the ancient world to damn the utilitarian principles of modern industrialists that resulted in their motto of 'Progress', their cry of 'Forward' and their apparent indifference to the high moral principles that were required to engineer a healthy future.³² 'Experience is the daughter of Time', Michell insisted, 'and the knowledge of what in former days was achieved' was what would make men 'better judges of the performances of their contemporaries'.³³ Prefaces to later editions of this poem assured readers that the events 'witnessed by' the temples and palaces of Nineveh, Nubia and Egypt, as well as the rock temples of India, were 'the great text-book in which the present should con its lessons'.³⁴ Michell could not resist echoes of industry in his approach to ancient cities. The great moral cesspits of Nineveh, Babylon and Memphis are urban sprawls from which 'dense and dun' cloud billows until the clear heavens are obscured.

As the century progressed, the role of the ancient world in epic poetry was gradually superseded by its evocation in prose fiction. Historical fiction, a genre whose scale and impact are only now beginning to be recognized, gradually gathered impetus, building on early triumphs such as *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) by the bench-hopping politician Edward Bulwer Lytton.³⁵ Half a century later Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur* (1880) could find not merely hundreds of thousands of readers but literally millions (it was the first fictional text ever to have a single edition of a million). Henry Rider Haggard, Bram Stoker, Marie Corelli, and almost all the *fin de siècle's* best-loved writers of fiction sought to stamp their singular personalities on perceptions of the ancient past. They subsumed controversial issues of the day—race, gender, class and industrial progress—into patterns that they saw underlying historical change, and they mapped for

³¹ 'Some Thoughts on Modern Poetry', *Review of Reviews*, 3 (July 1891), 40.

³² Nicholas Michell, *Ruins of Many Lands* (London: William Tegg, 1850), iii.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* iv.

³⁵ Michael Ledger-Lomas, 'First-Century Fiction in the Late Nineteenth Century,' *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* (2009).

modern Britain a position in the geography of time that located it in relation to Egypt, Assyria, Greece, Rome and, of course, Israel. These novels engendered spin-offs in art, verse, opera, song, plays, burlesques and eventually film. Wherever they were exported, ancient civilizations were presented to children and adults alike as everything from the stuff of dirty jokes and sensuous fantasy to, much more frequently, the source of vital knowledge that could save their immortal souls. Carlyle wrote that it was only because of historical novels that nineteenth-century readers possessed a ‘truth that was as good as unknown’ to previous generations: ‘that the bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men, not by protocols, state papers, controversies and abstractions of men’.³⁶ The bare frameworks of character and event provided in scholarly but self-consciously ‘popularizing’ form through series like *Records of the Past* (1875–1899) provided irresistible material for writers of verse and prose; this historical poetry and fiction, despite the subsequent neglect of almost all of it, was instrumental in propagating a public for ancient history.³⁷

It is clear why, in an overwhelmingly Christian culture, such a degree of importance might be attached to certain ancient civilizations. Every Christian denomination asserted its credentials as the exact ‘religion that Jesus taught and practiced’ so the nature of thought and action in first-century Galilee or Jerusalem was a ground of bitter contest.³⁸ In 1901, Friedrich Delitzsch gave two widely publicized lectures that would instigate the ‘Babel und Bibel streit’: a bitter controversy over the direction of influence between ancient Israel and Babylonia. Delitzsch ascribed the ‘magic halo’ that had rested for half a century on Assyriology to ‘one reason and consummation . . . *The Bible*’.³⁹ An ‘almost inconceivable’ range of scholars, Delitzsch insisted, explored the relations between archaeology and the Bible, throughout ‘Germany, England and America—the three Bible lands, as they have not unjustly been called’. Archaeological work in the (traditional Near Eastern) Bible lands, he decreed, would

³⁶ Thomas Carlyle, ‘Sir Walter Scott’, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1839), 6:72.

³⁷ The ‘first series’ of *Records of the Past* (1875–80) was edited by Samuel Birch; A. H. Sayce edited the ‘second series’ from 1888 onwards.

³⁸ Samuel Sharpe, *History of Egypt*, 2, esp. 200–21.

³⁹ Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel and Bible* (trans. Thomas McCormack, London: Kegan Paul, 1902), 1.

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prove more significant than ‘the most noteworthy discoveries in the whole domain of Natural Science’.⁴⁰ As the ‘cool quickening breeze’ of archaeology breathes through Mesopotamia, biblical ‘nations come to life again’.⁴¹

However, as Gladstone’s ‘worship’ of Homeric Greece and Michell’s praise of ancient India suggest, the power of the world of the Patriarchs and Apostles was circumscribed in time more than place: the temporal setting of the Old Testament and Gospels transcended the limits of their geography. Not the Holy Land narrowly construed but the whole of the ancient world was embroiled in theological debates and rich with theological meanings. Sacred geography spiralled outwards from the vast peregrinations of Abraham, Moses, the Holy family and St Paul, who moved freely between Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Egypt as well as around the Graeco-Roman world. It was extended beyond biblical bounds in Blake’s famous evocation of ‘those feet’ in motion on ‘England’s mountains green’ or in later accounts of the resurrected Christ’s jaunt through Kashmir.

These extreme examples were not all that atypical. This holistic Holy geography can be found in arresting forms throughout nineteenth-century culture. To William Henry Fox Talbot, the pioneer photographer and integral figure to the decipherment of the Mesopotamian cuneiform script, the past of the Holy Land was purely sacred; but the idea that any of his contemporaries might consider the histories of other ancient civilizations to be purely secular was laughable. He insisted that every ancient civilization that traded with Israel or Judea in goods also traded with the Hebrews in ideas. Every one of them was a ‘frontier land between the sacred and profane’.⁴² Talbot asked whether it was on Egyptian papyrus or Assyrian tablets of baked clay that the divine truth of the Hebrews was carried to Europe, ‘occasioning wonder amongst the ignorant natives of the West’; whichever medium carried this wisdom, it stood to reason that this intellectual intercourse must have taken place.⁴³ Novelists pounced on statements like these. The three-volume novel *Azeth the Egyptian* (1847) by the leading campaigner against women’s rights,

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² W. H. F. Talbot, *The Antiquity of the Book of Genesis* (London: Longmans, 1839), 17.

⁴³ W. H. F. Talbot, Notebook ‘pre-1839’, 12: British Library add. man., 31232.

Eliza Lynn Linton, is set in a Herodotean rendering of Egypt in the eighth century BC but features druids (because, Linton rightly noted, ‘most antiquarians agree in the belief of an intercourse between Britain, Egypt, Arabia, and India, as also in the identity of their Secret Religions’).⁴⁴

Like Gladstone, Bright, Lewis Morris, John Ruskin, and many other prominent Britons across the whole century, Talbot and Linton both drew monotheistic tendencies from sundry ancient texts. Book 8 of the *Iliad* in which Zeus speaks of reeling up the lesser, recalcitrant, deities into his own person led Talbot to surmise in his private notebooks that

Zeus was the name by which the Eternal Being, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, was adored by the most ancient Greeks . . . In course of time this religion was shrouded in fables . . . Yet superstition had never so firm a hold upon the minds of men that the belief ceased to recur in a Supreme God far exalted above all the rest: their Origin and Creator.⁴⁵

When he later published his conclusions on ‘the antiquity of Genesis’, he explained that study of the most ancient, supposedly ‘heathen’, literature was required for full knowledge of Christianity, the Christian God, and the true causes of the social problems of the present. Hesiod’s Silver Age, for instance, ‘answers to the days of the Patriarchs—when men were indeed fallen from their primitive state of happiness, but were still far better and happier than ourselves’.⁴⁶

This indicated a powerful shift in thinking on the ancient world. For centuries, Augustine’s stark distinction between *historia sacra* and *historia profana* had dominated approaches to preclassical history. Augustine insisted that Christian history was set in linear time and driven productively forward by God towards a rapturous conclusion; in contrast the histories of Egypt, Assyria and other pagan societies were devoid of divine momentum and condemned to existence in cyclical time: repetitive and unproductive. Mainstream Anglican and Nonconformist endeavours to repair this Augustinian rupture (perhaps influenced by its earlier renegotiation in the subculture of Freemasonry) were crucial to the gathering image of

⁴⁴ E. L. Linton, *Azeth the Egyptian* (London: Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847), 1:ii.

⁴⁵ W. H. F. Talbot, Notebook ‘1838’, 8: British Library add. man., 35314.

⁴⁶ Talbot, *Antiquity*, 72.

‘easygoing, joyous life’ that Talbot, then Petrie and his contemporaries, identified in all the cultures of the ‘early days’.⁴⁷

Egypt’s prime status in this new, glorious imagery of a thriving, interlinked ancient world, suffused ‘with the joys of overflowing life’, was inspired and defined by its uniquely remote antiquity.⁴⁸ For any idea that could be traced to the age of the pharaohs, Egypt was either a credible source, or only one step away from a providential, pristine original. For Josiah Conder these ideas included categories as broad as ‘Grecian wisdom’, ‘science’ and ‘philosophy’; even more fundamentally, they included the two great categories over which Victorian thinkers ceaselessly obsessed: religion and civilization.⁴⁹

In 1880, Reginald Stuart Poole took this civilizational theme to great rhetorical lengths. Poole was a British Museum curator who spent his formative years in 1840s Cairo and harboured intense resentment towards the Museum authorities who confined his career to the Department of Coins and Medals, when he coveted authority over his beloved Egyptian antiquities. He published widely on dynastic civilization despite the Museum’s hindrance, and was soon involved in the founding of several of Britain’s most important Egyptological organizations. In *The Cities of Egypt* (1880) Poole insisted that the history of the city of On (Heliopolis)—where Moses was said to have been schooled under Pharaoh’s straining benevolence—was ‘the history of the world’.⁵⁰ It began a linear chain of pioneering seats of learning that could be traced (‘not a link is wanting’) through Alexandria, Baghdad, Cordova, Naples, Bologna, and Paris to Oxford and Cambridge.⁵¹ He emphasized the influence of Egypt on the Hebrews and argued that Israelite history began when this idyllic pastoral tribe stood before the awe-inspiring pylons of the dynasties that ruled over thousand-gated Thebes, ‘City of Thrones’, and glorious ‘White Walled’ Memphis. From that moment forward God’s chosen people were able to combine spiritual inspiration with the virtues of advanced civilization: the making of the modern West was set in motion.

⁴⁷ W. M. F. Petrie, *Egyptian Tales*. Second Series (London, Methuen, 1895), 5.

⁴⁸ R. S. Poole, *Cities of Egypt* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1882), 33–4.

⁴⁹ Conder, *Modern Traveller*, 1.

⁵⁰ Poole, *Cities of Egypt*, 133.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Even many of those Britons remembered as most extravagantly sceptical of the integrity of pre-classical literature could subscribe to much of this view. Jacob Bryant was a scholarly pariah in early nineteenth-century Britain because of his insistence that no event, person or landmark from ancient literature could be considered historical without substantive external proof. In 1810 Byron stood on the supposed Tomb of Achilles and cursed ‘the blackguard Bryant’ who had ruined the scene’s evocative power when he turned his steely gaze to the Trojan War and ‘impugned its veracity’.⁵² But in the 1820s even Bryant argued that great leaders travelled from Egypt to Greece ‘in high antiquity’ and fertilized the barren wilderness of Europe with the nutritious Eastern ‘customs that prevailed in the age of Moses’.⁵³

One of the most widely-read authors of the second half of the century, A. P. Stanley—Broad-Church champion, Oxford Professor and Dean of Westminster—found similar importance in Egypt’s influence on the Hebrews, manifest as ‘gleams of the Eastern light’ present throughout Jewish and Christian history:

The primeval world of Egypt is with us, as with the Israelites, the starting point – the contrast – of all that follows. With us, as with them, the Pyramids recede, and the desert begins, and the wilderness melts into the hills of Palestine, and Jerusalem is the climax of the long ascent, and the Gospel History presents itself locally, no less than historically, as the end of the Law and Prophets.⁵⁴

This was all part of a long tradition tying Israelite and Egyptian history and culture together more intimately than many more familiar readings of the Old Testament would allow us to expect. In the first century, Josephus made the Israelites the builders of the pyramids, writing them firmly into Egyptian monumental history. Around a century later the Passover *Haggadah*, a central devotional text of Judaism, stated of Israel in Egypt: ‘here He became a Nation’, distinguishable and distinguished amidst Near Eastern civilizations. Twelfth-century Jewish poetry like that of Yehuda Halevi, whose

⁵² Thomas Moore, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron* (London: J & J Harper 1833), 101.

⁵³ Jacob Bryant, *Observations upon the Plagues Inflicted upon the Egyptians, to which is prefixed a prefatory discourse upon the Greek colonies from Egypt* (London: Hamilton & Cole, 1810), 11.

⁵⁴ A. P. Stanley, *Sinai and Palestine in Connection with their History* (London: John Murray, 1856), xxiii.

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ideals George Eliot wrote into *Daniel Deronda*, lovingly mapped ‘Temple language onto the topography of Egypt’.⁵⁵ Late nineteenth-century scholars constantly echoed these emphases—this ‘longing for Egypt’ in the words of the Hebrew scholar Diana Lipton—that emerged intermittently throughout Jewish and Christian culture. They created an Egypt that was an alluring civilized shelter, formative of cultural development as much as the tyrannical ‘other’ we have been taught to expect. As A. P. Stanley put it, at the very beginning of Israel’s national history ‘Egypt became the “Holy Land” and the Israelites to all outward appearance became Egyptians’; then, for centuries after the Exodus, ‘the heart of the [Israelite] people’ was always turning back to Egypt, their ‘ancient home’.⁵⁶ Pharaohs were to Israel what Caesars were to the Celt and Goth: feared for their arms but the source of coveted advanced civilization. The ‘world went down to Egypt for knowledge as well as corn’.⁵⁷ Perhaps most vividly and strangely of all, the uniquely pervasive genre of British devotional publishing soon began to use ‘the solemn colonnades of Egypt’ and ‘the palatial splendour’ of Mesopotamia—the two forms of architecture that the Israelite people had been enslaved to build—to convey to its audience an image of the timeless glory of ‘Christ’s Mansions in Heaven’.⁵⁸ The clashes of monumental Egypt and sacred Israel in modern British culture were as ambiguous but productive as their biblical originals.

This status of Egypt at the most remote interface of divine grace and human industry was the source of the civilization’s profoundest interest. John Ruskin (one of Carlyle’s few competitors as the most influential *litterateur* of the era) wrote in 1866 of being engaged in an endeavour to discover ‘how far the Greeks and Egyptians knew God, and how far anybody ever may hope to know him’.⁵⁹ In his eyes it was precisely because the priests of Egypt were more closely engaged in temporal governance than other clerisies that a combination of spiritual and practical expertise germinated the divinely-planted seeds of good government, law and the sciences on Egyptian soil.⁶⁰ Gardner

⁵⁵ Diana Lipton, *Longing for Egypt and other Unexpected Biblical Tales* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2008), 14.

⁵⁶ A. P. Stanley, *Sinai and Palestine*, xxviii.

⁵⁷ ‘School of Sculpture at Sydenham’, *Art Journal* (1854), 317.

⁵⁸ John Hyde, *Our Eternal Homes* (London: Pitman, 1864), 79.

⁵⁹ Ruskin, *Praeterita*, 1: xviii, xxxiv.

⁶⁰ Francis O’Gorman, ‘To see the Finger of God in the Dimensions of the Pyramid: a New Context for Ruskin’s *Ethics of the Dust* (1866)’, *Modern Language Review*, 98 (2003), 563–73.

Wilkinson similarly praised the enduring moral rigours of that priesthood: their ethical sophistication was the foundation stone of civilization, which allowed Egyptian kings to consolidate their primeval vigour while those around them succumbed to ‘Assyrian’ indolence.⁶¹

This growing perception of primeval spiritual sophistication was itself made possible by new methods of approaching the Old Testament historically, of which the higher criticism was just the radical frontline. The early-Hebrew thought that had shaped Genesis and Exodus was now seen, in one way or another, as a product of its cultural environment. As a result, critics and apologists alike embraced the search for parallels between ancient cultures and Augustinian assumptions of the entire dislocation of the Hebrew people from their warlike neighbours lost support. The Hebrew Bible was the one product of the ancient Near East that had always maintained a degree of comprehensibility in Europe, through continuous traditions of scholarly reinterpretation. It now acted to mediate between modern European thought and Egyptian ideas that seemed incomprehensible when first drawn forth from papyri and inscriptions. Even for the most committed supporters of the Bible’s inspired role as literal history, the Old Testament in 1860 no longer seemed quite so transparent as it had in 1760: its truths had to be disentangled from within an ancient Near Eastern form. The ‘mysteries of the Egyptians’ were still much more distant and occluded, but through parallels with the metaphors and parables of the Hebrew Bible, the apparently barbaric in Egyptian culture might reveal its elevated metaphoric core.⁶²

We tend to think of ancient Egypt as an ahistorical culture, uninterested in the activities of previous generations. That is not what the nineteenth century saw. Egyptian culture seemed deeply involved with its own past. Each dynasty structured its religious identity through direct reference to its predecessors, and each successive wave of Egyptian culture added new layers of reverence for the past, so that Graeco-Roman Egypt tied multiple ritual modes and symbolic

⁶¹ John Gardner Wilkinson, *Topography of Thebes* (London: John Murray, 1835) xiv: ‘And while luxury and indolence invaded the court of Assyria, and overwhelmed her princes in Eastern effeminacy, Egypt rose gradually by industry to power’; this is one of a very wide range of available positions on whether Egypt was ‘East’, ‘West’ or something less determined.

⁶² See for instance J. Hunt Cooke, ‘The Book of the Dead and a Passage in the Psalms’, *Contemporary Review* (August 1896), 277–85.

models into a complex web of allusions to preceding dynasties. Alfred Wiedemann wrote that the Egyptians embraced change when necessary, but ‘their acceptance of it involved no casting off of old and cherished ideas, which were retained and allowed to subsist on equal footing with the new modes of thought’: new and old remained distinct but were woven into balanced forms.⁶³ Observing an inscription in the tomb of Ramses VI, made by the ‘Greek priest-philosopher’ Nicagoras in Late Antiquity, A. P. Stanley praised this monument’s attestation to the confluence of histories and religions that flourished for millennia and was still recognized as a palimpsest ‘in the time of Constantine, on the eve of the abolition of both Greek and Egyptian religion by Christianity’.⁶⁴ From the very beginning of their civilization the Egyptians had been obsessed with making events ‘historic’ by recording them, and this tomb, Stanley suggested, was loaded with successive layers of historicity, echoing down through time and becoming richer than ‘the galleries of a vast Museum’.⁶⁵ In 1819, the art collector and friend of Byron, known to London high society as ‘the Nubian explorer’ William Bankes, had discovered a king list on the walls of the Temple of Abydos. This was significant enough to gain the epithet the ‘Rosetta Stone of Egyptian archaeology’, and was the most impressive of several such records that placed the first kings in relation to the pharaohs of its present. All of these dated from the New Kingdom or later and took significant places in the imagery of religious ritual. They showed Egyptian cultural memory spanning back from the era of the Greeks to the very origins of civilization. The fact that Egypt so consistently used its uniquely extensive past immeasurably enriched its allure to British thinkers who clamoured with questions relating to the contours of deep antiquity.

However, it was also Egypt’s proximity to the origin of things that provided its extraordinary potential for bitter controversy and tied it into some of the century’s deepest historical disputes. George Rawlinson, one of Britain’s most esteemed ancient historians, translator of Herodotus and brother of the decipherer of cuneiform, was an inveterate champion for the recent origin of humanity. He argued in 1877 that no civilization other than Egypt contained genuine texts that

⁶³ Alfred Wiedemann, *Religion of the ancient Egyptians* (London: H. Grevel, 1897), 1.

⁶⁴ Stanley, *Sinai and Palestine*, xlv.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

could honestly be claimed to derive from before the mid third millennium BC. The result was that:

Driven from all their other positions, the advocates of an extreme antiquity for the human race entrench themselves upon Egyptian soil, and maintain that there, at any rate, in the region fertilised by the life-giving Nile, man can be proved to have existed under settled government, and in a fairly civilised community, from a time removed almost seven millennia from the present day. There is no doubt that Egypt was among the earliest, if not the very earliest, of civilised communities. Sacred and profane testimony agree in the assertion of this fact. But the actual date to which Egyptian history ascends is a question of much difficulty and delicacy.⁶⁶

‘Delicacy’ matters just as much as ‘difficulty’ in Rawlinson’s view of history. His intervention in the debate is in part a response to popular tracts with titles like *The Jesus myth traced in Egypt for 10,000 years*, but it was also aimed against the much more formidable scholarship of Baron Christian Carl Josias von Bunsen. A crucial node in the international networks of Protestant culture, Bunsen was confirmed as the leading communicator between British and Continental Protestantism by his appointment as envoy between Frederick William IV of Prussia and Queen Victoria when they planned the divisive establishment of an Anglo-German Bishopric in Jerusalem. In *Egypt’s place in Universal History*, he had sounded a call-to-arms for scholars who championed the ‘extreme antiquity’ that Rawlinson denied. His substantial scholarly weight was thrown into ensuring that the divisive debate on the origins of civilization homed in on Egypt, and anchored itself around ‘the apex of those indestructible pyramids’.⁶⁷

DATING MENES

The disappearance of Egypt’s origins into the murkiest depths of the distant past was the source of both its greatest interest and its most intense divisiveness from the beginning of the century to its very end.

⁶⁶ George Rawlinson, *The Antiquity of man Historically Considered* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1877), 2.

⁶⁷ C. C. J. Bunsen, *Egypt’s Place in Universal History* (trans. C. H. Cottrell, London, Longmans, 1848–67), 1:xxvi.

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Several commentators felt it to be paradoxical, but also self-evident, that it was when the Egyptian past emerged from the realm of myth into history that the civilization ceased to be of the first order of interest. Conder precisely dated this 'event' to 567 BC.⁶⁸ Egypt's relationship to the beginnings of history, and the world before the historical record, was transformed as perceptions of time itself were reshaped. From the late eighteenth century onwards, time's 'limits' were 'burst' in the analogy familiar from the history of geology. Whereas in 1800 most people felt they knew the world to be 6000 years old, by 1900 it was difficult to deny millions of years of deep time. Not just ancient history, but geological, physical and biological sciences now dealt with the formation of the early world and the emergence of humanity. This forced alteration to people's mental landscapes, and the processes of accommodation it necessitated have been explored in one of the richest veins of recent historical research, including the work of historians of science like John Burrow, James Secord, and Ralph O'Connor.

But the arenas of history and prehistory were never strictly separate. Biblical scholarship was used to link the two: the philology and archaeology of the Old Testament gave the Bible a place in scientific disputes, while the work of almost all leading men of science was informed by a conviction of the profound truth of the biblical narrative. Egypt in particular was seen to straddle the divide between history and prehistory, and to offer insights into the early condition of humanity beyond those available anywhere else. Indeed, biblical archaeology was much more subtle than its usual portrayals allow: it was never just engaged in 'proving' the literal truth of the Bible; it always involved elucidating the many gaps in the biblical narrative with the help of the sciences and a comparative approach to other ancient literature. These lacunae were where theological controversy dwelt. The result was that all the contentiousness of science and history were bound up in the fact that the origins and early history of Egypt remained inscrutable.

In the 1820s, when Champollion suggested that the pyramids might be as much as seven millennia old, he was simply mocked in Britain. Britain's leading authority on ancient Egypt, John Gardner Wilkinson, ventriloquized self-satirizing verse (in imperfect

⁶⁸ Conder, *The Modern Traveller*, 59.

French) into Champollion's mouth (the translation here is Jason Thompson's):

Les Pyramides, 'sans aucune doute'
(Je veux le dire coûte ce qu'il coûte),
Ont sept mille ans, quelque chose de plus:
Le preuve est dans un papyrus.⁶⁹

The Pyramids, 'without a doubt'
(I'll insist at any cost)
Are seven millennia old, and more
The proof is in a papyrus.

Thirty years later, the claims of continental scholars like Bunsen to find the origins of Egypt in the extremities of time were less easily dismissed. The most flamboyant and disconcerting of these statements was made by Europe's leading Egyptologist of the mid century, August Mariette. Mariette saw the construction of chronologies from the fragmentary and inconclusive remnants of the king lists attributed to the Egyptian priest Manetho as an opportunity for a jibe at the received chronology still beloved of many Britons. He revelled in dating the accession of Menes, the traditional starting point of Egyptian history, back to 5004 BC. Provocatively, this was *exactly* a thousand years prior to Bishop Ussher's once-authoritative date for the creation of the world. In the 1840s, Ussher's chronology was not just the vitiated relic historians sometimes present it as: it maintained a vigorous cultural presence, circulated around every region of British culture through its appearance in the margins of most English-language Bibles. It was a device still used in thousands of Sunday schools to give the Old Testament narrative a context in history. And the notoriously anti-English Mariette was well aware of the attachment of ordinary Britons to their beloved chronology: in an almost surreal instance of how diverse realms of nineteenth-century culture constantly elide, the grand Gallic intellectual had served an apprenticeship as a ribbon maker in 1830s Coventry.⁷⁰ With attempts like Mariette's to extend historical time, Egypt was becoming more and more 'that dim and twilight land' where the primeval and historical

⁶⁹ Jason Thompson, *Sir Gardner Wilkinson and his Circle* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1991), 125.

⁷⁰ This was not an isolated incongruity, another of the sternest French heads of the Egyptian Antiquities Department, Jaques de Morgan was the son of a Welsh miner.

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‘seem to meet and blend together inseparably’.⁷¹ Its history now seemed to be two thousand years longer than that of ‘its nearest rival, Babylonia’; it was beginning to loom over the British present more enigmatic and threatening than ever.⁷²

In the world of the mid nineteenth century, where any piece of information about the age of the earth and its prehistoric development was as likely to become the stuff of bitter polemic as of considered debate, this gave Egypt an unstable, liminal status between history and the new sciences of prehistory. Egyptology promised to provide the most significant contributions that historical scholarship could make to scientific and theological debates over the ‘antiquity of man’ and the primitive condition of humanity. R. S. Poole’s editorial preface to the second edition of a work published anonymously (by Edward William Lane) *The Genesis of the Earth and of Man* (1854, 2nd edn 1860), observed that ‘the subjects here discussed belong altogether to the ground between literature and natural science’.⁷³ Poole assured himself that his Egyptian studies were a ‘neutral ground’ on which the contentions of scientists and theologians alike could be tested. At the same time, the great early scientific texts on the infancy of the world, such as Robert Chambers’ *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* and Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology*, contain a surprising density of historical discussion. Both these works make repeated reference to Egypt, equally obscured by the mists of time as the epoch of the mammoths; but Lyell in particular makes pharaonic civilization a recurring source of reference and analogy, required to contextualize geological timescales. Even at the end of the century, geologists such as John William Dawson, who had once been a travelling companion of Lyell, would publish on *The Meeting Place of Geology and History* (1894).⁷⁴

⁷¹ George Rawlinson, *Origins of Nations* (New York: Scribners, 1883), 12.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ [E. W. Lane], *The Genesis of Earth and of Man* (2nd edn, London: Williams and Norgate, 1860), editor’s preface to second edn, v; the author was Edward William Lane, translator of the *Arabian Nights*, author of *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* and of several unfinished works of Egyptology.

⁷⁴ For more on ‘history’ in ‘geology’ see ‘Review Symposium: the Geohistorical Revolution’, *Metascience*, 16 (2007), 359–95; and Martin Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time: the Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); ‘Transposed concepts from the Human Science in the early Work of Charles Lyell’ in L. J. Jordanova & R. S. Porter (eds), *Images of the Earth* (Chalfont St Giles: British Society for the History of Science, 1979), 67–83.

The intensity of this relationship between early Egyptian history and approaches to prehistory is perhaps best exemplified by the publishing practices of authorities from both fields. Authors of histories of ancient Egypt also published controversial works addressing explicitly the question of the antiquity of man. For instance, three years after publishing her study of ancient Egyptian religion in *Eastern Life Present and Past* (3 vols, 1848), Harriet Martineau produced her most divisive work, *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* (1851). The leading Unitarian scholar John Kenrick wrote *Ancient Egypt under the Pharaohs* (1850) alongside a series of *Essays on Primaevial History* (first series, 1846). J. W. Dawson's string of works on geology and prehistory came after an early work entitled *Egypt and Syria: Their Physical Features in Relation to Bible History* (1885); as George Rawlinson was working on his huge *History of Ancient Egypt* (1881) he published several works dealing with prehistory, beginning with *The Antiquity of Man Historically Considered* (1877). From a very different perspective, Phillip Gosse's infamous attempt to demonstrate that God had created fossils in order to bamboozle blasphemous scientists, *Omphalos: an attempt to untie the Geological Knot* (1857), followed his lesser-known but equally pietistic *Monuments of Ancient Egypt* (1847). Flinders Petrie's work can also be made to fit this trend, though a little more artificially: like Rawlinson he used his Egyptological influence to question the concept of Palaeolithic man.

The Egyptian publications in these pairings were frequently first, and can sometimes feel almost like dry runs for explicit intervention in the more polemical debate, but a little more digging reveals that the phenomenon extends much further than this visible trend. Even scholars who just produced volumes in one field or the other recorded their intention to contribute to both. Talbot only decided that his most helpful contribution would be to broader debates on the 'antiquity of Genesis' after he had already devoted extensive research to an abortive Egyptian volume. Edward William Lane, now best-known as a commentator on modern Egypt and translator of *The Arabian Nights* (1850), conducted extensive research for an ancient Egyptian work that remained unpublished (until Jason Thompson's edition in 2010) before he anonymously issued *The Genesis of Earth and of Man*. Gardner Wilkinson signalled his plan to write a volume on the antiquity of man in a letter to no less an icon of science than Charles Babbage; he broached the subject with the phrase 'the geologists are

becoming crazy', and soon protested against geological timescales in correspondence with Lyell himself.⁷⁵

As this publishing frenzy might imply, Mariette's dating of the beginning of Egyptian history to the sixth millennium BC was hotly contested. Other French and German chronologies typically arrived at results that were shorter, but of a comparable order of magnitude. Emil Brugsch, for instance, placed the accession of Menes at 4455 BC, while Karl Lepsius preferred 3892; Bunsen changed his mind on this issue more often, perhaps, than any other scholar in the field, but usually favoured dates sometime in the fourth millennium. Among the most striking features of these chronological reconstructions is the fact that dissent from Mariette's long span of Egyptian history was much more dramatic in Britain than anywhere else. Many British authorities dated the accession of Menes to a whole two millennia later than their French and German counterparts: Gardner Wilkinson initially favoured 2201 BC, modified to 2320 by 1837 and later extended to 2691; Poole preferred 2717.⁷⁶ These writers always commented on the broader implications of their chosen dates: they explored arguments for or against the viability of long prehistoric processes that may have 'led to the high culture of the pyramid builders'. The antiquity of man remained a live debate in history and archaeology long after the famous debates among geologists in the 1850s, which established vast prehistoric development as geological orthodoxy.⁷⁷

Scientists soon noted this disjunction between their concerns and those of Egyptologists. The palaeontologist Richard Owen (himself often unkindly caricatured as an atavistic opponent of Darwin) argued in 1877 that British explorers and archaeologists in the Near East needed quickly to recognize the findings of geologists. In his eyes, Egyptology was stubbornly committed to a biblical text whose usefulness to the study of prehistory was limited.

Obstruction to the acceptance of the inductive evidences on which alone a lasting knowledge of ethnology and of the antiquity of the

⁷⁵ Thompson, *Sir Gardner Wilkinson*, 196.

⁷⁶ For discussion of these dates see Rawlinson, *Antiquity of Man*; J. Gardner Wilkinson, *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (London: Murray, 1837), 1:94; Thompson, *Sir Gardner Wilkinson*, 144.

⁷⁷ A. Bowdoin van Riper, *Men among the Mammoths* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993), 117–43.

human race can be had, is the same which opposed the progress of the science of geology, and retarded for two centuries or more the demonstration of the causes which, in the long course of ages, modified the crust of the earth; incompatibility, namely, with the chronology of the Bible.⁷⁸

However, men of science were scattered through all corners of this debate. In the year after Owen's statement James Southall, the author of the period's leading textbooks on optics, argued that the absence of palaeolithic remains in Egypt conclusively proved the late creation of man. A discovery of science was as much a part of the truth of the universe as a verse of scripture, he argued in *The Epoch of the Mammoth and the Apparition of Man upon the Earth* (1878), but it should never be allowed to entirely supersede scriptural knowledge. His aim was to 'correlate the abrupt civilization . . . at the mouth of the Nile . . . with the rock shelters and caves of the Western Troglo-dytes'.⁷⁹ The Egypt he presented was vivid and heroic. Amidst wandering herds of mammoth primeval kings like Menes built great cities that flourished while 'the age of ice prevailed in Europe' and 'the artisans of the drift' eked out a living in the metal-scarce caves of frozen France.⁸⁰ He saw the Bible lands as a fertile zone that entirely evaded glacial coverage; only if evidence of a stone age could be discovered in this unique region could a long human history be demonstrated. Audaciously, he even quoted Owen, Bunsen and Renan in support of his case.⁸¹ Poole had rightly predicted in 1860 that the 'old battle' over human antiquity was not quite concluded, and would soon be 'fought again'.⁸² Uses of Egypt to reignite this debate would continue until, in the late 1890s, evidence of Egyptian prehistory was finally publicized and granted authority.

The rights and wrongs of this argument are far from its most interesting feature. Nor are they as straightforward as they might at first appear. Poole and Rawlinson may have got some aspects of the trajectory of the development of civilization remarkably wrong, but

⁷⁸ Collected with other scientific commentary in the end matter of Rawlinson, *Antiquity of Man*.

⁷⁹ James Cocke Southall, *The Epoch of the Mammoth* (London: Trübner, 1878), xi–xii.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* xi; this idea is not quite as ludicrous as it might sound: the last breeds of (dwarf) mammoths survived into the historical period in small, Arctic, pockets.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* esp. 'No Stone Age in Egypt', 4–6.

⁸² Lane, *Genesis*, xxii.

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their dating of the founding events of Egyptian history was in fact much nearer than Mariette's or Brugsch's to the chronologies of the first dynasty now favoured. In reality, the techniques and evidence needed to date Egyptian history even approximately did not exist in 1850 so the question of whose guess was 'most wrong' is hardly relevant. More interesting are the reasons that various scholars gave for favouring long or short chronologies, the type of evidence they wished to use, and the remarkable national differences in method and results. It is these themes that tie Egyptology into the cultures in which it was produced in ways that provide potential for broader historical insights. As will be demonstrated throughout this book, most of these motivations related directly to existing ideas on the status of the Bible and classical literature, which, in the face of vigorous challenge and equally stern defence, continued to define much of European culture, to the great pleasure of many and to other thinkers' dismay.

EGYPT IN BRITAIN, DECADE BY DECADE

In this brief sketch of Egypt's ties to biblical conceptions of time I have so far been largely inattentive to precise developments within the chronology of the nineteenth century itself. It is now time to set out in more detail some of the processes alluded to at the beginning of this introduction, which form the basis for the structure of this book. Many of the examples drawn on so far have come from the mid century, and the accepted history of Egyptology would suggest that to be a matter of necessity. Existing histories imply that ties between the Bible and archaeology could not be easily drawn out of the work of leading Egyptologists at the end of the century. This assumption is entirely unjustified. In fact, it is one of the most significant and surprising features of Egyptology's rollercoaster history that these ties persisted with extraordinary power. Such ties were considered more important and more fundamental by earnest Egyptologists after 1880 than they had been by the travelling adventurers or museum-based antiquarians who were their predecessors. Scholars such as Elliot Colla and Donald Malcolm Reid are right to tie the development of Egyptology to the chronology of Empire: the nature of 1880s Egyptology did have much to do with the popular focus turned on

Egypt by the British occupation in 1882 and the sense of providential destiny encouraged by the climb towards imperial high noon. However, the waxing global ambition of the British state was only ever one of several contributory developments: many of the factors that shaped Egyptology were not derived directly from imperialism or colonialism and they emphatically resist reduction to it.

This was a period of extraordinary developments in religious history that have variously been associated with ‘the secularization of the European mind’, the ‘warfare of science with theology’, ‘the decline of the British churches’ and (more realistically but less axiomatically) the pluralization from a biblically suffused, confessional culture into a more uneven world of diffusive Christianity in which strict denominational commitment and precise biblical dogma began to matter a little less.⁸³ Egypt’s status as a Bible land caused its image to alter in tandem with developments in religious culture, although it was just as frequently formed in reaction to prevailing currents as carried along on their tide. Changing practices in the interpretation of the Bible had an impact on how Egyptology was conducted, but the reverse was also true: Egyptological discoveries could shape how passages from the Bible were read.

The integration of ostensibly distinct cultural strands, like empire and religion, is part of the historian’s task and histories of Egyptology have almost entirely failed to do justice to the discipline’s involvement in religious culture. Perhaps the most immediate illustration of how the timelines of imperial history and religious history were bound together comes from the multiple implications of the term ‘orientalism’. The historian of German scholarship, Suzanne Marchand, has recently challenged the historical interpretation of this term that has prevailed since the publication of Edward Said’s first major works in the 1970s. Said’s ideas remain profoundly important (and we have surely learnt far more from him than from all his opponents combined) but as recent scholars including Marchand, Nigel Leask and Eitan Bar Yosef have demonstrated, a side-effect of his colossal influence has been to bury many of the subtleties of European engagement with the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East. Marchand shows how orientalist knowledge in Germany stretched back to

⁸³ S. J. D. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) paints the most compelling picture to date of the new religious frame formed from these processes.

the sixteenth century and was involved less in questions of how to use knowledge to exert authority over ‘the locals’ than in ‘traditional, almost primeval, Christian questions’.⁸⁴ Orientalist knowledge, she insists, was not always ‘power’ to be exerted over others, but was just as frequently appreciation, dialogue and self-critique. It emerged from movements that proposed new methods of reading the Bible, and was a powerful force long before the age of Empire. In Scotland, shortly before the period covered by this book, Alexander Geddes demonstrated how the term ‘orientalist’ could also imply a critical attitude to British theology when he looked with envy across the North Sea: ‘in Germany almost every man of learning is an Orientalist. In short, Sacred Criticism is everywhere the predominant study of the learned of all communions’.⁸⁵

The similar biblical concerns of British and German interest in the Near East always competed with the imperial commonalities shared by the British and French when it came to defining how orientalist viewed their role. Sometimes biblical scholarship lost this competition hands down, with ugly results; and biblical concerns were sometimes merely used as the feeblest excuses for unpalatable political agendas; but orientalism’s intellectual alter-ego nonetheless lived on into the twentieth century. Already, this introduction has drawn on several quotations that defy Said’s categories and show the specificity and sense of awe with which antiquarians approached the practical and spiritual achievements, and the detailed differentiation, of the cultures of ‘the East’. Many more examples will be found in the following pages.

This book begins immediately after the decipherment of the hieroglyphs. This was, paradoxically, a period of crisis for study of ancient Egypt. Until 1822 leading British scholars like the scientific polymath Thomas Young had been buried deep in ancient Egyptian material, attempting to find the key to its language and script. Young was a born problem-solver who frequently stressed that his interest was in a linguistic puzzle, not the pharaohs and their civilization; he looked elsewhere as soon as he felt that his contribution to decipherment was

⁸⁴ Suzanne Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xvii–xxxiv.

⁸⁵ See Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 244.

assured.⁸⁶ Similarly Talbot, another accomplished mathematician, never produced an Egyptian volume because he felt that his analytic skills were better expended on civilizations whose script or language was yet to be decrypted. Edward Hincks, an Irish clergyman, would become another major player in the decipherment of cuneiform, but he lacked Henry Rawlinson's taste for publicity and, until recently had largely disappeared from narratives of decipherment.⁸⁷ From the 1820s onwards Hincks considered Egypt to be his primary interest and made major steps forward in reading the Egyptian language, but his publications, lectures and greatest innovations largely concerned the languages of Mesopotamia. These publications frequently express his nostalgia for the days when the mystery of the hieroglyphs was on the public mind: 'more interest seems to be felt in the inscriptions of the buried palaces of Assyria . . . than in the longer known Egyptian monuments' he regretfully explained to the Royal Irish Academy when he addressed them on inscriptions from the palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad.⁸⁸ Once again, where Egypt was concerned, increased knowledge actually led to a decline in interest. Because Champollion had made a dramatic linguistic breakthrough, subsequent, less decisive, developments could not find a market. It is striking and strange that, after the hieroglyphs were deciphered but before much had really been learnt from them, Egypt was considered too well known to be the basis for a career by many of the scholars who had expressed interest in it.

Despite this trend, uncertainty as to whether Champollion's success had been genuine persisted for several decades: Egyptologists like Hincks were trapped between the indifference and hostility of their antiquarian peers. One of Champollion's competitors in the attempt to decipher the hieroglyphic script, Gustav Seyffarth, died in 1885 still stubbornly refusing to recognize Champollion's success.⁸⁹ Even

⁸⁶ John Ray, *The Rosetta Stone and the Rebirth of Ancient Egypt* (London: Profile, 2007) provides the strongest coverage of Young's career; see also Andrew Bednarski, *Holding Egypt: Tracing the Reception of the Description de l'Égypte in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Golden House, 2005).

⁸⁷ Kevin J. Cathcart has rehabilitated Hincks as a scholar of the Egyptian language: *The Edward Hincks Memorial Lectures* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1998), and *The Correspondence of Edward Hincks* (University College Dublin, 2007–9).

⁸⁸ Edward Hincks, *On the Khorsabad Inscriptions* (Dublin: M. H. Gill, 1850), 1.

⁸⁹ In the mid century, many British commentators interpreted Germanic Egyptology as divided between two schools, that of Lepsius and Brugsch, and that of Uhlemann and Seyffarth; committing support to one axis or the other was a deeply

Renan frequently worried that the decipherment had been fraudulent, while John Pentland Mahaffy's *Prolegomena to Ancient History* (1871) recounts with some pleasure the admirable critical inclination of audiences at his lectures when they reacted sceptically to the idea that hieroglyphic inscriptions could really be read.⁹⁰ Among Hincks' many run-ins with this scepticism was his attempt to publish a *Catalogue of the Egyptian Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin* (1843), which was delayed considerably by the opposition of Charles William Wall, Professor of Oriental Languages. Wall was one of numerous influential figures who simply refused to accept that hieroglyphic texts could now be understood: he belittled both Champollion and Hincks at every opportunity. The role of hieroglyphic scholarship at mid century was, then, marginal and contested. Britain's most celebrated publisher, John Murray, emphasized this by claiming that the Egyptian publishing industry had collapsed with the death of the showman-explorer Giovanni Belzoni in 1823.⁹¹ Many significant Egyptian works were researched over the next two decades, but most of them remained unpublished: like many other publishers Murray summarily rejected almost every manuscript that was sent to him. Some he dismissed on the grounds that they were dangerous to the Bible, others because he could see no audience for them.⁹² When Champollion died in 1832 the death of the hieroglyphic science he had begun was predicted by figures as elevated as Gardner Wilkinson. Indeed, Wilkinson always remained pessimistic as to the appetite for ancient Egyptian works; when researching his masterwork in the early 1830s he worried intensely about its fate: 'from the little interest generally felt about the country . . . it is probable it will never be required'.⁹³ Like Young's, Wilkinson's devotion to ancient Egypt was patchy and the civilization remained only one amongst his many antiquarian interests.

The publishing industry in this period expanded rapidly. Through steam-powered printing and distribution, expanding literacy and a

political act expressive of a panoply of religious and social attitudes. See chapter 1 below.

⁹⁰ J. P. Mahaffy, *Prolegomena to Ancient History* (London: Longmans, 1871), viii.

⁹¹ As quoted in Thompson, *Sir Gardner Wilkinson*, 80; see also 118.

⁹² Many of these works, including E. W. Lane's *Description of Egypt* (1825–7) were first published in the late twentieth or early twenty-first century, brought out for the first time by Egyptologists such as Jason Thompson.

⁹³ Wilkinson, *Topography*, vi.

budding postal service, books, pamphlets and tracts were beginning to march into regions they had previously struggled to reach. This is nowhere better illustrated than in Egyptology, where Vivant Denon's *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt* had been advertised for sale at a staggering price of 21 guineas in 1803, a year's wage for some manual labourers. The expansion of the press and the stabilization of European politics meant that no Egyptological work would ever be issued at a comparable cost again. Nevertheless, Egyptian works did not yet partake fully in this growth of the reading public: in relative terms, studies of ancient Egypt were losing ground, swamped in an unprecedentedly febrile intellectual milieu.

Many synthetic accounts of ancient history, recounting the actions of providence in the early world, did see the light of day. At the same time, inspired by the Egyptian Hall where Belzoni had established his vivid recreations of the temples of the Nile, Joseph Bonomi set about constructing Egyptianized buildings and monuments around Britain. But for most of the two decades after 1822 pharaonic Egypt was not the bone of public contention or cause of intense scholarly debate that it had been earlier and would imminently become again. Few big controversial ideas were introduced to the public through Egyptian evidence in these decades, and Egypt only rarely played a leading role in polemical arguments about the origins of man or the nature of religion and civilization. For once, in the mainstream press, Egypt seemed to be a world described almost transparently in Exodus: this was how Conder and even Carlyle conveyed it to their readers. Clergymen of the hellfire school might continue to frighten their congregations with great rhetorical turns constructed around Egypt's profligacy, and theological arguments over ancient history continued with their usual ferocity, but in the era of the Reform Act and Catholic Emancipation, Rome, and the role of its Empire and Church in history and prophecy, eclipsed all rivals.⁹⁴

In the 1830s, a tiny body of dissent did attempt to subvert the accepted *topoi* of biblical Egypt. Robert Taylor's *Diegesis*—the original Devil's Gospel—was formed around his quest for scriptural ideas in

⁹⁴ Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966–70), 1:35–6; Mary Wilson Carpenter, *George Eliot and the landscape of Time* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 3–29; Jonathan Sachs, *Romantic Antiquity: Rome in the British Imagination, 1789–1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Egyptian myth. His motto, scrawled on the walls of Oakham Gaol while imprisoned for blasphemy, would later become a rallying call amongst historically-minded secularist radicals: ‘Bind it around thy neck, write it upon the tablet of thy heart: Everything of Christianity is of Egyptian origin’. His schemes took advantage of public uncertainty as to the nature of hieroglyphs and the knowledge they conveyed, to insist that the Old Testament was discredited by its connexion with the superstitions of Egyptian priests. But public opinion in 1830 was united and coherent enough to sideline such atheistic rants and few took up this battle cry until the socialist poet Gerald Massey disinterred Taylor’s belligerent spirit half a century later, amidst a religious culture facing very different challenges.⁹⁵

Gardner Wilkinson’s most substantial contribution to Egyptology was made towards the end of the 1830s. Like almost all the great archaeologists of the mid century, Wilkinson was a profoundly heterodox figure who courted notoriety in his private life but nonetheless confined himself almost exclusively to orthodox and publically acceptable ideas in his published works. Indeed his heterodoxy seems to have slipped the notice of his Egyptological successors altogether. E. A. T. Wallis Budge, Keeper of the Egyptian antiquities in the British Museum from 1889, portrayed Wilkinson as a conventional stick-in-the-mud; but Wilkinson was in fact far more irreverent than the complicated but intensely conservative Budge would ever be (it is difficult to imagine Wilkinson writing to the railway authorities reporting colleagues he suspected of travelling without a ticket, as Budge routinely did).⁹⁶ Like the more famous figure of Austen Henry Layard, discoverer of Nineveh, Wilkinson was playful and subversive towards his Christian principles when travelling through the Muslim world in which he worked; but also like Layard, in his major texts he committed himself wholeheartedly to feeding the domestic public’s desire for material that could illustrate biblical narratives and make hymns and sermons more immediate and engaging.

So it wasn’t until the 1840s that trailblazing ideas originating from scholarship in the German states unleashed a heterodox Egyptology

⁹⁵ Massey even took Taylor’s motto, above, as his own, employing it in lectures and printing it opposite the frontispiece of *The Natural Genesis* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1883) with Kircher’s Egyptian planisphere adorning the following page.

⁹⁶ Grateful (bemused?) replies to Budge’s snitching can be found in the British Museum’s Arch Room archive.

that seemed to threaten the Bible, and Egypt developed an association with the higher criticism that served to problematize its appeal in Britain. This began with works such as Bunsen's *Egypt's Place in Universal History*, but Bunsen's British networks included many leading radical scholars, and a stream of Egyptological publications soon issued from figures associated with the freethinking Unitarians. These figures argued the early sophistication of the pyramid builders to demonstrate a 10,000-year pedigree for human culture: Egyptian civilization rose gradually and haltingly from a savage state to the point at which the Tura and Giza limestone of the Great Pyramid was cut and invested with religious meaning. The Old Testament was not a chronological document, but a 'relative' text whose timescale could be expanded and contracted, concertina-like, to fit external evidence. Unitarian scholars found in Egypt the third influence besides Hellenic and Hebraic thought that had led to the formation of early Christian culture and could explain the origins of 'Trinitarian superstition' as well as other errors of the early church. This clash of three civilizations in early Christian culture was highlighted by the nature of the most famous evocation of Egyptian wisdom ever written, Acts 7:22: 'And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds'. Here it is Stephen, the Hellene, who assures Luke, the Hebrew, of Egypt's pivotal role in proving that the Holy Land is not the only Land that is Holy. For Unitarian scholars it was only through knowledge of the impact of ancient Egypt on both Greek and Jewish thought that Christianity could be stripped to its fundamental truths.

Another of the very small number of widely circulated publicists of Egyptology in this period, William Osburn, put Egypt to similarly divisive sectarian use, but from a very different ideological angle. Osburn was the son of a Leeds wine merchant, and father of Lucy Osburn, the controversial acolyte of Florence Nightingale.⁹⁷ He was a founder of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, and his first publication was 'a translation of the inscriptions on the valuable mummy' acquired by the Society's museum.⁹⁸ It was followed up with *Ancient Egypt: her Testimony to the Truth* (1846) and *Monumental*

⁹⁷ Lucy's strange career in Yorkshire, Jerusalem and Australia involved accusations of Bible-burning and anti-Protestant propaganda.

⁹⁸ William Smith, 'William Osburn: Egyptologist' in *Old Yorkshire*, second series (London: Longmans, 1889–92), 3:89.

History of Egypt (1854). Osburn was much more traditional in his beliefs than Wilkinson, Kenrick or Sharpe, but like the latter he was driven by fierce desire to show the error of prevailing trends in British religion. His historical works aimed to show the ‘very early introduction of serious corruption and superstition in the Christian Church, in which the errors of the Greek and Latin churches had their foundation’; he assaulted the High Church Oxford Movement in the cause of ‘Evangelical Truth’, with ancient history ‘from the monuments’ as his weapon of choice.⁹⁹

Perceptions of Egyptology in this period cannot be understood without awareness of biblical criticism and its cultural status, just as the expansive range of this period’s criticism cannot be fully appreciated without the input of Bunsen’s Egyptology. Historical criticism made Egypt at mid century volatile and threatening in myriad ways: its monuments were used by Colenso to question the Noachic flood, and by George Gliddon to support American slavery on the grounds of polygenesis; and it was in the 1840s and 1850s that the discipline became familiar as a powerful player alongside the radical sciences that were transforming conceptions of historical time. At mid century, the history of ancient Egypt can be found woven into almost every intellectual controversy, from the *Vestiges* sensation, to the manifesto of broad-church commitment to the methods of criticism and science, *Essays and Reviews* (1860).

However, just as in the 1820s and 1830s, it remained the case that most Britons received their image of Egypt through churchmen, biblical commentaries, or the multitude of general providential narratives of western history. The Egypt presented at Oxford, and picked up by the young Gladstone, was more or less unruffled by archaeology or radical criticism; except for the application of a few new names like ‘Rameses’ and ‘Thutmose’ the hieroglyphs might as well never have been deciphered. To the young Gladstone ‘ancient’ meant ‘biblical’ and the works of Aristotle were treated as essentially similar to those of St Paul.¹⁰⁰ Until the last quarter of the century Wilkinson’s work remained the one widely read textbook dedicated specifically to

⁹⁹ Ibid. 90; ‘monuments’ did not just denote temples and tombs but all antiquities, however small: even in 1892 Amelia Edwards would refer to ‘ancient Egyptian jewellery, scarabs, amulets . . . writings on linen and papyrus, and other miscellaneous monuments’.

¹⁰⁰ Frank Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 322–68.

ancient Egyptian culture. Its careful and deliberate avoidance of the religious polemic that surfaces repeatedly in its rivals—John Kenrick's *Ancient Egypt under the Pharaohs*, Samuel Sharpe's *History of Egypt*, and William Osburn's *Monumental History of Egypt*—facilitated its broad acceptance in British culture.

Soon, however, the status of archaeology and the range of cultural uses to which the ancient world was put were transformed. Translation of the flood narratives that were the first known fragments of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* contributed to this at the beginning of the 1870s. They encouraged research in comparative mythology that began to find new, more resonant echoes of the Bible throughout ancient literature, and inspired a quickly growing market for comparative ancient history. But the most powerful factor in this development was the celebrity of Heinrich Schliemann and his excavations at Troy. Schliemann was presented to his large British audience as an antidote to the critical scepticism that had ruled study of Homer and the Old Testament for decades. Archibald Henry Sayce, Oxford Professor of Assyriology, wrote that it had taken half a century for the findings of the higher criticism to suffuse British culture, but that the opposing findings of Schliemann's archaeology, which ushered in 'a new era . . . in the study of antiquity', would reach the public with lightning-bolt immediacy.¹⁰¹

It was at this point that Egyptologists found the press throwing its resources at their feet. Amelia Edwards wrote in 1880 that thanks to her campaign on behalf of Egyptologists, the *Morning Post* had become for Egyptian archaeology 'such a medium of communication with the public as Assyrian & Greek archaeologists command in the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*.' Within a year the new confidence in archaeology's incisive power seemed vindicated by the discovery of the mummy of Ramesses II, widely proclaimed as 'the pharaoh of the Exodus'. Another year later and Edwards had established Britain's most important Egyptological organization, the Egypt Exploration Fund, which in the 1880s undertook the first large-scale British excavations. Their inaugural excavation claimed success in recovering the route of the Exodus, and establishing the geography of the Hebrew presence in New Kingdom Egypt; it was not really, its Honorary Secretary proclaimed, involved in 'Egyptian' archaeology

¹⁰¹ A. H. Sayce, *The Higher Criticism and the Verdict of the Monuments* (London: SPCK, 1894), xiv.

at all.¹⁰² With these digs, and the interest focused on Egypt by the British occupation, the theological purposes ascribed to Egyptology took off on a new scale and in new directions.

The processes through which Egyptology moved from its biblical identity in 1890 to the hardly secular, but rarely scriptural phenomenon recognizable from the reaction to the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb is the next important piece in this puzzle. The recognition of predynastic and prehistoric Egypt was crucial to this shift. It eventually grew out of excavations at early sites such as Naqada and discoveries including the Narmer Palette; it was pushed on with great intensity by huge archaeological endeavours at prehistoric Nubian burial sites (soon to be submerged by the first Aswan Dam and its early extensions). This entirely transformed the patterns that could be read into ancient history: it made previously dominant readings unsustainable, and created the possibility of entirely new interpretations. Petrie himself, deeply unsettled by his recognition of prehistory, turned to vast narratives of the cycles of civilization to provide an alternative historical teleology: the influence of a fervent nonconformist Christianity gradually gave way to a new ideological model shaped by a form of eugenics inspired by friendships with his next-door neighbour Karl Pearson, and Francis Galton.

The biblical Egyptology of the 1880s and 1890s underwent a fate that was a microcosm for the theological publishing industry itself in its rapid retraction in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The number of theological works published plummeted, and Egyptological works were soon much less frequently found among them. By 1922 biblical Egyptology appeared to be a niche pursuit amputated from the mainstream of the discipline in Britain (though not in America). Fascination with Egyptian exoticism was no longer widely moderated by a familiarity bred through long acculturation with the Bible. An extensive body of ancient Egyptian-themed fiction associated with names like H. Rider Haggard and Marie Corelli had been building momentum since the 1880s; like Egyptology itself this fiction gradually threw off its biblical moorings after the turn of the century. The stock ancient Egyptian imagery of the grotesque and barbaric, which had spent several decades subdued by a more homely, civilized and biblical Egypt, re-emerged emphatically.

¹⁰² M. L. Herbert, 'Recent Excavations in Egypt', 17 July 1888: EES, box XVIII, 75.

Dozens of this period's presentations of ancient Egypt located it in broad humanistic or spiritualist models of the cycles of civilization. The work of a wide range of thinkers including H. G. Wells, Petrie, W. B. Yeats, and the bestselling author of pedagogical histories, Hendrik van Loon, interpreted the role of Egypt in ways that possess remarkable similarities. Hegelian ideas about the continual unification of opposites came to define the language of large-scale history. Yeats, for instance, saw civilization centres like Byzantium and Rome as oppositional: throughout history neither had been able to stand except through the other's collapse: 'Each age unwinds the thread another age had wound . . . all things dying each other's life, living each other's death'.¹⁰³ These mechanical, Hegelian oppositions and persisting threads of cyclical life and death are found laid out at length in Petrie's *Revolutions of Civilisation* (1907) and *Janus in Modern Life* (1911).

Models of 'universal history' were influenced by new trends in anthropology that were developed through increasing involvement of anthropologists in Egyptology. These included the Professor of Anatomy at Manchester and University College London, Grafton Elliot Smith, whose hyperdiffusionism recounted in *The Ancient Egyptians and the Origin of Civilisation* (1911) and then *The Evolution of the Dragon* (1919), once again posited Egypt as the single point of origin for the defining features of the modern world. This new ancient Egypt superficially seems to have crossed the religious chasm that makes 1870 appear so culturally different from 1970. The advent of anthropology turned Egypt from the setting of Bible stories into an ancient society once again; yet the persistence of underlying religious motives and biblical narrative patterns should not be underestimated.¹⁰⁴ Petrie's move from religious models of interpretation to biological ones has many of the characteristics of a conversion, and the roots of these civilizational schemes in powerful teleologies make them as interlinked with conceptions of metaphysical and religious meaning as the biblical preoccupations they gradually displaced.

¹⁰³ W. B. Yeats, *A Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1937), 187; first issued in private edition, 1925.

¹⁰⁴ J. M. Blaut, *The Coloniser's Model of the World* (New York: Guilford, 1993).

WRITING THE HISTORY OF EGYPTOLOGY

Assembling any history of archaeology, Egyptology or Assyriology into something more ambitious than a disciplinary narrative makes three huge, interlinked demands on us. All three of these have begun to be woven into the content of this introduction, but they also need to be stated explicitly. Firstly, a nuanced cultural study requires us to think ourselves back into the religiously and classically suffused world of the nineteenth century. As historians from Quentin Skinner to J. W. Burrow and exponents of approaches such as reader-response theory have argued, the only way to understand the work of any author is to pay extraordinarily close attention to their intellectual surroundings.¹⁰⁵ The study of even the most exceptional historical thinkers requires examination of a host of ideas and texts in order to reconstruct the historical worldview on which the object of study drew. Indeed, it was scholars of nineteenth-century hermeneutics like Renan who first realized the extent to which the meaning of texts was defined by the environments of writer and reader alike. Egyptologists such as Flinders Petrie practiced painstaking techniques in order to ‘share the feelings and see with the eyes of those who ruled the world when it was young’: when we reconstruct his worldview we owe him the courtesy of expending similar effort.¹⁰⁶

The attenuated roles of religion and the classics in twenty-first-century society mean that these two bodies of literature define the boundaries of an imposing cultural chasm between us and the period this book approaches. An almost universal familiarity with the allusive languages of the Bible and classical literature amongst nineteenth-century readers means that those two bodies of texts run like long strings of code through the whole of European culture. Egypt’s historical relation to both Israel and Greece ensured that its study was particularly dominated by this cultural cipher. The extent to which this profoundly different role of ancient traditions makes the nineteenth century alien to us has been widely recognized in art and literature. Some of the twentieth century’s literary masterpieces—David Jones’s colossal poem *The Anathémata*, or works by T. S. Eliot and

¹⁰⁵ David Katz, *God’s Last Words* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) provides an apt introduction.

¹⁰⁶ Petrie, *Egyptian Tales*, second series (London: Methuen, 1911), vii.

W. H. Auden—were devoted to attempting to glimpse behind this conceptual veil and to reconstructing the allusive expression that has become, in Eliot's words, 'a heap of broken images'.¹⁰⁷ But until recently many historians have largely left the evocation of that world to poets. The literary critic Northrop Frye showed early interest in this act of reconstruction, and claimed to find seven biblical references in just four words of William Blake: the language of nineteenth-century historians and archaeologists of ancient Egypt could sometimes be almost equally dense with reference. It seems to me that there is now real appetite, as well as real necessity, for giving back to Egyptology a sense of the cultural and religious crucible in which it was forged (even if we are content to shirk the task of building an anatomy of biblical language as intimate as that employed by Frye).

Thomas Carlyle's 1829 description of Egypt buried 'deep in the wrecks of time', quoted above, can illustrate this point. This distinctive phrase had very specific contemporary resonance: like much Carlylean expression it emerged straight out of contemporary Scottish dissenting discourse. In 1825, the Kilmarnock collector of European folk poetry, John Bowring, had published the now-familiar hymn that begins 'In the Cross of Christ I Glory, Towering o'er the Wrecks of Time'.¹⁰⁸ Bowring and Carlyle recorded reading each other's works, and by 1831 they were corresponding on such themes as the religious attitudes of Saint Simonians.¹⁰⁹ Carlyle's adoption of Bowring's phrase gives great rhetorical power to his evocation of the littleness of pagan Egyptian antiquity, before the 'twist' that uses Moses to redeem Egypt as an influence on the present. From Carlyle and Conder to Amelia Edwards and Flinders Petrie, writers on Egypt chose carefully language that could inspire emotional and religious responses in their readers. Without fine-grained appreciation of the historically specific associations of such language we cannot possibly understand what these authors aimed to do.

The second requirement of a nuanced Egyptological history is a broad attentiveness to nineteenth-century interpretation of the other ancient peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East.

¹⁰⁷ T. S. Eliot, *The Wasteland* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), 1.

¹⁰⁸ John Bowring, *Hymns: as a Sequel to the Matins* (London: Private Edition, 1825).

¹⁰⁹ e.g. Thomas Carlyle to John Bowring, 11 July 1831, *Letters of Thomas Carlyle*, vol. 5, 330–1.

A history of nineteenth-century Assyriology, Homeric scholarship, or anthropology would involve much overlap with the actors who make up the cast of this book: the scenes would change, leaving many of the leading men and women still on stage. The early histories of these disciplines were interlinked, as innovations in one field were immediately followed up in others. Egyptology, Assyriology and study of cultures such as the Hittites all faced the exciting but enormously problematic issues associated with the deciphering of their scripts and the reading of their texts for the first time. Egyptology after 1822 was not simply involved in assimilating newly translated Egyptian texts, but still relied on extensive comparative research. It took decades for the diverse implications of hypotheses that were problematized by the first, halting, translations of inscriptions to be identified and rooted out.

The emotions resulting from Champollion's success in deciphering the hieroglyphs have usually been characterized as celebratory and euphoric. They just as frequently involved profound disappointment or frustration at the paucity of Egyptian and Assyrian documentation of the issues that really mattered to nineteenth-century readers. Samuel Sharpe wrote that 'our disappointment is of course fully equal to our curiosity when we find, from every fresh advance which is made in the reading of hieroglyphics how little the priests thought worth recording . . . beyond the titles of their gods and the particulars of the sacred offerings to their shrines'.¹¹⁰ Mariette and countless others expressed dismay that the question of chronology was not settled because it turned out that 'the Egyptians themselves never had any chronology at all'.¹¹¹ Others, including Poole, were incredulous that there were 'no traces of truth' in Egyptian texts relating 'to the origin of the material universe'.¹¹² Even archaeologists in 1887 deplored the fact that all 'sanguine expectations' of discovering knowledge of early history had been dashed by decipherment of the Egyptian script.¹¹³ It had once been assumed that the translating of

¹¹⁰ Samuel Sharpe, *The Early History of Egypt from the Old Testament, Herodotus and Manetho* (London: Edward Moxon, 1836), 5.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Francois Lenormant, *Manual of the Ancient History of the East* (London: Asher, 1869), 1:198; Mariette continued: 'modern science must always fail in attempts to restore what the Egyptians never possessed'.

¹¹² Lane, *Genesis of the Earth*, editor's preface, ix.

¹¹³ Percy Gardner, 'Naukratis', *Quarterly Review*, 164 (January 1887), 69; countless examples could be listed, especially concerning the Old Kingdom: 'the monuments

hieroglyphic and cuneiform texts would make Egypt and Assyria less problematic and puzzling. It made them more so, and contradictory comparative hypotheses sprouted faster than ever. Decipherment was an immensely fruitful anti-climax: it did not make Egyptology a self-contained discipline, but perpetuated its reliance on other strands of historical and archaeological research.

At the same time we do need to be aware of the differences between these incipient disciplines. Initially mysterious divergences between the histories of Assyriology and Egyptology often have quite straightforward explanations. There was a much shorter hiatus between the decipherment of cuneiform and establishment of a British University chair in Assyriology, than between the reading of hieroglyphs and investiture of Egyptology's first Professor in Britain. This apparent puzzle is explained by the affinity of Assyrian languages with Hebrew; it was this that saw Assyriology become a discipline intimately bound into theological institutions, while Egyptology was left wandering Britain's institutional wilderness for longer than the Israelites tramped round Canaan after the flight from Pharaoh.

Equally importantly, and in close connection with both the above aims, a cultural history of Egyptology requires a different set of criteria for reconstructing the period's Egyptological milieu than that usually employed. Existing histories have established a canon of scholars according either to estimates of their later influence on the discipline or the spectacular nature of their finds: Gardner Wilkinson becomes part of a lineage stretching across the decades down to Petrie and on to George Reisner, Howard Carter, and so on. This has led to the neglect of many important figures: even the influence of Bunsen has been dislocated from the standard history of the discipline. The alternative approach is to cut a series of cultural cross-sections, much like archaeological strata, which aim to treat authors according to their influence in the nineteenth century itself. The hope is to get at something of the excitement and confusion of the competing voices that attempted to claim authority over the interpretation of this most ancient of civilizations. Poole and Sayce made no contributions to the development of Egyptology that are recognized today, but in the 1880s and 1890s their names and ideas were as firmly associated with what it meant to be an Egyptologist as Petrie's. 'Egyptologist'

render us no assistance in this early portion of history' noted James Browne in the *Quarterly*, 68 (January 1839), 321.

(or ‘Egyptologer’ as the term was still frequently written in the 1870s) did not imply activity in the field, although it did suggest use of archaeological evidence or translated inscriptions.¹¹⁴ In fact, even in Britain—where developments in Egyptian archaeology are characterized as having eclipsed the more Germanic realm of research into the Egyptian language—a dynamic between excavator-workman in Egypt and interpreter-scholar was charged in favour of the latter until at least the 1880s, so the all-too-common dismissal of or disdain for ‘arm-chair’ scholars threatens to substantially misrepresent contemporary Egyptological dynamics. Samuel Birch, one of the great Egyptological scholars of the age, interpreted the death of his colleague George Smith at Smyrna in 1874 as confirmation of the idiocy inherent in embarking on missions of historical recovery outside the congenial environments of European museums.

One of the immediate and liberating results of combining these aims is the conclusion that, even at the end of the century, the excavation report was far from the dominating document it has sometimes been presented as. Petrie’s field reports have secured his reputation in the present, handing down remarkable innovations in the practice and recording of archaeological process; but he published hundreds of initially better-known narrative and descriptive works that defined his image amongst contemporaries. This situation might be seen as bearing some resemblance to that faced by geologists like Lyell in the 1830s, when they had to demonstrate through popular surveys, tracts and sermons that they could go beyond the technicalities of strata hunting to treat sensitive social and religious issues seriously.¹¹⁵ Egyptology in 1880, like geology in 1830, felt the pressure to demonstrate its ‘philosophical’ purpose if it was to be respectable, relevant and worthy of public attention (as well, of course, as funding). As late as 1905, Petrie insisted that the archaeologist must differentiate his approach from ‘unchecked literary criticism’ by constant emphasis of his ability to ‘deal with historical questions safely’.¹¹⁶ In this vein, it was not just Petrie as archaeologist, but

¹¹⁴ This terminology remained entirely unsettled. While ancient historians might be called ‘Egyptologists’ or ‘Egyptologers’ in 1870, the term ‘hierologist’ was sometimes used to distinguish linguists.

¹¹⁵ James Secord, introduction to Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology* (London: Penguin, 1997).

¹¹⁶ W. M. F. Petrie, *Researches in Sinai* (London: John Murray, 1906), 195.

Petrie as public interpreter of Egyptian civilization that was of interest, even to the most intensively educated nineteenth-century readers.

Indeed, the ways in which the role and nature of the excavation report developed between 1840 and 1890 account for many misconceptions about archaeological history. Mid-century precursors to the excavation report proper, of which Austen Henry Layard's *Nineveh and its Remains* is the most famous, were huge travel narratives. They were suffused with local colour and emotional responses to the biblical environs as well as motifs of the construction of a celebrity explorer. At this point the persona of a controversialist adventurer was coveted, thanks to the celebrity of Alexander Kinglake's scandalous and anonymous *Eothen: or traces of travel brought home from the East* (1844); the full title of Layard's work demonstrates its author's immersion in the same tradition as Kinglake: *Nineveh and its Remains, with an Account of a Visit to the Chaldean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or Devil-worshippers; and an Inquiry into the Manners and Arts of the Ancient Assyrians*. By the late 1880s, excavation reports were records of archaeological process, shorn of extraneous or interpretative detail. The bewilderment of the 1880s and 1890s public who subscribed to archaeological organizations expecting to receive the next *Nineveh and its Remains*, but were faced instead with a brief technical prospectus, can be traced easily in archives of correspondence; the disappearance of biblical allusion, in particular, was 'a felt loss . . . reducing the value' of subscriptions.¹¹⁷ This development can be written into a straightforward secularizing narrative, and if 1880s archaeologists had published only excavation reports it would add up to exactly that. However, where *Nineveh and its Remains* was more or less a stand-alone text, Egyptologists after 1880 published narrative and descriptive works to accompany the technical documents of every excavation. Most of Petrie's thousand publications, of which the vast majority are not excavation reports, have never been integrated into the history of Egyptology, and that history begins to look very different with some of them restored. In fact, it might even be suggested that scholarly interest in Petrie's publications has sometimes been almost inversely proportional to their circulation at the time of publication.

¹¹⁷ J. O. Corrie to Amelia Edwards, 17 May 1887: Egypt Exploration Society (EES), box XVI, e.23; see also Corrie to Edwards, 5 May 1887: EES, box XVI, e.22.

Introduction: The Accession of Menes

49

Tracing Egyptological works to their audiences is a central task of a cultural history of the discipline. As this introduction has repeatedly emphasized, many people who mulled over Egypt's place in history did not encounter the civilization directly through Egyptologists, but through the ancient history that was taught in Sunday schools, church-run day schools, and at every level of British education up to the ancient universities. In a particularly striking example of this phenomenon, Flinders Petrie was famously drawn to Egypt through the intertwining of the approach to biblical prophecy encouraged by the Plymouth Brethren, the sect in which he was raised, with the Pyramidology movement that sought divine meaning in the dimensions of the Great Pyramid. But this phenomenon of wider Egyptian awareness was not always quite so quirky.

After 1880 public perceptions of Egypt were increasingly open to the input of archaeology and the Egyptian language, whereas earlier in the century they had frequently bypassed Gardner Wilkinson's groundbreaking *Manners and Customs* in favour of contemporaneous biblically focused works like Robert Wilberforce's *The Five Empires: an outline of ancient history* (1840) which were the kind of material widely awarded as school prizes. Like many of his contemporaries, Wilberforce worked on the principle that the teleological purpose of civilizations since the Fall had been to recover 'the natural perfection which man had from God's image within, and of God's outward presence'.¹¹⁸ Egypt and Assyria were judged according to their success or failure in bringing this end about. Egypt was worth studying because at the time of Joseph it had been chosen by God 'as the preserver of that chosen people through which God's blessing to man was given'.¹¹⁹ Monuments and literature should be deciphered and studied with the aim of understanding why God had made this decision. Even those who did encounter the works of the new Egyptian archaeology firsthand in the 1840s would already have powerful preconceptions of the civilization formed by this didactic backdrop.

When *Sinai and Palestine: in connection with their History* (1856) was published by A. P. Stanley at the height of his immense popularity, it became another favourite school prize, went into twenty-three editions and stayed in print until after the First World War. It forcefully reasserted 'the connexion between sacred history and sacred

¹¹⁸ Robert Wilberforce, *The Five Empires* (London: John Hughes, 1847), 1.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 79.

geography' as the fundamental basis of popular interest in the Near East. Not just the church-going public, but organizations including the Palestine Exploration Fund and Egypt Exploration Fund were immersed in Stanley's identification of enduring records of providence in surviving Near Eastern landscapes.¹²⁰

Education in nineteenth-century Britain, in ancient history as well as every other field, was a system integrated with the church. By Hugh McLeod's reckoning, between 1834 and 1843 only eleven per cent of clergymen were not Oxbridge graduates; even by 1906 this figure had only reached thirty-five per cent.¹²¹ The converse also applied: the majority of those who had undergone an education at one of the established universities pursued careers in the clergy. One simple fact that shouldn't be forgotten when dealing with the history of subjects as contentious as prehistory and Egyptology is that scholarly developments, however important, could take decades to filter through into general education, and until they did each generation was brought up with a strong attachment to more traditional models, and had to break with firmly established ideas afresh, for themselves.

The role of education in shaping views of the Near East is demonstrated in accounts of elementary education like those collected by Jonathan Rose in *The Intellectual Life of the English Working Classes* (2001). Public familiarity with the ancient Bible lands, including Egypt, was extraordinarily extensive and intense. As Rose demonstrates, those in many British towns had little idea of the geography of Britain: the world beyond their local streets was unknown and life was so localized that many could scarcely grasp the concept of the British Empire. But Sunday schools meticulously taught the landscape and history of the Bible: knowledge of the outside world, beyond a single street or home town, was often confined to that teaching.¹²² Michael Home, a Norfolk farmer's son, wrote that the tiny scraps of secular geography and modern history taught in his school were of people

¹²⁰ For a typical account of Stanley's role see the Cambridge Arabist E. H. Palmer's account of the Palestine Exploration Fund's survey of Sinai: *Desert of the Exodus: Journeys on Foot in the Wilderness of the Forty Years' Wanderings* (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1871).

¹²¹ Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850–1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 14.

¹²² Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 341.

and places that ‘might never have existed’; but the places taught in Sunday school ‘were as real as if I had been a participant . . . Elijah and Elisha and Naboth’s vineyard and Mount Carmel were more real to me than the history stories of Europe in our Readers at school’.¹²³ As Stanley put it, ‘the local features of the Holy Land have naturally become the household imagery of Christendom’.¹²⁴

Biblical education could produce a kind of Anglo-Zionism where children saw a historical destiny passed down from the ancient Near East to themselves. When Michael Home was educated, in the 1890s, religious and historical identities were defining each other more powerfully, and more unpredictably, than ever. Other civilizations might be old—India and China for instance—but what R. S. Poole insisted in his evocation of Egyptian cities and Stanley claimed in his narrative of Hebrew history, John Kenrick also asserted in *Ancient Egypt under the Pharaohs*: the world of the pharaohs ‘was the starting point of our Ancient History’; the civilization planted in Egypt ‘still lives and grows in other climes’.¹²⁵ This was why familiarity was consistently as much a part of Egypt’s image as exoticism and orientalised spectacle. Egypt’s unpredictable place in the panoply of degrees between West and East was further demonstrated when, after 1870, Occultists emphasized a breach between two mystical traditions; they constructed an ‘Eastern branch’ that looked to Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu myth, and a ‘Western branch’ with its inspiration incorporating Celtic culture, medieval Christendom and the Book of the Dead as well as a pre-Christian, Egyptian rendering of Hermetic tradition.

Education and religious edification conspired with empire, entertainment and the conventions of learned life to form the worldviews of Egyptologists and create the common ground on which they engaged with their extensive audiences. Flinders Petrie famously excavated in only pink underpants at the Great Pyramid to discourage passers-by from intruding on his work, but the very nature of the debates with which Egyptology intersected meant that it could never operate in isolation. It was woven into a culture and society undergoing disconcertingly rapid change and looking to its past, especially the

¹²³ Michael Home, *Winter Harvest: a Norfolk Boyhood* (London: MacDonald, 1967), 78–9.

¹²⁴ Stanley, *Sinai and Palestine*, xxiii.

¹²⁵ John Kenrick, *Ancient Egypt under the Pharaohs* (London: Redfield, 1852), 3.

biblical past, to steady its careering course. This book hopes to nudge the history of Egyptology, and archaeology more generally, gently in the direction of broad cultural involvement and catholicity of approach, and away, for now, from exclusive focus on the generalized grand narrative or heroic life. It also hopes to encourage scholars of the nineteenth century to integrate Egyptology more fully into their understanding of the period's intellectual life. Its aim is to recover the reactions, alternating between intense excitement and debilitating neurosis, of readers who devoured accounts of the discoveries and innovations that changed the cultural landscape in which archaeologists of the Near East worked. This will involve direct confrontations with multiple historical misconceptions; it means giving the history of Egyptology a good firm shake, and seeing what unexpected treasures then fall out.

1

The Old Kingdom

Ancient Egypt at mid century

‘Who will show us any good? Who disclose to us any *new* old studies? . . . for it must be admitted that but little has yet been ascertained’. *The London Magazine*, 1822

ESCHATOLOGICAL EGYPT

In 1822, citizens of London with an interest in ancient Egypt had something of a hangover. Two decades of heady enthusiasm had been fuelled by the patriotic verve that followed the Battle of the Nile. In this unusually decisive naval encounter in 1798 Nelson had trapped and battered a substantial French fleet in Aboukir Bay, ending Napoleon’s ambitions to control the Mediterranean and enacting one of the most celebrated feats of British naval history. Amidst this enthusiasm some serious scholarly engagement with ancient Egypt took place alongside extensive, politically motivated, acquisition of antiquities.¹ But these Egyptian trends had limited shelf lives. By the early 1820s press opinion had begun to emphasize the repetitive nature of Egyptian writing and the limited progress being made in understanding the civilization.

We now remember 1822 as the year in which Champollion’s ‘Letter to M. Dacier’ announced the great breakthrough in decipherment of hieroglyphs, but this event took up a miniscule proportion of

¹ Holger Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination* (London: Profile, 2010), 205–72.

the year's publishing on Egypt in Britain. Even the writing it did inspire was dismissive: the geographer and arctic enthusiast John Barrow insisted that 'we are not a single iota advanced in understanding the meaning of any one of these sacred characters'; he assured readers of the *Quarterly Review* that Champollion is 'wandering into the mazes of theory... he will lose himself in the inextricable labyrinth'.²

For several years after 1822, articles and letters looked forward to the moment when someone might make the first step in decipherment. A correspondent to the *Gentleman's Magazine's* much-loved column 'Mr Urban' in 1823 expressed his flagging but still 'sanguine' expectations that a development might one day be possible (the Egyptological authority he evoked was Athanasius Kircher's imperious but less than cutting-edge *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, 1652–5).³ According to a notice of the Marquis Spineto's Cambridge lectures of 1829 'Hieroglyphic' works were all mislabelled: 'the veil' had not yet been lifted and even when it was, 'error and confusion' would follow.⁴ Still later, in 1836, Thomas Pettigrew was forced during his unwrapping of a Theban mummy to attempt to assure his wealthy, sceptical audience that Champollion had 'a claim to truth' and translations of hieroglyphic texts were not 'wholly speculative and conjectural'.⁵

Dismissals of Champollion's discoveries have usually been interpreted as nationalistic attempts to sideline the godless Frenchman and open the field for the British polymath Thomas Young. This intellectual re-enactment of the Napoleonic wars has been glorified as the 'race to decipher the hieroglyphs'. But this misrepresents most of this period's writing on the Egyptian script, which was just as dismissive of Young as Champollion. The traveller Robert Richardson wrote of Young's efforts that 'conjecture may dress up a plausible tale, yet still it is but conjecture, and not truth'; he was typical in seeing the real breakthrough (if it ever came) as belonging to some unknown 'future traveller'.⁶

² John Barrow, 'Modern Egypt', *Quarterly Review* (1824), 481–508.

³ M. Y., 'Letter', *Gentleman's Magazine* (1823), 131.

⁴ 'Lectures on Hieroglyphics', *Monthly Review* (1829), 550.

⁵ Thomas Pettigrew, 'Account of the Unrolling of an Egyptian Mummy', *Magazine of Popular Science* (1836), 17.

⁶ Robert Richardson, *Travels along the Mediterranean and parts adjacent in company with the Earl of Belmore* (Edinburgh, Blackwood, 1822), 28.

Richardson's own narrative of Nile travel, published in 1822, came amidst a flurry of similar works on Egypt, significantly more than in any previous year. Contributions 'English, Scotch, French and American' were listed and appraised throughout a rapidly expanding field of monthly and quarterly periodicals.⁷ Like Champollion's 'speculation', this travel literature was rarely seen as a blessing for civilization: a once stimulating trickle of Eastern travelogues had become an un-called-for and unnecessary flood. John Barrow's review of Richardson's narrative for the *Quarterly* expressed regret that 'the long series of ruins and rubbish which strew the banks of the Nile from Alexandria to the Second Cataract . . . mysteries which nobody understands' should be 'described in all the minutiae of dull detail'.⁸ Two or three pencil sketches, Barrow surmised, were all the well-to-do readers of the *Quarterly* would require to take the measure of these crude monuments.

Among this chapter's priorities will be a tour of Egypt's presence in the presses of several British cities in 1822, in order to show that London's jaded indifference was not a national malaise. But the first task must be to establish the most powerful and persistent image of ancient Egypt that Britain has ever known: the perceived biblical imperative to slight and dismiss the achievements of the civilization that brutalized the Old Testament Israelites. This pervasive orthodoxy gave counter-cultural possibilities to all Egyptomania, whether in seventeenth-century Italy or 1920s New York. But its dominance was particularly overwhelming in a British society suffused with Evangelical Revival, anti-revolutionary enthusiasm and apocalyptic speculation. From 1800 to the 1860s this stern orthodox Egypt remained the general backdrop against which other renderings were understood to be elaborations, deviations and protests. From evangelical preachers to their High Church critics, countless sermons made Egypt the target of prophetic vitriol and an exemplar of the destructive potency of holy wrath. Memphis suffered the same notoriety that made travellers hear the groans of damned souls from the drowned city of Sodom in every wave that scoured the Dead Sea's shores.⁹

⁷ Barrow, 'Modern Egypt', *Quarterly*, 481.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ H. G. Cocks, 'The Discovery of Sodom, 1851', *Representations*, 112:1 (2010), 1.

This Egypt can be seen vividly in the irresistible rhetoric of the *wunderkind* of conservative eschatology, E. B. Pusey (Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford from 1828 to 1882). One of the most fervently loved and deeply abhorred of mid-century churchmen, Pusey was ‘prophet and judge’ of ritualism and stern nemesis of the powerful evangelical communion.¹⁰ His reputation was defined by ‘fire and brimstone’ sermons (reported to last beyond an hour and a half) and his insistence that a congregation’s thoughts before sleep rest on ‘the parching flame, the never-dying worm, the everlasting fire, the gnashing of teeth, “the smoke of torment” which “goeth up for ever and ever”’.¹¹

Egypt’s biblical transgressions and crushing punishments held great significance to this enthusiast for ‘Old Testament and oriental studies’. From the 1820s to the 1870s his Egypt was first and foremost that of Ezekiel chapter 30: ‘[12] And I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate, and her cities among the cities that are laid waste . . . and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations . . . [14] And I will bring again the captivity of Egypt . . . [15] It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they may no more rule above the nations’. No sites could be agreed for Sodom or Gomorrah, noted Pusey, but visitors ‘could scarce count the number of ruined cities’ in once glorious Egypt. And here was the crux: pharaoh’s fallen cities were once as lambent as their mirror image, ‘the largest heathen city’ in modern Europe: ‘wealthy, busy, restless, intellectual, degraded London’.¹²

Pusey reminded his readers, students and congregation that ‘the humiliation of Egypt’ was not a *topos* of Ezekiel alone; it ran throughout the prophets and, in fact, ‘three words of Joel’ capture it more completely than the most verbose diatribes: Egypt ‘*shall become desolation*’. In his *magnum opus*, *The Minor Prophets* (1860) Pusey reprised the theme of a lifetime and built this phrase into an elaborate fantasia. Joel did not foretell a momentary catastrophe, but an endless state: there was no ‘passing scourge sweeping over the land’, but a

¹⁰ Tim Larsen, *A People of One Book* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), 11–12.

¹¹ See for instance, volume three of *Plain Sermons by Contributors to the Tracts for the Times* (London: Rivington, 1841) or E. B. Pusey, *What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment?* (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1880).

¹² E. B. Pusey, *Minor Prophets* (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1860), 1:172.

permanent transformation of the land itself which shall ‘*pass over into that state*, it shall become what it had not been’; its lifelessness will become ever starker in contrast to the flourishing of God’s people. Pusey reminded his audience that Joel lived through the ‘most prosperous time that Egypt ever saw’ but that even then God was raising wild hordes—Chaldees, Persians, and Macedonians—‘to be consolidated thereafter into powerful empires’ which, with Rome and ultimately the Ottomans, would lay mighty Egypt irrevocably waste.¹³ The pages that followed contained a giddy catalogue of quotations from travellers, scholars and theologians enumerating the visible effects of Egypt’s divinely ordained degradation. Napoleon’s savants and subsequent travellers are all drawn into discussion of how ‘an universal air of misery is manifest in all which the traveller meets’; ‘exceeding misrule alone’ could not have brought this stupendous civilization to its knees: ‘Egypt could not become barren except by miracle’.¹⁴

This ‘very interesting dissertation’ on the Egyptians was one of the best-received passages of this major work of biblical commentary. The author’s ‘special pains’ in constructing it, reviewers noted, had paid dividends.¹⁵ Pusey’s footnotes demonstrate the extent of the ‘pains’ he took over Egyptological research. Shortly before the work’s publication, Anthony Charles Harris had purchased the famous forty-one-metre text now known as the Great Harris Papyrus. He and his party collected a substantial array of papyri that would remain unpublished until the twentieth century, yet Pusey is able to draw on documents in the possession of a ‘learned daughter of a learned Egyptologist’, Miss Harris, to prove the presence in Egypt of substantial fortifications at the time of the Exodus; he directs his reader (repeatedly) to George Rawlinson’s *Herodotus*, to Hincks in the *Athenaeum* and, when he wishes to compare Egyptian and Assyrian architectural styles, to Layard’s *Nineveh and Babylon*.

Pusey expended enormous effort on demonstrating the degraded condition of modern Egypt, but this orientalist creation was not a straightforwardly dismal other with which to celebrate the advanced civilization of Europe: this was a damning assault on British morality and custom. It was London, not Cairo, that had ‘sins many and grievous . . . a vast reign of violence, murder, blasphemy, theft, uncleanness, covetousness, dishonest dealing, unrighteousness . . . the

¹³ *Ibid.* 215. ¹⁴ *Ibid.* 216.

¹⁵ ‘The Minor Prophets’, *Christian Remembrancer* (January 1862), 173.

breach of every commandment of God'; London was primed to fall to the new Gallic 'Assyrian'.¹⁶

It is not the particularity of Pusey's powerful rhetoric that matters here. Pusey was, in diverse ways, an exceptional figure (and, when not inflamed by pharaohs, even he was not always so draconic). His treatment of Egypt, from the 1820s to 1860, was typical in everything except its intensity. To those who knew their Bible, Egypt was not just the setting of the Exodus but was interleaved through the most splenetic ejaculations of belligerent psalmists and chiliastic prophets. The other Old Testament Egypt, in which Pharaoh becomes the father-in-law of Solomon, and Hoshea allies with the Egyptian monarch, only gradually infiltrated the works of Anglican commentators.

Egypt as Hebrew nemesis was a rhetorical device that appeared in British prose whenever crisis struck. When Carlyle depicts 'that grand universal suicide, named French Revolution, by which [the eighteenth century] terminated its otherwise worthless existence', the one man capable of saving the *ancien regime*, Calonne, is described stretching 'out an Aaron's rod over France; miraculous; and summoning quite unexpected things' to fend off the gathering storm.¹⁷ Yet unlike Aaron's triumph over the magicians of Pharaoh, Calonne's wiles are inadequate against the modern elemental forces of bankruptcy and the mob. Countless examples of this rhetoric of disaster could be recounted. Failed business ventures are swallowed up 'like Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and horsemen'; supporters of the Royal Navy turned repeatedly to the same event to give rhetorical force to pleas for funding (which could guarantee that future invasions would be 'ruthlessly swept back and engulfed like the host of Pharaoh in our protective seas').¹⁸

Artistic renderings of Egypt and Mesopotamia in the first half of the century reinforced these associations: Memphis appeared on the eve of destruction, as destruction occurred, and in its desolate

¹⁶ Pusey, *Minor Prophets*, 1, 172.

¹⁷ Thomas Carlyle, *French Revolution: a History* (New York: Scribner's, 1837), 1:70; the showdown between Aaron and Pharaoh's enchanter was a favourite allusion of Carlyle's as in 'Signs of the Times' (1829): 'it is grievous to think that this noble omnipotence of Sympathy has been so rarely the Aaron's-rod of Truth and of Virtue, and so often the Enchanter's-rod of Wickedness and Folly!'

¹⁸ e.g. 'The Hon. Artillery Company', *The Times* (18 December 1860), 12; 'Ocean Telegraphs', *The Times* (18 February 1861), 12; 'Money Market and City Intelligence', *The Times* (19 June 1862), 9.

aftermath. Pyramids and temples rarely bask under the serene blue skies of later orientalist painting. Instead they are bombarded by swirling storms and fire, engulfed in apocalyptic black flecked with Homeric bronze. The first Royal Academy exhibition of the century included the grandest painting to date by the young J. M. W. Turner. Less assured in scripture than Pusey, Turner's *Fifth Plague of Egypt* in fact depicts the seventh: a gleaming pyramid cowers under the assault of divinely driven hail. 'And Moses', who appears insect-like in the corner of the frame, 'stretched forth his hands toward heaven. And the Lord sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along the ground . . . ' (Exodus 9:23). Two years later, this success was followed up with Turner's first painting as an elected member of the Royal Academy. He chose the tenth and most terrible plague: 'And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the first-born in the land. And Pharaoh rose, he and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead' (Exodus 9:29–30). Equally gloom-stricken but conspicuously less 'Egyptian', this painting ties Turner into the grand historical style of artists from Altdorfer to Poussin, even down to the unexpected anachronism of its buildings.

Turner would remain the master of elemental grandeur, but he was soon comprehensively outdone as conjurer of divine wrath and Old Testament architecture. In this subject matter there is simply no competition for the 'lunatic-master' John Martin, whose ferociously intense panoramas of cosmic rage would inform almost all subsequent images of Memphis, Nineveh and Babylon.¹⁹ His 'stretched and craving conceptions of the glories of the antique world' (in the words of Charles Lamb), and 'reckless accumulation of *false* magnitude' (according to Ruskin) led to repeated snubs from the artistic establishment, but Martin was soon woven into the literary and philosophical fabric of early nineteenth-century Britain.²⁰ Inspired by the imagery of civilizational destruction in Byron's *Sardanapalus* he in turn inspired Keats's *Hyperion* and the apocalyptic fantasies of

¹⁹ The widely used epithet 'lunatic master' might originate from confusion between John Martin and his brother Jonathan (who threatened to shoot the Bishop of Oxford, then claimed to be an instrument of divine wrath while he burnt down York Minster) but the image of a crazed prophet rang true for the painter too.

²⁰ See Christine Alexander, 'The Burning Clime: Charlotte Brontë and John Martin', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 50:3 (December 1995), 285–321.

the Brontës.²¹ Stirred by Martin's prints hanging in her childhood home, Charlotte's 'primeval apocalypics' intrude into *Villette* when, on carnival night, Lucy Snowe wanders into a hallucinatory 'plain sprinkled with coloured meteors... a region, not of trees and shadows, but of strangest architectural wealth—of altar and of temple, or pyramid, obelisk and sphinx'. She sees 'the wonders and the symbols of Egypt' teeming through the park; Martinesque Egypts like the one that fired Charlotte's imagination ('flushed with passion; shaded with grief; kindled with ecstasy') exist only by natural, or miraculous, night.²²

Martin's many biblical canvases include plagues and the destruction of Pharaoh's host, but the Egyptian detail in his work also intrudes in unexpected places. Egyptian architectural forms provided inspiration for reconstructing unknown elements in forgotten (or imaginary) architectural styles. In the later, and best-known, part of his career Martin eschewed earthly cities in favour of the palaces of hell, the plains of heaven and post-apocalyptic devastation, but before this his great success came through the reconstruction of 'lost' Mesopotamian forms. He painted exactly those biblical cities whose buildings would be recovered over the following half-century.

One of the British Museum's most engrossing rooms, the Enlightenment Gallery, houses tiny fragments of glass, collected by travellers like Claudius Rich, which were the waste products of a Neo-Assyrian glass industry: these were mistaken by travellers for blistered stone, super-heated under the action of holy fire and brimstone. Inspired by the cataclysms these globules seemed to evoke, Martin reimagined appropriate 'victims' for a vengeful Old Testament God: composite palaces, temples and cityscapes that blended the extant architecture of Karnak and Edfu with biblical, classical and literary descriptions of the achievements of Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar as well as Solomon and Milton's Satan.

Among Martin's most popular paintings was *Belshazzar's Feast* (1819), the first canvas the Royal Academy was forced to cordon off due to public over-excitement. (It was also one of the inspirational images that hung, in mezzotint, on the Brontës' wall). This presented

²¹ Ibid.; see also Winifred Gérin, *Charlotte Brontë: the Evolution of Genius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

²² Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, H. Rosengarten & M. Smith (eds) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 655.

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Belshazzar in Babylon feasting from the holy silver vessels of the Temple of Jerusalem. The ‘writing on the wall’ that dictates his fate appears, as the prophet Daniel looks sternly on. This was, in Martin’s words, intended to ‘make more noise than any picture ever did before’: the tiny figures are dwarfed by colossal architectural forms stretching to vanishing point; these are, in turn, engulfed in a vast elemental frenzy that reflects the revellers’ torchlight back into the palace’s cauldron-like atmosphere. Martin created an elaborate ‘key’ to accompany this image that details his reliance on Egyptian architecture in the hulking columns and entablature that frame the painting’s foreground. But there is also much of the industrial world in the billowing black cloud, flying sparks and leaping flames of Martin’s canvases in this period: Martin’s vision is defined by the combined influence of overweening Egyptian temples and the equally bombastic edifices of the new heavy industry, in particular the iron foundries of the Black Country and the bridges and sewers of London.²³

The huge mid-century trend for apocalyptic epic poetry made full use of ancient cities benighted by clouds that appear industrial. The imaginary journey described in Nicholas Michell’s *Ruins of Many Lands* approaches Mesopotamia in dazzling sunlight:

But Nature’s aspect changes; dense and dun,
Clouds slowly rise, and veil the mid-day sun;
O’er Mosul’s towers they deepen still their gloom,
Till heaven seems one vast pall, and earth a tomb.
Like arrows tipped with fire, the lightnings fly,
As launched by fiends across the angry sky;
While bursts their howl in yon deep thunder’s roar,
Which rolls from Eastern hills to Tigris’ shore,
Then, like the wail of suffering and dismay,
O’er the far trackless desert dies away.²⁴

The opening of the next stanza encapsulates Michell’s Martinesque vision of these cities:

Meet is the hour they dreary site to see,
City of darkness, vanished Nineveh!²⁵

²³ William Feaver, *Art of John Martin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

²⁴ Nicholas Michell, *Ruins of Many Lands* (London: William Tegg, 1850), 28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Many renderings of Nineveh, Babylon and Memphis, in art and literature, languish in Martin's shadow throughout the mid century. Even though David Roberts' later Egyptian paintings would help establish the 'luminous colouring' of a sunnier Egypt, one of his first great works, *The Departure of the Israelite's out of Egypt* (1829), was characterized by vast, imaginary Martinesque architecture on which long dark shadows were cast from a haze-filled firmament. This was, the *Art Journal* enthused, an 'epic poem . . . on canvas'.²⁶

The best-known fictional Egyptian of this period appeared in *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1837), created by the prickly political gadfly and historian of Athens, Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Like Martin, Bulwer-Lytton benefited from a combination of new printing technologies and expanding literate audiences which made it increasingly easy (and profitable) to subvert established conventions of 'taste'. He expressed his adoration of Martin in no uncertain terms: 'the greatest, the most lofty, the most permanent, the most original genius of his age' and 'a great soul lapped in majestic and unearthly dreams'.²⁷ Through *The Last Days*' Priest of Isis—Arbaces—Bulwer-Lytton was responsible for carrying the Egypt of Martin, Michell and their mentor, Ezekiel, into best-selling fiction.

This malevolent Egyptian priest exerted an influence on British readers that was as potent as the wilful rancour he directed towards the fictional inhabitants of Pompeii. Arbaces' contemporaries in the doomed Roman city see him as a purveyor of solemn mysteries and a descendant of the majestic 'race of Rameses'. As a votary of Isis (a cult more venerable and mystical than those of the Roman deities) Arbaces gains political influence through the oracles he interprets. But he is an embittered fifth-columnist and a vindictive charlatan. While the splendid 'Roman Eagle' looms over the cowering 'serpent of the Nile' he harbours hopes that 'craft can master force' and falsifies his oracles to 'dupe mankind' into pretty fetters.²⁸ The citizens of Pompeii are a 'mushroom herd of robbers' (whatever that might mean) and 'slaves filching the fragments of a feast'; their society is a diminished pastiche of the vast Nilotic original in war, religion and statecraft.²⁹

²⁶ 'David Roberts', *London Review* (3 December 1864), 605; 'British Artists: their style and character: no.xxxvi—David Roberts R. A.', *Art Journal* (1858), 201.

²⁷ Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *England and the English*, (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), 2:211.

²⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), 39–47.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

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The abstemious facade of the priests of Isis—barefoot, vegetarian and reclusive—hides vast orgies and inexhaustible splendour amidst supposedly holy shrines. Arbaces' greatest coup is to manipulate the superstition of the Greeks and Romans so that they unwittingly fund his project to unravel the moral fabric of their civilization:

Plod on, plod on, fools of ambition and of avarice! your petty thirst for fasces and quaestorships, and all the mummery of servile power, provokes my laughter and my scorn. My power can extend wherever man believes. I ride over the souls that the purple veils. Thebes may fall, Egypt be a name; the world itself furnishes the subjects of Arbaces.³⁰

This priest embodies the persistent paradox that the accomplished engineers of the pyramids lacked the spiritual insight to find anything better than dogs for gods; and Arbaces continues the association between Egypt and civilizational destruction. A fictional Egyptian priest in this period can only be a villain, just as he is bound to appear at a city's moment of collapse. Arbaces was a popular sensation, appearing in songs, on the stage, in paintings and multitudinous engravings. As Simon Goldhill has noted, archaeology even uncovered the 'real' skull of this fictional character, which is still displayed in Lytton's family pile, Knebworth House (replete with peeling Victorian labels).³¹

Given this weight of apocalyptic imagery at home it is no surprise that travellers too observed an Egypt that was the biblical enemy. The most orthodox response for visitors to the site of Memphis was to survey its desolation and confirm that the pomp of ancient heathendom had been utterly annihilated by the righteous Hand of God. The inhabitants of its modern neighbour Cairo, arch-traditionalists insisted, had also been 'diminished'. Many mid nineteenth-century travellers claimed to confirm prophecy in this way: they did not see the Egypt that confronted them in the present, but imagined instead a conventional, historical and literary landscape. Alexander Kinglake, when expected to frame biblical sites like these within conventions imposed by literary tradition, differentiated himself from the mushroom herd: 'I am not thus docile'.³²

³⁰ Ibid. 40.

³¹ Simon Goldhill, 'A Writer's Things' (forthcoming).

³² Alexander Kinglake, *Eothen, or, Traces of Travel brought Home from the East* (London: John Murray, 1844), 116; cf. Derek Gregory, 'Performing Cairo: Orientalism

Pyramids and temples stood for futility above all else. Bible-wielding travellers quoted Shelley as they revelled in the idea that the wise words of Moses, leader of a slave revolt, had outlasted the fame of the ostentatious tyrant who made the Hebrews slaves (Memnon, Ozymandias, Sesostris or whichever Greek identity they gave him). Others, including Richard Cobden, stressed that unlike pyramids British engineering was, at least, useful.³³ The travelling author of *Ruins of Ancient Cities* (1840) took pleasure in demonstrating that the civilizational progress embodied in the London to Birmingham railway made it a far superior accomplishment to the bombastic futility of the Great Pyramid.³⁴

Visiting, reporting, and even collecting trophies from sites that had been consigned by prophecy to desolation had an equivocal effect. Finding these cities' perimeters etched into the desert prevented them from becoming pure metaphors; yet, as Babylonian glass-fragments demonstrate, travel added extraordinary immediacy to their salience as allegory: evidence that Babylon was a punished whore, that Nineveh was benighted, that Memphis was the very epitome of desolation was easily found. As Harry Cocks has argued, there was never an easy relationship between travel and the demythologization of landscapes.³⁵ Apocalyptic fantasies and existential fear might not have been majority sentiments even at this moment of heightened insecurities; but those who were gripped by this nauseous angst were much more likely to seek knowledge of preclassical civilizations through travel, art, scholarship and literature than their contemporaries who feared less for their immortal souls.

Even in the 1820s and 1830s a few Britons did succeed in relegating the Egypt of Ezekiel to secondary status and bringing other biblical Egypts to the fore, finding flattering affinities between the prowess of the pharaohs and industrial, imperial modernity. Yet they were always counter-cultural, ineffectually flailing against religious orthodoxy.³⁶ Where Martin allowed industry to shape ancient architecture,

and the City of the Arabian Nights' in Nezar Al-Sayyad, Irene Bierman and Nasser Rabat (eds), *Making Cairo Medieval* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 69–93.

³³ John Morley, *Life of Richard Cobden* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1881), 37–8.

³⁴ Charles Bucke, *Ruins of Ancient Cities* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1840), 435–64.

³⁵ H. G. Cocks, 'The Discovery of Sodom, 1851', *Representations* 112:1 (2010), 1–26.

³⁶ A partial exception to this, coming from an established Anglican source (though hardly an orthodox one), is Edward Upham's extraordinary three-volume novel, *Rameses: an Egyptian Tale; with Historical Notes of the Era of the Pharaohs* (London:

a few nonconformist or radical industrialists did the reverse. These were figures willing to subvert standard conceptions of Egypt and let ‘Mosaic wisdom’ shine through as they forced strange Egyptian impostures into the burgeoning industrial city. Among the most remarkable examples of this juxtaposition of Egypt, industry and moral earnestness is John Marshall’s distinctly Martinesque Temple Works in Leeds. Marshall was a ‘Whig-Radical’ and Unitarian, later MP for York and devotee of the ‘apocalyptic sublime’ in art (he began his collection of Turners at an auction in 1820).³⁷ To construct Temple Works, Marshall drew in other attendees of the Mill Hill Unitarian Chapel with whom he aspired to produce an epitome of ‘the immense flax mills of modern times’.³⁸ Despite its intimidating scale this would be socially progressive in its emphasis on education and its blanket ban on corporal punishment.

In seeking an architectural scheme that could do justice to such expansive ambitions Marshall found inspiration in Bible verses from Proverbs and 1 Kings, which referred to the Egyptians as the manufacturers of the finest flax and linen available to Palestine.³⁹ He commissioned designs based on the Temple of Horus at Edfu that could ‘throw boldness and massiveness’ into ‘one monster room’. Covering two whole acres, the factory floor was said to be ‘the largest room in the world’ and was built open-plan on a single floor ‘for ease of supervision’. More than a thousand workers toiled here between ‘half a hundred pillars’ (looking, surely, suspiciously like enslaved children of Israel). They were spectacularly top-lit by ten-thousand square feet of conical skylights and heated from below by furnaces while sheep grazed the humidity-regulating lawn on the roof above their heads. As Dickens put it, ‘all that mechanical skill can effect is

Upham, 1824); despite his title, Upham’s source material was ‘the comparison of ancient historians with modern travellers’. Even Upham (who helped familiarize British readers with Buddhist beliefs) felt compelled to acknowledge that readers would find a positive reading of Egypt ‘objectionable’.

³⁷ P. G. Hamerton, ‘Turner’, *Portfolio* (1877), 145; John Marshall’s son, John Marshall, became a noted classical scholar publishing a range of works for the Museum of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society including *Observations on Greek Inscriptions* (Leeds: Private Edition, 1879).

³⁸ Charles Dickens, ‘Wallotly Trot’, *Household Words* (1853), 499.

³⁹ Proverbs 7:16, ‘I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved [works], with fine linen of Egypt’; 1 Kings 10:28, Solomon’s list of accumulated treasures includes ‘horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn’.

effected' in order that this Egyptian shell might enclose the most advanced productive edifice in the world.⁴⁰

This enterprise was more than a point of fascination for local industrialists. It drew on Egyptological expertise from Leeds and London, and runs through the correspondence of its designer (Joseph Bonomi) and the translator of its hieroglyphic inscriptions (the pariah of the High Church, William Osburn). By the time the project was finally realized these antiquarians were more than a little perturbed by the industrial world into which they had intruded: 'we are all', wrote Osburn to Bonomi, 'in alarm here with Chartists etc'.⁴¹ The idea of Chartist demonstrators marching past Egyptianized architecture constructed under the auspices of the great new tyranny, capital, has a strange symmetry.

The forms that the careers of Martin, Bulwer-Lytton and Marshall took would have been impossible just a few decades earlier. John Martin tapped into imagery of industry, archaeology and political revolution that only became imaginative realities in his generation; his popularity, given the hostility of critics, relied on the wide circulation of mezzotints made possible by his expertise in new technologies such as steel engraving, and made profitable by new audiences empowered through the slow osmosis of an augmenting national wealth. John Marshall worked on a colossal scale in a trade that had been a cottage industry in his grandfather's generation. His career, from near-poverty to vast riches, and a social mission that involved a founding role in the Leeds Mechanics' Institute, is definitive of the heady industrial and moral mission of this moment. Although the drawn-out, faltering process of industrialization had been underway for decades and its large-scale economic impact was only really felt much later, it was these decades—in which Martin painted his industry-inspired temples and Marshall planned his temple-inspired industry—that saw the new manufacturing recognized as transformative of society and characteristic of the age. Martin generated a new monumental Egypt fitted for this heady moment; Marshall demonstrated that Egypt's example in an advanced and humane industrial society might be more than merely cautionary.

⁴⁰ Dickens, 'Wallotly Trot', *Household Words*, 499.

⁴¹ Osburn to Bonomi, n.d., Add Ms 9389/2/O/3.

EGYPT IN 1822

By stepping back into 1822 it is possible to find the radical ideas that coalesced in Marshall's industrial Egypt beginning to take form, and to locate their political and religious underpinning. Egypt's associations with spectacular, but oppressive megalomania crop up widely in the prose, poetry and painting of this year. But stirrings of fresh new interest, contrasting the metropolitan press's weariness at the ongoing production of derivative Egyptian texts, can be observed in action if we take leave for a moment of the society crowds of London. To start the tour we head past the site of Marshall's future mill and cross the border to the North where, in the vibrant Edinburgh of 1822, leading men of science such as George Combe were drawing Egypt into the heady speculation of nineteenth-century science. Combe, the leading light of one of Edinburgh's flourishing new disciplines, phrenology, published and republished a string of very similar phrenological texts through the 1810s and 1820s. A rare innovation in his *System of Phrenology* (1822) was the addition of ancient Egypt. Having observed skulls of several mummies and casts made from several more he was able to confirm them as 'indicating the elements of a superior character and intelligence: full size, large development before the ear, and broad coronal region'.⁴² He did not, however, enthuse over their organs of 'Constructiveness and Ideality' as he did with the Greeks. Combe's Egyptian 'cradle race' was intellectually superior but morally underdeveloped. This was an Egyptian 'type' that appeared again and again: indeed, Bulwer Lytton was a committed devotee of Combe's emergent discipline and Arbaces himself was shaped by Combe's analyses.

In phrenology, astronomy, geology and palaeontology, Edinburgh would soon produce many more scientific studies that featured ancient Egypt as either an explicative analogy or a source of evidence.⁴³ The sheer age of pyramids and pyloned temples gave them extraordinary interest in a city whose scientific elite were particularly aware

⁴² George Combe, *System of Phrenology* (Edinburgh: John Anderson, 1822), 619–20.

⁴³ e.g. Robert Chambers, in his 'first attempt to integrate the natural sciences into a history of creation' mused on the 'noble art of letters' among the Egyptians as proof of the human mind's universal tendency to generate ideas. Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (London: John Churchill, 1844), 388, 320.

of changing conceptions of time (they were, after all, the nearest learned societies to those great engines of temporal discombobulation, highland faults). This Edinburgh circle was also deeply radical. Phrenology posited a potent ‘alternative view of social change and self-help’; as numerous historians of science have demonstrated, it proposed a new rational social order that could do away with privilege and assign status according to anatomically quantifiable ability.⁴⁴ The power of Egypt to conjure biblical cataclysm and upheavals of the natural order made it a perfect allegory for Edinburgh’s radical thinkers; the extraordinary but uncertain age of pyramids made them sit uneasily alongside the historical civilizations of Greece and Rome which were the recognized stomping-ground of the establishment. Pyramids were claimed instead by cosmogonists. Figures like the Astronomer Royal for Scotland after 1846, Charles Piazzi Smyth, could claim authority over the study of origins through confluences of scientific and theological knowledge.

In 1822 Edinburgh was still two decades away from receiving the railway line that would facilitate its intellectual integration with other British cities, but the presses of a few other towns were nonetheless busy with new Egyptian themes at exactly the same moment. First on the coast road south is Newcastle.⁴⁵ The *Newcastle Magazine* of 1822–3 featured a diverse series of articles and letters on ancient Egypt which included heady celebration of the city’s recently acquired Theban mummy (already a favourite of correspondents to the

⁴⁴ J. Morrell & A. Thackray, *Gentlemen of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 278.

⁴⁵ Dissenters in these northern cities discovered Egypt through different sources than did Anglicans. A favoured dissenting text was the 1730s *Ancient History* by the French Jansenist Charles Rollin; this was issued in an array of 1820s translated editions (4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 15 vol. versions, and a 2 vol. edn for young children; several published by Guthrie’s of Edinburgh). Rollin was praised for ‘clashing with no sect or party among Christians’; his Preface on the ‘Usefulness of Profane History, Especially with Regard to Religion’ preceded a cautionary account of Egypt’s ruins, topography and doomed kings. In Edinburgh, the poet Janet Hamilton, deeply imbued with the Presbyterian spirit, recorded a ‘heavy literary diet as a child’, including Rollin, until at the age of eight she encountered, ‘with joy’, some lighter reading (a copy of *Paradise Lost* left ‘on the loom of an intellectual weaver’). The diary of Adam Mackie, a farmer, records Rollin’s stern lesson: ‘afternoon reading Rollin, wherein instruction may be learned. Indulge not in ease. It enfeebles the body...luxury...should not be indulged. It enervates the whole mind and by imperceptible steps overcomes the whole frame’. The young Carlyle, still close to his Scots Calvinist origins, held Rollin, read in 1821, in such esteem that his future wife was forced grudgingly through 3 vols (of 6) by January 1822.

Magazine's chief competitor the *Tyne Mercury*). The *Magazine's* editors rightly fussed over the 'spirited engraving' that accompanied the first article on their ancient aristocrat: this must be counted amongst the very first engravings of ancient Egyptian material to be printed in such detail and circulated so cheaply. The interest generated by this 'beautiful female' was only increased when a visitor to the Literary and Philosophical Society made off with the richly painted 'footboard' so that the mummy was 'afterwards placed for security in a glass case'.

During eight days, the secretaries attended to shew this curious relic of Egyptian antiquity to the public, when the anxiety to procure tickets of admission from the members exceeded all previous conception. It is computed that ten thousand persons visited the room wherein it was exhibited. It is said that none of the Museums in Paris, London, Edinburgh, or Glasgow, possess a more beautiful or better preserved Mummy.⁴⁶

On 22 October 1822, after writing to metropolitan authorities for advice as to the latest techniques, the Society's members opened and investigated their acquisition. They hoped, by unwrapping, to discover how it could 'be possible that the same people who built the pyramids' and invented geometry 'should worship "beans, vetches, leeks, onions, and even cheese"': the equivocal assessment of Egyptian qualities made by Combe and Bulwer-Lytton is also present here.

Throughout the year this question was the constant theme of Newcastle's engagement with ancient Egypt and the most striking feature of the debate is the neat divide in perspectives between those from different religious backgrounds. The city's leading nonconformists argued that the true nature of Egyptian civilization was embodied in its sophisticated architecture. Their establishment competitors, including John Barnsby, under-curate of St Nicholas', asserted that the 'vulgar fetichism' of dog-worshippers was the defining feature of this concupiscent society. The debate rumbled on in papers read to the Literary and Philosophical Society, and in the *Newcastle Magazine*:

I find in the first number of the *Newcastle Magazine* an ingenious attempt to vindicate the *polished* Egyptians from the charge of

⁴⁶ Eneas Mackenzie, *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Town and Country of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle: Mackenzie & Dent, 1827), I, 474.

embalming dogs, cats, and crocodiles, and even from the charge of the metempsychosis. This is disproving too much – the facts cannot be disputed, if we dare put any faith in history. . . . The truth is, that high civilization is not necessarily incompatible with great mental imbecility and superstition.⁴⁷

Newcastle's nonconformists in 1822 were building on a unique history of engagement with ancient Egypt. In the agricultural crisis of the first decade of the century, the city had acquired its own 'Egypt', a region in the Eastern suburbs where granaries of imported grain echoed 'those erected by Joseph in that ancient country'.⁴⁸ The town's large dissenting community were prodigious in both local pride and publishing on biblical Egypt: John Mitchell, founder of the *Tyne Mercury*, published a *History of Egypt*, while the Methodist minister, John Baillie, accompanied his renowned *Impartial History of Newcastle upon Tyne* with a *History of Egypt*. Eneas Mackenzie was best known as editor of *The History of Northumberland*. He was a radical Baptist 'zealous for the diffusion of knowledge' as well as the reformist secretary of the Northern Political Union. Yet he counted a *History of Egypt* (2 volumes, 1809) as his first great achievement.⁴⁹

The scale of interest in the early 1820s was extraordinary even in comparison to Newcastle's previous output: it combined the arrival of a significant antiquity with a community whose religious differences were large enough to cause controversy, but small enough to be debated rationally in public arenas. Ancient Egypt was an accessible and acceptable theme through which theological disagreement concerning the status of the Old Testament in modern Christianity could be disputed.

Mackenzie's 1820s lectures to the newly formed Newcastle Mechanics Institute typify the dissenting milieu's insistence that the Old Testament was the guidebook to progress, and that writing preclassical history was a radical, progressive project. His biblical lecture on 'The Geography of the Ancients' discussed the points of origin of scriptural ores and minerals. It stood sandwiched between 'The Utility of Machinery in Promoting the Comfort and Happiness of

⁴⁷ For instance, 'The Civilisation of the Egyptians', *Newcastle Magazine*, 1:5 (May 1822), 258.

⁴⁸ Mackenzie, *Descriptive Account*, 185.

⁴⁹ Richard Welford, *Men of Mark Twixt Tyne and Tweed* (London: Walter Scott, 1895), 3:177.

the Working Classes' and 'The Effects of Steam on the Future Destinies of Mankind'. For Mackenzie, ancient Egypt evoked radical and democratic ideals; it had associations with new sciences and technologies that Greece and Rome did not. Egypt was where the chosen people—the liberty-loving children of Israel—had been shown the mechanisms of civilization, taught to construct sophisticated architecture, and set on the path of civilization that would lead inexorably to the steam presses from which the 'spirited engraving' emerged.

There are several remarkable paradoxes at the heart of this non-conformist ancient Egypt. Much of this debate, as Mackenzie's lectures demonstrate, is really about the role of technology in British identity; yet Mackenzie requires an anti-establishment rereading of ancient history in order to valorize manufacture. He questions reliance on Greece and Rome (in withering asides that make the classics the spring from which the river of modern unbelief has poured); yet, unlike many other nonconformists, he still feels the need for a more ancient pagan civilization to give him legitimacy. The self-improvement that is his constant theme is to be achieved not through book learning but through Cartesian experience and action, invention and construction; yet these aspirations are shaped and communicated through research into idealized ancients.⁵⁰ Mackenzie's attempts to rewrite the priorities of the present—economic, political and theological—through the Northern Political Union find their corollary in his attempts to overturn the accepted order of the ancient world: to place Egypt above Greece. Although Newcastle's worthies were not travellers or archaeologists (as most subsequent figures in these pages are), they do provide a necessary reminder that British thinkers who turned to Egypt were rarely straightforwardly representative of established power. They were not usually elite, or educated through conventional channels: even when they hailed from the fringes of the aristocracy they usually pushed agendas that were at odds with established ideologies. Their relationships with state power, religious authority and ideological hierarchies were always conflicted and ancient Egypt was a means of attacking state authority more often than it enforced it.

Bypassing Marshall's Leeds once again, the next stop on our Eastern descent towards the metropolis is the British archaeologist's

⁵⁰ For Descartes on the necessity of knowing the Near East through experience not learning, see book 1 of the *Discourse on Method*.

playground of choice, Colchester. Here, peculiar circumstances produced another distinctive Egypt. At the end of 1821, a ‘massive’ stone sphinx was discovered buried ‘about fifty paces from the London road’ (a little over two feet tall, its dimensions were quickly exaggerated). Monumental sphinxes, it appeared, had once guarded the gates to Roman temples in Britain. This triggered a debate, running in the national press throughout 1822, over the influence of Egypt on European civilization, the relative antiquity of preclassical civilizations and the meaning of Egypt to Colchester’s Roman occupiers. C. W. A. Hay in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* praised the aesthetic value of this sphinx, claiming that despite its ‘blood-thirsty passion’, ‘there is not perhaps any single object of ancient art, that has ever been found in this country, which offers so much interest’. Acknowledging the ‘almost hopeless’ nature of inquiry into its meaning he suggested the sphinx to be a symbol of power, a ‘warning emblem’ and ‘infernal minister of divine wrath’, borrowed by the Egyptians from ‘Chaldaic or Assyrian Sphinxes’.⁵¹ Hay confessed uncertainty as to whether Egyptian religion amounted to ‘a perverse depravation of sacred record’, a less impious ‘corrupted copying’ of scriptural history, or merely a vacant and thoughtless ‘poetic fancy’. He dated this monument—the first representative ‘of this occult character, that has ever been discovered in Britain’—from the reign of Augustus. That emperor (Hay reminded his readers) did not just wear signet rings depicting himself and his illustrious forbear, Alexander the Great, but also carried the image of a sphinx on his finger. The ‘Emperor of the World’, the master of the statesman’s art, displayed the three greatest empires of history as symbols on his conquering fist. The British prince, Cunobelin, had initially been a favourite of Augustus and so had adopted the sphinx as his own emblem as could be seen on his coins. But the statue had been overturned and buried at the moment described by Tacitus when the precinct was ‘destroyed by the natives, irritated with the tyrannous sway of the Romans’.⁵²

Disavowals of Hay’s arguments were quick to appear and their thrust is telling. The *Gentleman’s Magazine* noted in February 1822 that Hay muddled his narrative: ‘History and the Divine Writings’ prove that Egypt was already a kingdom of ‘engravers’ in the age of

⁵¹ C. W. A. Hay, ‘On an Ancient Monument of Sculpture in Stone’, *Quarterly Journal of Science* (1822), 1–17.

⁵² *Ibid.* 14.

Abraham; the Egyptians have absolute priority over the ‘comparatively modern’ and utterly depraved ‘empires of Iran or Babylon’.⁵³ Hay was also accused of misrepresenting this sphinx’s symbolism: the sphinxes beloved by Augustus and Cunobelin were primordial Egyptian forms, ‘expressive of mildness, repose, strength and fecundity’. Chosen by Augustus, ‘that wise and politic prince as an emblem of the secrecy required in public trusts and dispatches’ this sphinx also indicated his possession of ‘the person and treasures of Cleopatra . . . the highest lustre to his triumph’. The Colchester sphinx is not Augustus’ emblem: it is a Theban sphinx. This aberration, described by Hesiod and Sophocles, was expressive only of monstrous ‘cruelty’.⁵⁴ There is no evidence, this commentator argued, that a temple existed on this site at all, never mind a temple with this little sphinx as its gate keeper.⁵⁵ No theory was ventured, however, as to the real reason for the emergence of a Greek sphinx from the grassy verge of an English thoroughfare.

Later, Louisa Costello, writing in *Bentley’s Miscellany*, would pose the question that the *Gentleman’s Magazine* had refused to address:

What brought these Egyptian idols to the coasts of Essex? And how came inscriptions in Arabic over certain doors in the town? Were we overrun once by the children of Pharaoh and the tribes of Africa, or must we be satisfied to believe that the Romans brought to Britain all that startles and amazes the minds of those who, in turning up the ground of their native market-town or peaceful village, come upon frightful “monsters that the world ne’er saw”, and go to bed to dream of horrors hitherto unimagined?⁵⁶

The fact that most commentators chose to underplay Greek elements in this sphinx’s form and provenance is intriguing. Amidst their disagreements we see all sides acknowledge Augustus’ integration of Egyptian motifs into the iconography of Imperial Rome. Egypt is linked with Empire in ways that would come to be associated with

⁵³ ‘Ancient Egyptian Sphinx found at Colchester’, *Gentleman’s Magazine* (February 1822), 107–11.

⁵⁴ The Baconian interpretation of the Oedipal sphinx as allegory for modern science was apparently firmly out of fashion.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Louisa Stuart Costello, ‘Sketches of Legendary Cities and Towns’, *Bentley’s Miscellany* (1845), 62; the quote is from Sarah Fielding’s novel *Adventures of David Simple* (1744) and places emphasis on the corrosive and immoral city confronted by the title character.

so-called ‘philosophical’ constructs of Egyptian history; by the 1840s these would result in histories of Egypt that were comparative in purpose, seeking parallels between the Greeks or Romans in Egypt and the British in their colonies.⁵⁷ In Colchester’s strange discovery the horrors of Ezekiel’s Egypt become domestic, refusing to remain on the territory of the ‘other’: the many dynastic and ethnological links that writers over the centuries have drawn between modern Europe and ancient Egypt are seen spluttering up from the soil of England itself.

In London, just a few miles to Colchester’s south-west, ancient Egypt’s fortunes were setting rather than rising in 1822. The metropolitan public had passed the meridian of its intense post-Napoleonic love affair with all things pharaonic. It was now that Egyptian travel accounts began to meet the chilly responses endured by Richardson. The Egyptian interest that was subsiding had mirrored that of Newcastle and Edinburgh in its intertwining of progress, ancient history and popular spectacle with moral preoccupations that began in the pages of the Bible.

All these forms of interest had coalesced around the towering figure of Giovanni Batista Belzoni. In 1819, when Belzoni returned to London, via his native Padua, from Thebes he was no longer the popular performer he had been on an earlier London visit when his repertoire had included the ability to ‘Cut a Man’s Head off!!! And put it on again!’⁵⁸ Deeply embarrassed at his previous life as an ‘itinerant exhibitor’ he now attempted to secure respectability and prestige as an authority on ancient Egypt. He was extraordinarily successful in elevating his social status, despite a series of misadventures which included a mistaken arrest at the opera and pursuit from a mob who mistook him for Bartolomeo Pergami, the hated servant and illicit lover of Queen Caroline (London’s most controversial celebrity). Charisma, alongside a deep stock of Egyptian adventures, made him ‘the fashionable lion of the day’ and the authority to whom those with an interest in Egypt (including the worthies of Newcastle) turned for information.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Edward Hincks, ‘Egypt and the Bible’, *Dublin University Magazine* (October 1848), 374.

⁵⁸ His first visit began in 1802: an account can be found in Robert Chambers (ed.), *Book of Days* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1832), 2:651–3.

⁵⁹ See Stanley Mayes, *The Great Belzoni* (London: Putnam, 1959).

Belzoni's greatest coup to date had been conveyance of the colossal bust of Ramses II, known as the Younger Memnon, to its place in the British Museum in 1818. By 1821, his efforts had led some British scholars to question the accepted associations of Egypt, especially its reputation for monolithic but barbaric structures: 'he has convinced us that there were in Egypt noble sculptors—not the carvers of misshapen mongrels, but the builders up of a fame as legitimate as that of Phidias or Praxiteles'.⁶⁰ Belzoni briefly seemed capable of dragging Egypt out of prehistory and into the historical realm of the classics. Other commentaries, however, suggest he failed. The *New Monthly Magazine* interpreted the Younger Memnon as confirmation of the 'painful and oppressive effect on the imagination' that any brutish, slave-made image of a tyrannical warlord must make. It was barely possible to maintain composure amidst the 'awe-stricken amazement' instilled by this vast nauseating, expressionless lump.⁶¹ Even amongst Belzoni's staunchest supporters, celebration of Egypt's achievements had less staying-power than the personal celebrity of the Italian showman.

Belzoni's London reputation was soon tied to his ambitious exhibition housed in the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, which opened in the summer of 1820. The Egyptian Hall itself was a product of the Napoleonic surge of interest in Egypt. Inspired by the Temple at Denderah it had been commissioned by William Bullock, designed by Peter Robinson and completed in 1812.⁶² In the unprecedentedly eclectic architectural world of the early nineteenth century its pylons and parallelism were imitated around Britain, including in the Egyptian House at Penzance that still stands. For seven years the Egyptian Hall was home to Bullock's strange 'London Museum'. Aztec and Egyptian remains were displayed as part of the same grand global civilization and Napoleon's carriage from Waterloo was inserted in their midst. The Hall was then briefly dominated by exhibitions of paintings before it began its transformation into the setting of popular entertainment—'England's Home of Mystery'—that hosted the kind

⁶⁰ 'The Civilisation of the Egyptians', *Newcastle Magazine*, 1:5 (May 1822), 258.

⁶¹ 'British Galleries of Art', *New Monthly Magazine* (1824), 567.

⁶² Contrary to received knowledge the foremost inspiration for this building was drawn from travellers such as de Montfaucon, Pococke and Norden; the first plates of the Napoleonic *Description de l'Égypte* only arrived in Britain in 1810, after the Hall's design had been planned.

of displays that had once been Belzoni's trade (e.g. 'American Jack the Frog Man').

Belzoni's new project in 1820 was an ambitious exhibition that included scale models of the major Egyptian temples—Karnak, Philae, and 'Ipsamboul' (Abu Simbel)—as well as the second pyramid, whose entrance he had famously discovered. Its central feature was a reconstruction of one of Egypt's most spectacular tombs, discovered and explored four years earlier. The press response to Belzoni's Piccadilly tomb demonstrates some of the ingrained associations of Egypt. Reviews consistently refuse to attempt detailed description: the sharp vision of reviewers is routinely dimmed by pre-existing expectations of Egyptian 'mystery'. Much like travellers, these reviewers do not describe what is in front of them, but perpetuate preconceived imaginative tropes. The splendour and extent of this 'brute creation of that infancy of time' is considered 'scarcely possible to convey by words'; the impression is assumed to be 'beyond the reach of language' and of 'the most undefinable nature'.⁶³

This phenomenon seems a long way from the pious rhetoric of churchmen like Pusey, but Belzoni's interpreters and audience had no difficulty leaping the gulf between the Egypts of spectacle and scripture. One such interpreter was Britain's leading speculator on the hieroglyphic script, Thomas Young. Belzoni persuaded Young to read copies of the tomb's inscriptions and demonstrate the identity of its royal occupant. Young's misidentification was characteristically confident: this was the tomb of 'Psammis the Powerful', son of the biblical pharaoh Necho. A procession on the wall depicted 'Aethiopian, Persian (or Babylonian), and Hebrew' captives, melancholy victims of 'the triumphs of Necho'. Illustration of the Egyptian belligerence that led to the capture of this unfortunate retinue was drawn from 'Herodotus, the Hebrew Chronicles, and the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah'.⁶⁴ This scriptural connexion was heralded as the factor that made this 'the finest field for investigation which the ancient has ever restored to the modern world'.⁶⁵ All the stereotypes of overweening and authoritarian Egypt were perpetuated.

⁶³ For instance 'Egyptian Antiquities', *Kaleidoscope* (8 May 1821), 358; 'Egyptian Tomb in London', *Literary Gazette* (28 April 1821), 268–9; cf. Elliot Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 181–3.

⁶⁴ 'The Belzoni Sepulchre', *London Magazine* (1825), 609.

⁶⁵ 'Egyptian Tomb in London', *Literary Gazette*, 269.

Responses to Belzoni's tomb fizzed with familiar apocalyptic glee. Much of this came directly from churchmen, but ecstatic responses to the links between the Bible and ancient history were beloved of anti-clerical radicals and even atheists too. Volney's *Ruins of Empires* was translated into English numerous times and hailed by thinkers from Shelley to Thomas Jefferson; it reified Egypt's associations with futile ambition which were soon intensified further in the twin Ozymandias sonnets that Shelley and Horace Smith produced in response to Belzoni's success in moving the Young Memnon. 'Pharaoh' was a figure who raged hopelessly in the void. He was powerful beyond the understanding of ordinary mortals, but hopeless in the face of time and the elements. He might construct breath-taking monuments, but his identity would nonetheless be erased by time.⁶⁶

The tomb's instant involvement in religious controversy drew more activity from 1820s presses than did any other association. By far the most widely circulated work to feature Belzoni's exhibition was the *Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* by Thomas Hartwell Horne, a British Museum librarian and convert from Wesleyan Methodism to the Church of England. This introduction to conservative biblical criticism had first been published in 1818 and sections on Belzoni were added under the heading of 'Credibility of the Scriptures Confirmed' from the fifth edition (1825) onwards.⁶⁷ With a wide transatlantic circulation, this would have been the first coverage of Belzoni's exhibition read by many American readers. Horne found proof in the tomb's now famous procession of the biblical interaction between Egypt and the Hebrews in 2 Chronicles 35: the conquered in this scene 'are obviously Jews', Horne proclaimed, 'and might be taken for the portraits of those, who, at this day, walk the streets of London'. Belzoni's tomb brought not just Egypt but the Old Testament to life in London,

⁶⁶ A softer scriptural response to Belzoni is evident in Smith's follow-up to his Ozymandian sonnet, a poem addressed to a mummy in Belzoni's tomb. Smith asked whether this Egyptian had 'dropp'd a halfpenny in Homer's hat' or held a torch at the dedication of the Temple of Solomon; he suggested that Egyptian funerary practice corroborated Christian theology, finding confirmation that the soul endures after death: 'Why should the worthless tegument endure,/If its undying guest be lost for ever?' This was not the only 'Belzoni' poem in circulation; e.g. 'Doctors, a race licenced to kill,/Compared to thee, thou man of doom,/Are nothing; for thy horrid skill,/Each day brings hundreds to the Tomb'.

⁶⁷ These sections on Belzoni were added the year after Horne joined the British Museum staff.

confusing lines between the museum and the city, the spiritually charged primeval world and the immanent, material present.

Over the following years increasing doubt was cast on the identification of Psammis as the occupant of this tomb, including by Champollion (who suggested Petosiris), and by Samuel Lee, Cambridge Professor of Arabic, who favoured Herodotus' legendary Sesostris, commander of 'the Egyptian conquest of Europe'. From 1822 until after the end of the century, attempts to read both hieroglyphic and cuneiform inscriptions led to a host of similar misidentifications. It is a striking feature of these that the vast majority turn non-biblical pharaohs and texts (whether Seti I or chapter four of the Babylonian Creation Epic) into records of biblical events and characters, from Psammis son of Necho to apocryphal alternative chapters to the Book of Daniel. These misidentifications were not the work of ill-informed biblical apologists, but the best guesses of the most advanced and authoritative scholars. They reveal the sense of biblical expectation attached to any discovery in the Near East and demonstrate the persistent desire amongst British readers to see their most coveted texts materialize in granite, papyrus and baked clay.

By mid 1822 Belzoni was having severe trouble raising funds. He had closed his exhibition and auctioned off many exhibits; his attempt to revive the display in Paris was crippled by the consequent dearth of major pieces. The British Museum still held prestige pieces Belzoni had given them for inspection two years earlier: they proved unwilling to buy them or to return them to their owner. These included the spectacular alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I that Belzoni had envisaged as a major exhibit in the Egyptian Hall. This was the same curatorial disdain that was turned upon Henry Salt and his expansive collection.⁶⁸

But Belzoni's stay in England was not limited to London. His tireless travelling aided the spread of Egyptian interest outside its existing strongholds. He was instrumental in the success of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, when he donated the spectacular seven-ton sarcophagus lid of Ramesses III just months after two Trinity College Fellows, Barnard Hanbury and George Waddington, acquired some of the University's first Egyptian items including the coffin of Nespawasheft. These are still the prestige pieces of an

⁶⁸ Deborah Manley & Peta Ree, *Henry Salt: Artist, Traveller, Diplomat, Egyptologist* (London: Libri, 2001).

Egyptian exhibition that received relatively little (except a bequest from the Prince of Wales) until the 1880s.

Consequently it was in Cambridge, rather than London, that a subscription was raised to fund Belzoni's next exploratory mission. In 1823, apparently dissatisfied with the life of a metropolitan celebrity, he left Britain to follow in the footsteps of the many illustrious explorers whose lives had been claimed *en route* to the legendary city of gold, Timbuktu. He soon became another martyr to the cause, dying of dysentery at Gwato in Benin on 3 December 1823.⁶⁹ Belzoni's widow briefly reopened his exhibition in Leicester Square, but without the presence of her celebrated husband or the draw of his most spectacular discoveries the failure of the venture left her ruined.

JOHN GARDNER WILKINSON

The decade and a half between Belzoni's death and the publication of John Gardner Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs of the ancient Egyptians* (1837) is the least prolific period of Egyptological publishing in nineteenth-century Britain, despite being a key moment in the expansion of the press. These years saw the creation or development of a host of transformative technologies: the steamship, rail, cable telegraphy, the rotary steam-press, lithographed illustrations and the first experiments in photography. Yet publishing on ancient Egypt really was dominated by derivative and iterative Bible commentary, theological exposition and travel narratives. Many travel narratives of this period demonstrate a turn from antiquities towards mercantile interest, natural history and sport (concerns which would expand still further with the advent of the steamship). The crocodile, in particular, gathers increasing attention amidst frequent references to one of British science's great eccentric celebrities, Charles Waterton, whose 'ride on a crocodile's back' seems to have become something of a popular phenomenon after 1826.⁷⁰ Major British political figures

⁶⁹ Richard Burton judged this an inadequate ending to so colourful a narrative: he insisted that robbery and murder, not mere disease, had despatched so redoubtable a traveller.

⁷⁰ See for instance the references back to events of 1826 in 'Tales of a Traveller in Egypt', *Mirror of Literature* (1844), 340.

were also beginning to enter Egypt in search of ‘answers’ to the Eastern ‘question’, but few of them indulged in much veneration of antiquity. Richard Cobden visited the pyramids on his Egyptian tour of 1836 and his democratic, utilitarian principles were instantly roused against the ancients, in

vexation at the enormous sum of ingenious labour which here was wasted. Six millions of tons of stone, all shaped and fitted with skill, are here piled in a useless form. The third of this weight of material and less than a tenth part of the labour sufficed to construct the most useful public work in England – the Plymouth Breakwater.⁷¹

Cobden’s Egyptians were not Eneas Mackenzie’s radicals, they were the oppressive corn-law protectionists of the ancient world.

Some major works of French and German antiquarian scholarship were published in translation during the 1830s. The six-volume *Historical Researches* of the Göttingen scholar A. H. L. Heeren was among the most significant (translated by the Oxford publisher and religious reformer David Alphonso Talboys). This work demonstrates an uncertainty over the status of Egyptology that was pervasive in this decade. Heeren worries over the proper sources for his study and surrounds his rare references to Champollion with caveats and qualifications. The direct testimony of Egyptian monuments is ‘vague and laconic’ so that classical and biblical ‘Tradition’ alone is their proper ‘interpreter’.⁷² Heeren’s running theme is the power of religion as the constitutive factor in all ancient societies: the ‘bond of union’ from which each nation’s distinctive ‘spirit of *nationality*’ derived. Talboys’ introduction transfers Heeren’s philosophical lessons from Hanover to Britain. Reliant on its Navy, England resembles Carthage. Citizens must therefore always be alert to three threats—corrupt government, factious aristocracy and degenerate elements in the populace—if they are to prevent a fall of Carthaginian proportions.

Dense, expensive and prolix, Heeren’s work was not destined for wide circulation. A text with much more apparent potential was the *History of Egyptian Mummies* (1834) by the Charing Cross surgeon, Thomas Pettigrew. Since 1821, when he assisted Belzoni’s unrolling of a mummy at the Egyptian Hall, Pettigrew had harboured desires to

⁷¹ John Morley, *Life of Richard Cobden* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1881), 37–8.

⁷² A. H. L. Heeren, *Historical Researches into the Politics, Intercourse and Trade of the Principle Nations of Antiquity* (2nd revised edn, Oxford: Talboys, 1838), 5:vii–xv.

make an Egyptological showman of himself. Held back both by the general malaise in Egyptian interest and legal strictures on dissection (relaxed by the 1832 Anatomy Act), he finally began to pursue his ambitions in 1833. Claiming scientific purpose, he was able to muster small but eminent audiences for his early performances: princes, members of Parliament and men of science such as Faraday all listened watched, smelled and grimaced as Pettigrew ripped the vestures, then the limbs, from aristocrats of ancient Thebes (to taste ‘the aromatic flavour’ of a queen, as the *Gentleman’s Magazine* put it).⁷³

Strangely, Pettigrew and his *History* (which received substantial numbers of prestigious subscriptions) were almost entirely ignored by nineteenth-century attempts to write the history of interest in Egypt. Pettigrew founded his public persona on ability to read hieroglyphs; he aimed to ‘demonstrate the certainty of hieroglyphic research’ which had not yet (1836) ‘sufficiently established its claim to truth and authenticity and was treated as being almost wholly speculative and conjectural’.⁷⁴ Gardner Wilkinson was in the audience when Pettigrew made this claim, yet the surgeon was never mentioned in the roll-calls of hieroglyphic scholars given by Wilkinson or Gell; when Egyptologists of the 1880s and 1890s looked back to earlier Egyptian interest Pettigrew was rarely referred to. It seems that he was always (and largely unjustly) seen more as a Belzoni-imitator and performer than scholar. Famed for his prickly personality, he also mustered substantial opposition on religious, social and personal grounds. Pettigrew and his naysayers alike were satirized in *The Figaro in London* (edited by Henry Mayhew who penned most of its articles until he founded *Punch* in 1841) under the title ‘Scientific Mummery’:

Some nasty beasts met together on Saturday last to indulge in the disgusting amusement of *unrolling a mummy*. Our old friend Pettigrew, commonly called Mummy Pettigrew, was the principal unroller on this filthy occasion. Pettigrew seems positively to do nothing else but unroll mummies; and, whenever the dirty process is to be gone through, he is pitched upon as naturally as when nightwork is to be done one sends for

⁷³ ‘Manners and Customs . . . Second Series’, *Gentleman’s Magazine* (March 1842), 235.

⁷⁴ Thomas Pettigrew, *A History of Egyptian Mummies* (London: Longman, 1834), 98.

the scavenger. Pettigrew positively glories in the unclean process, and pulls about the encrusted carcase with a fervour of purpose which may be scientific, but which is nonetheless nasty in the extreme. Our private opinion of the proceeding is, that it amounts to a public nuisance.⁷⁵

Moonlighting surgeons retained an air of illegitimacy even after their reputation for grave-robbing was ameliorated by the legal reform of 1832; despite the Archbishop of Canterbury's subscription to Pettigrew's *History*, public opinion was split as to whether whiffs of radicalism and atheism could be detected amidst the vapours of spice and unguent that rose from the ancient dead.

The heyday of unwrapping came once the work of Gardner Wilkinson had revived public interest in 1837. Pettigrew then began to muster audiences over five-hundred strong and moved from small professional venues such as Charing Cross Hospital and the Royal College of Surgeons to the huge public arena of Exeter Hall. At the same time, he gained access to select society settings such as the home of David Roberts. His most famous unwrapping took place in 1844 at the Bristol Institution Theatre, with 'all the boxes filled . . . stage decorations got up with great care [and] Mr Pettigrew and the mummy . . . in the centre, supported on either side by antiquarians tastefully arranged so as to give full effect to this imposing scene'.⁷⁶ After 1837, new 'unwrappers' emerged as rivals, Samuel Birch, newly ensconced in the British Museum, among them. As a historian and philologist rather than surgeon, Birch roused much less suspicion and his first invitation was to unroll the mummy owned by the Bishop of Lichfield.⁷⁷ From Shrewsbury, Norfolk, Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Edinburgh to the London homes of worthies including Lord Londesborough, mummies were devestured of 'spicy cerements' the length and breadth of 1840s Britain. Unrollings were supervised by the full range of those with investment in the images of Egypt: anatomists, artists, astronomers, clergymen, historians, philologists and showmen.

⁷⁵ 'Scientific Mummery', *Figaro in London*, 6 (1837), 58.

⁷⁶ See W. R. Dawson, 'Pettigrew's Demonstrations upon Mummies', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 20 (1934), 170–82.

⁷⁷ When the Prince of Wales returned from his Egyptian tour of 1868, Birch unwrapped twenty mummies he had acquired; in the second half of the century unwrapping was dominated by British Museum staff, Wallis Budge conducting a late performance at UCL in 1889. The phenomenon was now less performative, but the frequently repeated assumption that this made it more 'scientific' is entirely unfounded.

The major event of the 1830s which helped generate this popular and elite enthusiasm was the publication of *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (1837) which became the first work to receive public approval and critical adulation on a scale to rival Belzoni. It achieved a feat that proved beyond every other mid-century writer except Bulwer-Lytton: Wilkinson rendered an Egypt that could appeal to readers more or less irrespective of their religious denomination or degree of prior training in ancient history. In this way he presents a stark contrast with Pettigrew and with the many divisive historians of ancient Egypt of the 1840s and 1850s explored below. The production and reception of Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs* is set out at length in Jason Thompson's *Sir Gardner Wilkinson and his Circle*; there is no need to duplicate Thompson's work, so just one question will be asked here. Given the indifference and hostility faced by others who wrote on Egypt, why was more general approval achievable for Wilkinson?

Wilkinson was among a group of wealthy travellers who took up residence at Thebes in the 1820s. Each of them strove to publish major works on ancient Egypt; all of them besides Wilkinson were forced to make their names in other fields when their Egyptian schemes came to nothing: the ratio of serious interest to publication is almost unbelievably small. Some of these figures blamed their failure on the decline of interest in ancient Egypt since the death of Belzoni, making self-indulgent statements about the collapse of a scholarly field and the extreme unfashionableness of all things Egyptian.⁷⁸ Others, including Lane, completed texts on ancient Egypt but could not raise the funds required to publish them in the lavish illustrated forms they desired. When the response of friends to Lane's coverage of modern Egypt outstripped their enthusiasm for his antiquities he produced a work so engrossed in Egyptian modernity that reviewers 'verily believe[d] the words obelisk, pyramid, tomb, temple never once occur throughout the two volumes—not a mummy even once crosses his path'.⁷⁹ Others met with astonishing bad luck, including burned manuscripts and financial ruin.

⁷⁸ Jason Thompson, *Sir Gardner Wilkinson and his Circle* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1991), 80, 118.

⁷⁹ John Barrow, 'Review', *Quarterly* (July 1837), 165; see also 'Manners and Customs', *Examiner* (15 January 1837), 38.

Educated at Harrow and Oxford, the son of an Anglican clergyman, Wilkinson's background mirrored those of his travelling companions. The son of another Anglican cleric, Edward William Lane, had attended Bath and Hereford grammar schools before moving to Cambridge to enrol in a college and take orders. He abandoned both these aims, relocating to London with the claim that he had already 'satisfied himself that he was able to take high mathematical honours'.⁸⁰ Amongst the others in this circle, James Burton was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge and privileged favourite of Sir John Soane.⁸¹ Robert Hay, who visited Alexandria and read Belzoni while on naval duty, was heir to a grand Berwickshire estate.

These travellers were joined by a considerable range of 'society' Britons, from Joseph Bonomi, to the explorer of the Sudan and Ethiopia, George Hoskins, and the enigmatic draftsman and Mayan pioneer Frederick Catherwood. Owen Browne Carter, architect of many of Winchester's most imposing public buildings, and the Bristol architect Charles Laver were among the lesser lights of this prestigious milieu. This book will feature few figures with the 'elite pedigree' and access to the most socially exclusive seats of education shared by these gentlemen. Nineteenth-century Egyptology frequently provided a scholarly outlet for figures who, whether for reasons of class, gender, religion or other accidents of birth, did not receive the traditional education that was (at least nominally) required to excel in the more established fields of Greek and Roman Classics. In the previous decade Belzoni had far more influence than the aristocratic travellers who visited Egypt, but he attained it by manoeuvring himself into high society with claims to showmanship more than scholarship. Later figures like Flinders Petrie were individuals of extraordinary talent who were never persuaded into conventional educational grooves by the influence of universities or other forms of established authority. Petrie's Plymouth Brethren background and youthful aversion to classical languages were enough to dictate his reliance on alternative routes. Deep, sustained interest in Egyptian monuments amongst Gardner Wilkinson's little band of borderline aristocrats, at this particular moment, is itself unusual.

⁸⁰ Jason Thompson, *Edward William Lane* (London: Haus, 2010), 7–23.

⁸¹ Soane, yet another devotee of the apocalyptic sublime, had purchased Belzoni's alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I after the explorer's death.

Maya Jasanoff has argued that the careers of these figures embody an inverse trajectory to the life of Belzoni. The colossus of Padua had conducted his activities in Egypt in the hope of securing status and acceptance in British high society (he was an ‘outsider’ who coveted ‘inside’ status); Wilkinson, Lane *et al* were born into high society and spent decades attempting to evade its strictures (they were ‘insiders’ seeking ‘outside’ status).⁸² This rings true; *The Examiner* in 1837 made a similar diagnosis: through extended domicile in Egypt ‘the silver fork school’ had lost Lane to his ‘liking for the no-fork-at-all school’.⁸³

On the eve of *Manners and Customs* Wilkinson was not very highly regarded. The Petrarch scholar and Catholic convert, James Browne, commented when reviewing *Manners and Customs* that Wilkinson’s *Materia Hieroglyphica* had been a ‘crude and ill-digested performance, devoid of method or arrangement’ and that Egyptological speculations, ‘regarded as dry, hard, and repulsive, have never found much favour in the eyes of the public’.⁸⁴ The immediate success of *Manners and Customs* was not based on any linguistic prowess ascribed to Wilkinson, and the publication of his work proved an excuse to revive vexations about whether hieroglyphs had been deciphered at all. Browne, claiming that the fame of Thomas Young ‘still shines unrivalled’, noted that

Wilkinson appears to have early become sensible that, in the department of hieroglyphical discovery, he was not destined to effect anything remarkable, or to signalize his name by any new additions to our knowledge.⁸⁵

Wilkinson is portrayed as an accomplished popularizer, a ‘safe guide’ on all topics ‘– hieroglyphics alone excepted –’; on that topic ‘he does not yet understand the subject upon which he dogmatizes with an air of so much self-satisfaction’.⁸⁶ *The Westminster* began its review of Wilkinson’s second series (1841) by complaining that even now no ‘consistent synopsis of the . . . picture language . . . has been laid

⁸² Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire* (London: Vintage, 2006), 298.

⁸³ ‘An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians’, *Examiner*, 1511 (15 January 1837), 38.

⁸⁴ James Browne, ‘Wilkinson—On the Ancient Egyptians’, *Edinburgh Review*, 138 (January 1839), 316.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 337.

before the public'.⁸⁷ Henry Hart Milman, controversial Dean of St Paul's (among the period's most prolific writers on Egyptology through his many anonymous reviews), was less censorious in conceding that 'it is the people, not the language' in which Wilkinson is expert.⁸⁸ But Milman's review in *The Quarterly* still aimed to assure sceptical readers that the value of Wilkinson's work did not depend on linguistic claims for which they might not have much credence:

we should reduce [*Manners and Customs*] not much in compass, and still less in interest, if we were to erase . . . all which depends on the credibility or incredibility of Champollion's interpretation of hieroglyphics.⁸⁹

However, all these reviews were agreed that something was new and deeply impressive about Wilkinson's text. The nature of this novelty can be observed in seconds by any modern reader leafing through Wilkinson's work alongside any early nineteenth-century rival: his success was not textual, but visual. Murray's plush reproduction of Wilkinson's copies of tomb paintings allowed Gardner Wilkinson to conjure ancient Egyptian life more vividly than any previous endeavour. For almost all reviewers, it was the facility with which Wilkinson wielded evidence from paintings, not hieroglyphs, that made his work praiseworthy. As the *Literary Gazette* noted, no review would be complete

without directing attention to the extraordinary and perfectly original nature of the illustrations. No fewer than four hundred and fifty prints are given for this purpose! . . . These, indeed, are great adjuncts to the clear understanding of the history of a people, wonderfully complete and satisfactory . . . whilst their language can only be, if at all, most imperfectly deciphered.⁹⁰

Wilkinson's on-site effort in Thebes, copying paintings, was judged a 'truly astonishing' feat casting honour on 'human industry and intellect'.⁹¹ The biggest single novelty of this work was the detail in which

⁸⁷ E. C., 'Biblical Illustrations from Egyptian Anaglyphs', *Westminster Review* 37.2 (April 1842), 368–9.

⁸⁸ H. H. Milman, 'Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs*', *Quarterly Review*, 63 (January 1839), 122; for Milman's role in theological controversy, see chapter 2 below.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 123.

⁹⁰ 'Wilkinson's Ancient Egyptians', *Literary Gazette*, 1096 (20 January 1839), 39.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

‘numerous and particular illustrated prints’ could conjure the daily life of ancient Egyptians across all ‘castes’—priestly, military, townsman, peasant—the habits of each of which are described in turn in every review.⁹² As *The Athenaeum* noted, *Manners and Customs* was not a traditional history, but a companion piece to existing narratives: it ‘is not only interesting in itself, but tends to elucidate all ancient histories, by explaining allusions to national customs, which would otherwise appear incomprehensible and absurd’.⁹³ ‘Can it be,’ the *Monthly Review* asked,

that at periods coeval with Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, we should now be able to tell what the Egyptians were doing, how they dressed, lived, and thought – and that, too, when the language spoken by such a people is so imperfectly known, that little or no information can thence be derived on which reliance . . . can be placed? . . . We answer – yes; and the[se] volumes are pregnant with . . . proofs of the assertion.⁹⁴

To this reviewer, Wilkinson’s images rendered ancient Egyptian life ‘far more plain and intelligible than our notions of foreign nations contemporary with ourselves’.⁹⁵

The moment when discoveries from the Egyptian language would force their way into public consciousness was still long distant in 1837; but Wilkinson’s work pushed the equally evocative evidence of tomb paintings into a prominent place in British culture. From this date on, British readers would understand Egyptian tombs to be ‘repositories of personal, family and national history’ in ways they had not before. Milman argued that it was only correspondence between texts and paintings that had allowed Egyptian writing to be interpreted at all: in his words, this imagery permitted the ‘restoration to life . . . of the ancient Pharaohs’ which could now be celebrated as

⁹² This was already a well established orientalizing scheme, drawing comparison between ancient Egyptian and modern Hindu social structures; it was the structuring principle of most reviews and had a profound impact on interpretation on Egyptian society for several decades (whether pharaohs were drawn from the sacredotal or military classes was a staple debate in mid-century studies).

⁹³ ‘Manners and Customs’, *Athenaeum*, 533 (13 January 1838), 33.

⁹⁴ ‘Manners and Customs’, *Monthly Review*, 1.3 (March 1838), 314.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* Those who left private records of reading Wilkinson also paid greater attention to images than words; Sarah Harriet Burney, for instance, wrote to Henry Crabbe Robinson on 20 April 1838 to recommend the woodcuts in *Manners and Customs*, enthused at drawings of ‘an Egyptian car, & a wooden pillow hollowed out for the head’, like one she had seen while living in Florence.

‘the most extraordinary event in literary or antiquarian history’.⁹⁶ Reviewers repeatedly make these dramatic claims concerning the wholesale rediscovery of a civilization. Repeatedly, they insist that decipherment and the Egyptian language played negligible roles in the process.

Besides his emphasis on this imagery of daily life, Wilkinson’s other major novelty was to limit discussion of religion—ancient Egyptian, Muslim and Christian—to the barest minimum. The Bible is treated as a key source, and references to scripture therefore abound, but the theological interpretation engaged in by every other writer on ancient Egypt is consistently avoided. This was a crucial factor in the work’s success. In contrast to Wilkinson himself, almost all reviews discuss religion at length: they take full advantage of Wilkinson’s apparent ‘neutrality’ in discussions that are often intensely partisan. *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, for instance, emphasized, in its opening sentence, that the oldest and most faithful records of Egypt ‘must undoubtedly be found in the writings of Moses’ but its stance was acerbically anticlerical: in Egypt Herodotus had only been given access to that most untrustworthy class, ‘the clergy’.⁹⁷ *The Literary Gazette* found the fact that Wilkinson was ‘free from theoretical bias’ a great advantage; his avoidance of ‘theory and airy conjecture’ was celebrated by the *Monthly Review*.⁹⁸ Browne in the *Edinburgh* stressed the virtue of Wilkinson’s practiced neutrality, which allowed him to detoxify the ‘chronological excess’ of earlier scholars without overstating counter-theories of his own or ‘entering into the examination of controverted questions’. His willingness to admit that ‘from Menes to the 18th, or at least to the 16th dynasty, there is great obscurity’ seems to have charmed even the most pugnacious reviewers, most of whom supplied the gap with wild speculations of their own.⁹⁹ The *Athenaeum* praised the monuments of Egypt for illuminating ‘the object and force of the denunciations of

⁹⁶ Milman, ‘Manners’, *Quarterly*, 120.

⁹⁷ ‘Manners and Customs’, *Gentleman’s Magazine* (September 1838), 235.

⁹⁸ ‘Wilkinson’s Ancient Egyptians’, *Literary Gazette*, 39; ‘Manners and Customs’, *Monthly Review*, 313.

⁹⁹ Statements like this often draw topical inferences between quests for the origins of Nile civilization and of the river itself: ‘like the river by which Egypt is watered and fertilized, we may trace [the civilization’s] course through vast tracts of space, but its origin eludes our researches; we may ascend the stream, but it is vain to hope that we shall be able to explore its source’; Browne, ‘Wilkinson’, *Edinburgh*, 319.

the prophets' in ways that even 'the unlearned can appreciate'.¹⁰⁰ Wilkinson's transparent descriptions provided evidence for the interpretation of which 'no preparatory course of study is necessary': unlike hermeneutics, the monuments furnish a line of evidence, so simple and direct, that 'the wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot err therein'.¹⁰¹

The Westminster's deeply learned, but wildly speculative, review similarly embraced 'the opportunity of showing to how remarkable an extent the Egyptian monuments are illustrative of Biblical records'.¹⁰² Its focus on 'mythological analogies' involved explaining how hieroglyphic inscriptions 'express in a more vivid and precise manner the record and prophecy of Moses: there is no difference whatever in the details'; indeed, the reviewer's only apparent interest in Wilkinson (he is mentioned twice in the twenty-six-page comparative review) concerns the extent to which the imagery of his plates can illustrate theories in comparative religion—Nordic, Greek, Persian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Hebrew, Christian.¹⁰³

Yet, despite Milman's grand claims, *Manners and Customs* was not a miracle cure for the Egyptological malaise, largely because it failed to provide the narratives that readers desired. In 1839, two years after Wilkinson's work, the *Monthly Review* asked 'why is it that ancient Egypt does not interest modern readers'? The reviewer's conclusion was telling: 'the Egyptians were not favoured with historians who could . . . fix and hand down to us their traditions'; the result was that 'instead of a rich and poetic fable, they have left us bald reality'.¹⁰⁴ The only solution for those who sought an Egypt that could take 'hold on our imaginations' was still to 'meditate on the history of Abraham, of Jacob, of Joseph, of Moses, of the Israelites'.¹⁰⁵ This was a meditation in which *Manners and Customs* could assist: throughout reviews, Wilkinson's plates are recommended as homiletic aids more often than sources for new views of ancient Egyptian history.

¹⁰⁰ 'Manners and Customs', *Athenaeum*, 33.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² E. C., 'Biblical Illustrations', *Westminster*, 369.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 389–90.

¹⁰⁴ 'Sharpe's Egypt under the Ptolemies', *Monthly Review*, 1 (January 1839), 112.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

DISPLAY

For some years after Gardner Wilkinson, the most prominent forms of British interest were not to be found in archaeological reports, philological scholarship or historical writing but in art, design and display. Having spent more than a decade in Egypt after 1824 Joseph Bonomi produced works on the ancient civilization that were even more widely circulated than those of Wilkinson himself. Bonomi's greatest works were not grand historical studies in prose, but hundreds of plans, engravings and sketches alongside architectural monuments and buildings. He worked on designs for Marshall's Mill, as well as the Egyptian portico of Abney Park Cemetery, Stoke Newington and the Egyptianized springs at Hartwell House in Buckinghamshire. He was not, however, best known as a practising architect, a fact which almost prevented him from receiving his most elevated appointment, the curatorship of the John Soane Museum.

Bonomi came from a prestigious Catholic family. His uncle, Don Carlo Bonomi, was a teacher and theologian in Rome, while his father (also Joseph Bonomi) consorted with cardinals and popes as architectural overseer of St Peter's. Joseph Bonomi the elder was brought to London by the distinguished Scottish architects Robert and James Adam in 1767. There he was taken under the wing of Sir Joshua Reynolds who pressed for his appointment to prestigious Academy positions. In 1796 he had even designed a pyramidal mausoleum at Blickling Hall, Norfolk. His son continued the family immersion in architecture and religion and moved in circles where heady speculation on both was the norm. After adventurous years in Egypt (during which he and a mistress, Fatima, had two children) he returned to London and married Jessie, daughter of John Martin.¹⁰⁶ A serial collaborator, Bonomi's most lasting partnership was with the controversial Unitarian Bible translator and historian of ancient Egypt, Samuel Sharpe. Joseph and Jessie's correspondence reads like a who's who of artistic and historical interest in Egypt: the Alma-Tademas, Edwin Atherstone (author of archaeologically inspired biblical epics), Samuel Birch, John Colenso, George Gliddon, Anthony Harris, Leonard Horner, Karl Lepsius, William Osburn, David Roberts, Charles Piazzi Smyth and even the young Amelia

¹⁰⁶ After Jessie's early death another of Martin's daughters, Isabelle Mary, moved in to keep house.

Edwards and R. S. Poole. In the range of Bonomi's interests and acquaintances and the completeness of his archive's survival, this correspondence provides unrivalled insight into the elusive Egyptological community of the 1840s and 1850s. Indeed, some of Bonomi's correspondents published nothing on Egypt until twenty years later and were not yet members of learned societies; their exchanges with him are sometimes the only surviving evidence of their interest's longevity.

Bonomi was a uniquely important node in Egyptological networks. For the many years he spent in Egypt he was the British Museum's primary vehicle for Egyptological information. One letter of 1842 captures Samuel Birch's lingering desire to travel (despite his disdain for its practicalities). It also illustrates Bonomi's usefulness as a source of scarce information on the politics of archaeology in Egypt, and his role in conveying information from London to Cairo and beyond. Most of all, it indicates the arbitrariness of the 'professional' status conferred on Birch as curator of the British Museum's Egyptian collection.¹⁰⁷ Birch begins by describing his fruitless unwrapping of the Lichfield mummy in Shrewsbury. He continues in his unique style, scattered with unexpected and eccentric metaphors (which led reviewers to lament the fact that a man so learned was so consistently incapable of direct communication):¹⁰⁸

But God is great and I hope to see you soon again telling us tales of the flood and desert and noting down the scraps that time puts in his wallet. I shall never rest however till I see either Egypt or China the two lands most interesting to me . . . pay more attention to Sakkara than Thebes, indeed the Delta generally seems to have been much overlooked . . . Our Egyptian influxes have ceased, has the Pasha formed a Museum of his own? . . . Tell Mr Harris when you see him that the Trustees of the Museum will probably present him with a copy of the papyri.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Birch was hired by the British Museum to catalogue Chinese coins in 1836; by 1841 he was working on Egyptian papyri and was appointed Assistant Keeper in the Department of Antiquities in 1844. When that Department was subdivided in 1861 he was appointed Keeper of Oriental, Medieval and British Antiquities: having never travelled to Egypt he still relied on the informal networks of travellers he had drawn on in the early 1840s.

¹⁰⁸ e.g. 'Ilahun, Kahun, and Gurob', *Saturday Review* (17 October 1891), 452: 'Dr Birch laboured under the serious drawback of knowing every language except his own. He could not communicate his learning and much, if not all of it died with him'.

¹⁰⁹ Birch to Bonomi, 11.9.1844, CUL, Add Ms 9389/2/b/78.

When Birch wished either to convey a message to, or receive information about, travellers in Egypt—whether Lepsius, Wilkinson or Harris—he wrote to Bonomi.

Bonomi toured the temples, tombs and palaces of Egypt, acting as draftsman for Robert Hay and then for Lepsius. He also traversed Mesopotamia, ‘reading the sculptures on the walls together with the Scriptures’, and his most substantial prose publication was on Nineveh and Babylon. By the early 1840s, Egyptian architecture was gaining much more public exposure in Britain, thanks not just to Birch and Bonomi but also to David Roberts who, on visiting Thebes in 1838, found that ‘all that has hitherto been drawn of these extraordinary remains conveys no more idea of them than a country village would of the grandeur of London’ and endeavoured to set this mischief right.¹¹⁰ In the same decade that Roberts’ paintings entered circulation Bonomi attempted a series of commercial ventures which included (with Henry Warren and James Fahey) an ambitious but financially catastrophic *Grand Moving Panorama of the Nile* (Bunsen and Birch visited together on a drab February morning before its collapse).

Bonomi was bailed out by his brother just in time to embark on a still more ambitious, and much more successful, venture: the Egyptian Court of the Sydenham Crystal Palace. He was accompanied in designing this display by Owen Jones, whose *Grammar of Ornament* formally placed Egyptian patterns into the didactic repertoire of British architecture. Their project saw the conflation of Egypt and industry embodied in Marshall’s Mill writ larger still; it wrested authority over Egyptian art from the hands of Hellenophile curators at the British Museum and cast ancient Egypt into explicit comparison with Greece, Rome, Assyria and Moorish Spain. The Egypt these designers generated was profoundly different from that found elsewhere in mid-century society. In stark contrast to Belzoni’s displays it was an exercise in demystification: ‘in Egypt’, Jones proclaimed, ‘little now remains a mystery’.¹¹¹

Egyptian architecture, or rather Egyptian art,—for painting, sculpture, and architecture are so intimately united that they are inseparable,—is

¹¹⁰ Extract from letter dated 24 December 1838, reprinted in ‘Mr Roberts’ Excursion into Egypt’, *Chambers Journal* (April 1839), 88.

¹¹¹ Owen Jones, *Description of the Egyptian Court Erected in the Crystal Palace* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1854), 5.

the parent of every other. Undoubtedly the most ancient, its remains are still the most abundant. The Egyptians built for immortality and obtained it. Whilst obedient to religious laws, which limited the direction of their art, they combined the highest sublimity of conception with the most refined and delicate finish of execution. While they originated, they excelled at the same time all that followed after.¹¹²

The counter-cultural thrust of Jones's statements is remarkable. His *Description of the Egyptian Court* conjured a vision of Egypt that did not 'nauseate' with the barbarous magnitude of the Younger Memnon but exuded 'exquisite beauty', 'grace', and 'refinement'.¹¹³

As contemporaries noted, this was a pragmatic exercise in managing expectations. From the pillars of Karnak to the tomb of Beni Hassan the exhibition's architecture and sculpture was constructed on 'a considerably reduced scale'.¹¹⁴ The sculpture was 'gaily coloured'.¹¹⁵ Any visitor who wandered into this reconstruction 'of patriarchal and scriptural scenes' and expected to 'stumble over the Pyramids, or to grope his way over the sacred ashes of ape and cat into... dark mummy-pits' would be disappointed. 'The great folio of Egypt is, in fact, brought out in duodecimo parts to suit the times'.¹¹⁶

Despite this demystification Jones and Bonomi did weave one thread of mystique. They insisted that the history of Egyptian art was a tale of unbroken decline in which the Ptolemies were un-schooled apprentices at the feet of the master craftsmen who had engineered the pyramids. Jones suggested to readers of his *Description of the Egyptian Court* that even the earliest and most perfect Egyptian temples contained material reclaimed from earlier, unknown, more imposing edifices. Artistic decline was the master-narrative of Egyptian history around which all else fitted.

This created a paradox. Sustaining this narrative meant underplaying the sophistication and significance of New Kingdom achievements, despite the fact that the majority of the exhibit's features (from Karnak to Abu Simbel) dated from the nineteenth dynasty. Remarkably, rather than admit that this late focus was a product of the wealth of impressive New Kingdom monuments, Jones implied that it resulted from the limitations of modern technique: Bonomi as

¹¹² Ibid. 4. ¹¹³ Ibid. 3. ¹¹⁴ Ibid. 4.

¹¹⁵ Hannah Lawrence, 'Fine Arts', *British Quarterly* (1854), 302.

¹¹⁶ 'The Egyptian Court at the Sydenham Palace', *Athenaeum* (1854), 283.

'high priest and chief artist' had been unable 'to attain to the perfection' of earlier periods 'but he is yet far above the Ptolemaic'.

This dismissal of the New Kingdom had the advantage of making the Egypt that oppressed the Israelites a civilization that was already in its decadence, compromised in judgement as well as artistic skills. Yet, in an idiosyncratic replay of Young and Belzoni's appeals to Psammis, Jones and Bonomi could not resist an anachronistic appeal to the twenty-sixth dynasty. Their 'Philae Portico' featured a series of names in cartouches. These were not intended to have any 'authentic' purpose, but simply to conjure the associations that would gratify visitors' expectations. They included Cleopatra and Caesarion, but also Necho, the biblical father of the pharaoh who had been shoe-horned into the tomb at the Egyptian Hall. Bonomi's historical note reminded visitors of the battle of Megiddo where the vast armies of Egypt, after slaying Josiah, King of Judah, clashed with the might of Assyria.

This attempt to conjure biblical grandeur was not enough for those who saw in Jones's fresh paint and cheerful colours an affront to Egypt's 'solemn mysterious feeling' and 'dim religious light'.¹¹⁷ The fame of Egyptian sculpture, Hannah Lawrence argued in the *British Quarterly*, rested on its perfect adaptation to the plains of Egypt. The entire absence of artistic value in Egyptian art (a 'recognised fact') was made up for by the silent grandeur of 'self-sufficing power, the repose of deep thought, of far seeing wisdom' that was evident in the sculpted faces of kings 'in whose minds still dwelt the dim traditions of Eden'.¹¹⁸ Close-up views of miniature gods and *ersatz* sphinxes instilled no such sense of awe.

This display might finally have prodded the British to ask a question they were astonishingly reluctant to address: what, beyond awesome scale and deserved ruin, might be the salient characteristics of Egyptian art and architecture? Visitors wandered through the Egyptian Court's weird composite of disparate temple complexes and juxtaposed it with the marginally less eccentric syntheses of structures from Nineveh, Athens, Rome and the Alhambra: they mused on narratives of history and the contrasting characteristics of these civilizations as they did so. Yet the responses that survive were bemused more often than enlightened. Confused visitors, unable to

¹¹⁷ Lawrence, 'Fine Arts', *British Quarterly* (1854), 302.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

settle on an interpretation of Egypt, complained that the ‘patterns’ of history set down in the guidebook were nowhere made evident in the displays themselves. Within a year a replacement guide had been commissioned, in which Gardner Wilkinson replaced Jones and Samuel Birch replaced Sharpe. This new guide removed the narrative of decline and put in its place Gardner Wilkinson’s favoured story of stolid, unbroken stasis from the earliest period to the arrival of the Western ‘younger races’. The two narratives of Egyptian history presented in these rival handbooks would coexist and compete throughout the rest of the century. Neither allowed for development: this had two opposing consequences. One of these is frequently picked up on as a feature of colonialist Egyptology: ancient Egypt was not to be granted a productive, progressive history; yet the other consequence was equally important: ancient Egypt was not tainted by a primeval primitivist stain. Its beginnings were grand and godly, however unwholesome its long withdrawing roar might seem.

UNORTHODOX EGYPTOLOGY

As the century progressed, the reputations of figures like Gardner Wilkinson, Burckhardt and Belzoni were chipped away at thanks, in part, to changing moral conventions. Insincere acting-out of religious roles was subject to particular criticism. According to one traveller writing in *Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal* in 1850, ‘to make a semblance of joining in the divine service of Moslems for literary purposes is what no right-thinking man would descend to now-a-days, however it might have been considered in the time of Burckhardt’.¹¹⁹ Even in the 1840s Wilkinson himself was sometimes dismissed as a feckless dandy whose ‘only thought is where to buy his kid gloves’.¹²⁰ When later British excavators turned to Egyptian archaeology in earnest, classic ‘anxiety of influence’ symptoms saw them nonchalantly dismiss the achievements of the 1830s. Gardner Wilkinson was the only figure from this era worth mention, but as Flinders Petrie put it in 1901,

¹¹⁹ ‘The University of Cairo’, *Chambers’s Journal* (25 May 1850), 330.

¹²⁰ P. W. Clayden, *Samuel Sharpe: Egyptologist and Translator of the Bible* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883), 65.

throughout the greater part of the century the archaeology of Egypt lay untouched . . . even Gardner Wilkinson's fine view of the civilisation depended largely on Greek authors, and had no perspective of history in tracing changes and development.¹²¹

During the 1840s and 1850s, ancient Egypt became increasingly divisive, particularly through renewed debate over chronologies. These were decades of huge social and intellectual change: G. M. Young's classic study of the Victorian period insisted that the shift from the end of Chartism in 1848 to the opening of the Crystal Palace in 1851 was a transition between two worlds. Before 1848 radicalism and fear of radicalism had defined the 'national mood' until after the great 'storm which swept away half the governments of Europe passed harmlessly over the islands'.¹²² There followed the decade later characterized as the 'Age of Equipoise'. 'The Great Exhibition', Young wrote, 'was the pageant of domestic peace. Not for sixty years had the throne appeared so solidly based on the national goodwill as in that summer of hope and pride and reconciliation. After all the alarms and agitations of thirty years the State had swung back to its natural centre'.¹²³ This picture has not survived completely intact and Martin Hewitt has recently given a particularly powerful account of its failings. The disjunction now appears much less stark, yet its outline does remain compelling and is evident in the work of Egyptologists.

The climate of fear that only diminished at the end of the 1840s can be seen operating amongst the Egyptologists in Osburn's 'alarm . . . over the Chartists etc', but also in the heightened international tension that led to exceptional suspicion of Islam, Russia, and the Ottomans. Islam, in particular, received substantial attention in this decade, which began with Carlyle's lecture-cum-essay on Mohammad, 'The Hero as Prophet' in which Mohammad became an extraordinary Hegelian reformer who turned wandering tribes into a mighty productive nation by force of personality alone. The tension evident in the scandalized response to Carlyle was raised by machinations

¹²¹ W. M. F. Petrie, 'Archaeology' in *Progress of the Century* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1901), 80.

¹²² G. M. Young, *Portrait of an Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 81; Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 628–38.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

over the Anglo-Prussian Bishopric in Jerusalem (founded 1841) and long disputes over the political implications of attempting to convert the Muslim population of Palestine. The Nestorian massacres of 1843 and Canning's campaigns against the death penalty for apostasy in Ottoman territories raised suspicion to fever pitch. This is rarely explicit in published Egyptological texts, but runs through the 1840s correspondence of enthusiasts for the ancient Near East. In no other decade did they express political views more candidly or in more apocalyptic, anti-Islamic terms. Hearing of new French discoveries in Mesopotamia in 1844 Joseph Bonomi wrote to Samuel Birch expressing hope that these might 'stimulate our government to make researches at Babylon in which question our Indian influence might be brought to bear. However it will be difficult to do very much till all these countries are under European government which will I hope at no distant period be the case for it is impossible to patch up the old system much longer'.¹²⁴ Birch was usually reticent on politics and religion, yet he penned a reply to Bonomi that is typical of this arch-orientalist moment:

I agree with you as to the shadowed fate of the Ottoman Empire – the time of the false prophet as the Revelations call Mahomed has come and his Empire is going to the bottomless pit. I think that if the European powers instead of fighting were to sit down and share out the Ottoman Empire thus – the Bosphorus, Austria and Russia; France, Maroc and Algeria; England Egypt; Prussia Syria – the affair might be arranged without a shot fired in Europe, and a vast saving of blood and treasure, but as my trade is not politics I leave all this to those who consider themselves better judges than I am of foreign politics'.¹²⁵

This biblical anti-Islam is *de rigueur* in the 1840s and quickly loses its urgent intensity, if not its general thrust, afterwards; this was the moment when George Eliot declared society 'chemically critical' and ready to implode.¹²⁶ Catholicism, dissent, Islam, Jews, Chartists, Corn-Law rioters: in these years of crisis all possessed an apocalyptic mien. Even the choice of Bible verses addressed by travellers and topographers were shaped by these fears, as demonstrated in Harry

¹²⁴ Bonomi to Birch, 8.9.1844, CUL, Add Ms 9389/2/b/77.

¹²⁵ Birch to Bonomi, 11.9.1844, CUL, Add Ms 9389/2/b/78.

¹²⁶ For discussion of Eliot's early apocalypics see Mary Wilson Carpenter, *George Eliot and the Landscape of Time* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 5.

Cocks's and Astrid Swenson's recent studies of 'the 1840s Sodom Mania'.¹²⁷ In the new, more positive, domestic environment of the 1850s, even the Crimean War didn't generate quite the angst among antiquarians that is exemplified by Birch's conflation of the Last Days and the Eastern Question.

Yet the 1850s wasn't all Arnoldian sweetness and light. These were the decades in which the most divisive questions raised by geology were substantively fought out: neither international affairs nor the intellectual world settled into complacency quite as easily as domestic politics. The decades after 1850 saw a sequence of powerful intellectual developments: during the 1850s, the earth's history and humanity's relationship to time were significantly shifted, culminating in the geological confabulations of 1859 and *On the Origin of Species*.¹²⁸ During the 1860s, theologians gradually began to accommodate the discoveries of the previous decade, often in searching texts that display none of the knee-jerk conservatism that received opinion leads us to expect.¹²⁹ Then, in the 1870s, that conservatism did begin to proliferate: a new Egyptology played a part in the more general public backlash against scientific and theological latitude.

Perhaps the most influential figure on British writing on ancient Egypt from the 1840s to the 1860s was Baron Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen. In that most resonant of years, 1859, William Smith, editor of the famous Bible Dictionary, penned a retrospect of recent Egyptology. He told readers of the Tory *Quarterly Review* that 'Egyptologists' could not be trusted and chose Bunsen's *Egypt's Place in Universal History* as chief target for his angry barbs. Bunsen's text was a vast, unwieldy and radical project begun in the 1840s; Birch, who 'breakfasted' regularly with the Baron, called it 'the most critical work yet published on the subject of Egyptian history'.¹³⁰ Yet Smith argued that Bunsen was hopelessly naive because his claim that the Bible could not be trusted as a source for chronology did not prevent him putting uncritical faith in other ancient authors. Smith noted that a

¹²⁷ H. G. Cocks, 'The Discovery of Sodom, 1851', *Representations* 112:1 (2010), 1.

¹²⁸ A. Bowdoin Van Riper, *Men among the Mammoths* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993), 117–43.

¹²⁹ Peter Bowler, *Evolution: the History of an Idea* (3rd edn, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 177–216.

¹³⁰ Add Ms 9368; this phrase referred to both Bunsen's text and Lepsius' contemporaneous work.

‘kind of halo’ rests on ancient history that until the present day had made it

almost as presumptuous to question the tales of Livy as the statements of the Bible. It was only timidly and gradually that critics ventured to apply to ancient history the laws respecting the value of evidence, and to examine the grounds upon which the ancients themselves believed in the stories which they related.¹³¹

Egyptologists like Bunsen, Smith argued, had not yet learnt to transcend this outdated credulity. *Egypt’s Place* and its reception were ‘a striking proof of the laxity which still prevails in forming a judgement of the history of antiquity’.¹³² Even Bunsen’s detractors were, Smith claimed, unaware of the paucity of evidence behind his model of Egyptian history:

startled by the antiquity which he assigns to the Egyptian monarchy, and by the remote period in which he places the first colonisation of the valley of the Nile, they refuse, without any further investigation, to credit a narrative which appears to contradict the Biblical account of the creation and dispersion of man. On the other hand, those who find a difficulty in crediting the plainest historical statements of Scripture, hail with delight a theory which carries back the authentic history of Egypt to a period before the Deluge.¹³³

Bunsen’s work had been judged according to one factor alone: ‘the theological dispensation of its critics’.¹³⁴ Of course, Smith claimed that his review was the first to respond to *Egypt’s Place* in a manner uncompromised by religious enthusiasm, just as almost all commentators on mid-century Egyptology accused their opponents and rivals of being blinded to Egyptian history by religious error. Some saw heresy in those who refused to support dynamic new revisions of biblical interpretation; others found blasphemy in challenges to traditional readings of the Old Testament. Figures on every side presented their rivals as materialists and rabid opponents of the Christian faith, yet throughout the century there was only an extraordinarily tiny minority among British writers on Egyptian history whose work was not produced in explicit support of one form or another of Christianity, Judaism or later, occultism. Mid-century Britain was shocked by

¹³¹ William Smith, ‘Bunsen’s Egypt and the Chronology of the Bible’, *Quarterly Review*, 105, (1859), 382.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

Bunsen's work because his deeply earnest biblical scholarship was at odds with theirs, not because he lacked genuine reverence. Biblical events—the building of the Tower of Babel, for instance—remained unimpeachable focal points in Bunsen's 'science of languages' even when he refused to conform to received opinion as to their dates.

Bunsen argued that accurate chronology could, at a stretch, be traced back to the age of Solomon: beyond that the monuments of Egypt were a unique source of the chronological details that the Bible could not provide. The widespread delusion that a chronology of the early world existed was 'the melancholy legacy of the 17th and 18th centuries; a compound of intentional deceit and utter misconception of the principles of historical research'.¹³⁵ Bunsen's aim was to construct a history of language: 'to discover the law by which new languages are formed out of a declining one'.¹³⁶ Tracing the application of such a law back into prehistory would determine the timescale required for all the languages of the world to be reconciled with their single source. This one point of origin was 'a fact as much beyond the possibility of mistake, as is their early separation'.¹³⁷ Origins were not, however, to be found in Egypt, which was a mere bridge between the primeval and historical orders. Humanity had originated in China, then begun to disperse around 15,000 BC, before the Flood around four millennia later:

The religion of Egypt is merely the mummy of the original religion of Central Asia. The mythology of the Egyptians is the deposit of the oldest mythological belief of mankind, which . . . was petrified in the valley of the Nile by the influence of an African sky, and by the overpowering force of solar symbolism.¹³⁸

Bunsen's theories were a major step in the contested development of an ancient Egypt 'anterior to chronology, and connected with the primeval ages of the world'.¹³⁹ He made Egypt a crucial source of evidence for scholars whose method combined 'historical faith' (a metaphysical capability which extrapolated forwards from revealed divine origins) and 'historical science' (an intellectual project which progressed backwards from the known facts of more recent events

¹³⁵ C. C. J. von Bunsen, *Egypt's Place in Universal History* trans. Charles Cottrell (London: Longman, 1848), I, viii.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* ix.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* IV, 27.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* I, xvi.

and languages).¹⁴⁰ He saw the decipherment of hieroglyphs as the first step in a revolution in biblical interpretation because it suggested that it was possible to restore 'the genealogy of mankind, through the medium of language'.¹⁴¹ Just as Bunsen did not privilege Egypt as a source, he did not assign the civilization much importance as a historical agent. He explicitly rejected the impious impulse that led seventeenth-century divines like John Spencer 'to look for an Egyptian origin in the religious institutions and symbols of the Jews': every argument adduced in support of this idea 'is a fallacy'.¹⁴²

Bunsen's work gained its greatest notoriety in the year of his death, thanks to *Essays and Reviews* (1860) and the controversy it created. This text was a major step in the introduction of German rationalist theology to Britain precisely because six of its seven contributors were leading churchmen (they were nonetheless, quickly labelled by conservatives the 'seven against Christ'). The work contained six essays and one review, the lone 'reviewer' being Rowland Williams; his chapter was entitled 'Bunsen's Biblical Researches'. Exposition and advocacy of Bunsen's historical claims landed Williams in the dock on a charge of heresy (condemned by the Court of Arches, he was then exonerated by the Lord Chancellor). In the press coverage that followed, the Baron's name and ideas were the stuff of popular gossip.

During the 1850s and 1860s, Bunsen and Mariette's analyses of ancient Egypt towered over British scholarship to the extent that the most important work by the most able British Egyptologist of these decades, Samuel Birch, was a mere appendage to his translation of Bunsen. These figures were impossible to ignore, but equally impossible to reconcile either with each other or with the most traditional forms of British belief. E. B. Pusey had been a committed opponent of Bunsen's projects since the Baron brokered the Anglo-Prussian Bish-
opric at Jerusalem in 1841. It might be assumed that 'rationalist' was the dirtiest word in the Oxford cleric's lexicon, yet he saw *Egypt's Place* as proof that Bunsen was not just 'a rationalist' but had 'very considerable leanings to something worse'. From Pusey to Charles Piazzi Smyth the self-appointed guardians of morality regretted the worrying divergence from biblical narratives among 'intellectualists . . . Egyptological and rationalistic'.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 159–66.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. viii.

¹⁴² Ibid. 231ff.

¹⁴³ Charles Piazzi Smyth, *Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid* (London: Wm Isbister, 1874), x.

Other respected churchmen had a great deal to lose merely from accepting Champollion's system of decipherment. The stern philologist memorialized in the south-west transept of Canterbury Cathedral, Charles Forster, was author of *The One Primeval Language* (3 volumes, 1852). In this work, he attempted to prove that the hieroglyphic script was a vehicle of the Hebrew, not ancient Egyptian language. Forster claimed to be sole possessor of real answers to the riddles of the Rosetta Stone and issued challenges to British Museum 'Egyptologers' inviting them to public debate over the merits of their respective systems. Birch's entertaining victory came when he composed a hieroglyphic paean to 'our Sovereign Lady Queen Victoria' which Forster confidently identified as a biblical inscription: a pronouncement of Thothmes III whose grandson drowned in the Red Sea before the eyes of Moses.¹⁴⁴ Diverse religious speculations were threatened by the linguistic project that Champollion set in motion and that Bunsen now seemed to wield against history and tradition. Because the public were increasingly accepting the idea that the hieroglyphs had been deciphered, but still knew so little about the results, Egyptology was more malleable to diverse theological ends, and thus more threatening, than at any other point in British history.

The perceived teutonic 'tendency towards irreverence' was invoked as a convenient means for explaining away Bunsen's controversial opinions.¹⁴⁵ The 'sober-minded and slow-going people of England', John Kitto claimed, always braced themselves for 'the latest phase of theological monstrosity' if ever they turned their attention to German scholarship.¹⁴⁶ But this could only indirectly be blamed for the equally unorthodox trajectory of mid-century Egyptology in Britain. The most active Egyptological organization of the era, the Syro-Egyptian Society, was a hotbed of diverse forms of rational dissent, but the public image of Egyptology was now closely associated with one of the most mistrusted sects of all: Unitarianism. Two of the three best-selling historians of ancient Egypt—Samuel Sharpe and John Kenrick—were amongst the denomination's leading lights; the most searching and historically engaged travelogue of the period was written by another author steeped in Unitarian culture, Harriet Martineau.

¹⁴⁴ B. W. Savile, 'Israel in Egypt', *Journal of Sacred Literature* (1864), 1.

¹⁴⁵ 'Foreign Intelligence', *Journal of Sacred Literature* (1853), 475.

¹⁴⁶ 'Foreign Intelligence', *Journal of Sacred Literature* (July 1855), 475–97.

The Unitarian movement, a branch of rational dissent that broke away from Presbyterian congregations in the eighteenth century, had an intellectual presence far greater than its numbers would suggest (membership was measured in the hundreds throughout this period).¹⁴⁷ Its public image blended profound religious earnestness with frequent disdain for ‘popular theology’ and unusual openness to heterodox opinion and radical theology (including the anti-Trinitarian ideas that explain its name). It was a tenet of the order that Unitarianism could only exert influence over those who were permitted membership: no strict requirements in relation to belief or dogma should be demanded as a prerequisite for entry. Rational interpretation of scripture was permitted, leading the sect to nurture some of the most innovative theological ideas of the century.

The permissive nature of Unitarianism allowed innovations to take very different forms. Individuals could pursue the historical criticism of scripture to very different degrees, and in very different directions, without endangering their Unitarian identity. It is therefore difficult to generalize Unitarian beliefs beyond the principle that most Unitarians considered the Bible to be a set of texts containing divine inspiration (often the only text to do so) but also containing fallible human interpolation. This could result in an impulse to dismiss individual Bible verses as later additions, to challenge the canonical status of books like the Epistle to the Hebrews, or more radically still, to write off the whole Old Testament.

A Unitarian claim that might appear to diminish the importance of Christ—that Jesus was human, born at the moment of incarnation, hence without a previous existence—in fact served to sever New and Old Testaments more fully than ever before. It made Genesis, in particular, an expression of the unfulfilled Hebrew quest for knowledge of the divine. For advocates of this belief, Hebrew opinions ‘respecting cosmogony and primeval history’ need not be paid much heed by an age that had developed advanced geological and historical

¹⁴⁷ On Unitarianism in context see David Young, *F. D. Maurice and Unitarianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); John Seed, ‘Theologies of power: Unitarianism and the social relations of religious discourse 1800–50’ in R. J. Morris (ed.), *Class, power and social structure* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986); Kathryn Gleadle, *The early feminists: radical Unitarians and the emergence of the women’s rights movement 1831–1851* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995); Michael Ledger-Lomas, ‘Unitarians and the dilemma of liberal Protestantism in Victorian Britain: the Free Christian Union (1867–70)’, *Historical Research*, 83 (2010), 486–505.

thought. Ancient belief and ‘mythology’ were ripe for historical, anthropological and critical analysis.

Deeply religiose and often intensely committed to those parts of the Bible they did accept, many Unitarians were open to critical approaches to the Pentateuch that they rejected for the Gospels. Few embraced the sceptical rationalism associated with names like Strauss, but their adoption of ‘constructive’ critical traditions drawn from Göttingen scholars like Michaelis, Eichhorn and Ewald was still rationalistic enough to scandalize some British audiences. It is fair to follow John Rogerson’s assessment that British engagement with unpopular German scholarship was ‘at its deepest and keenest in Unitarian circles’.¹⁴⁸

The preacher John Kenrick, author of *Ancient Egypt under the Pharaohs*, described by *The Times* as ‘indisputably the greatest non-conformist of our day’, had studied at Göttingen with some of the most resonant names in higher criticism. He had a long, volatile friendship with Bunsen that began in stormy fashion after the Baron published a controversial article equating Unitarianism with Deism. But Kenrick always remained a vocal advocate of Bunsen’s approach to ancient chronology. He drolly refused to detach the name of ‘the Chevalier Bunsen’ from the letters that followed it (‘D.D., D.C.S., D.Ph.’) in emphasis of Bunsen’s subversion of Trinitarian traditions: ‘we recommend this triple doctorate, in which “there are not three Doctors, but one Doctor,” to the advocates of the Trinity, as a substitute for some of their worn-out illustrations’.¹⁴⁹

Kenrick used ancient Egypt as an anthropological, philological and historical resource to demonstrate that the first eleven chapters of Genesis were the mythical records of a primitive people whose ideas should not be expected to have any concord with the discoveries of modern scholarship. He argued in his chaotic *Essays on Primaeval History* (1846) that the origins of humanity could not be found within the traditional historical period, and that a vast expansion of human history was required. Egyptian history became the rational scientific control against which experiments in reconstructing the corrupted history of the Hebrews might be tested.

¹⁴⁸ John Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth-Century: England and Germany* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 158.

¹⁴⁹ John Kenrick, ‘Bunsen’s Philosophy of History’, *Christian Reformer*, 11 (1855), 530.

Perhaps because of its distance from his theology, Kenrick's *Egypt of Herodotus* was his most widely and positively reviewed contribution to scholarship on Egypt. Yet even here Kenrick proved unable to resist anti-Trinitarian renderings of ancient myth. The Cabiri (mythic sons of the Olympian blacksmith Hephaestus) had been argued by classical scholars to demonstrate a Samothracian memory of the Holy Trinity; Kenrick presented them as mere 'pigmy and deformed idols'.¹⁵⁰ The influence of German critical scholarship was brought to bear in his blunt dismissal of heroic Greece whose kings and warriors, he insisted, were the inventions of later Hellenes who (like post-exilic Hebrews) mistook religion for history.

The Egypt of Herodotus received its most expansive and revealing appraisal from Thomas Price, editor of the *Eclectic Review*. Price's journal, although officially nondenominational, was an important vehicle for dissenting scholarship. The great Congregationalist, Josiah Conder, had been his predecessor as editor, and contributors included leading nonconformist theologians from the Methodist Adam Clarke to 'Wee Free' Thomas Chalmers. Price himself was a Baptist divine, anti-slavery campaigner and insurance broker (his company later changed its name to Aviva).¹⁵¹

Price argued that Kenrick was contributing to a revolution against the lazy, 'frigid . . . mechanical . . . barrenness' of Cambridge classical scholarship.¹⁵² England's scholars could no longer neglect, he warned, the 'moral science' of the Classics, which they had tended to overlook in their pursuit of practical affairs like 'astronomy, chemistry, magnetism, geology, physical geography, physiology'.¹⁵³ The great recent developments in moral knowledge, Price proclaimed, had been triumphs of the German universities with their 'host of unfettered talent'. Despite being 'democratic, drunken, irreligious, neological, or whatever else they may be' German academicians had developed new methods and priorities in classical studies that had enormous social implications.¹⁵⁴ European culture was an endangered entity unless the level-headed tendencies of British thinkers

¹⁵⁰ See John Kenrick, *Egypt of Herodotus* (London: Fellowes, 1841), 265 ff; Thomas Price, 'The Egypt of Herodotus', *Eclectic Review*, 14 (October, 1843), 439.

¹⁵¹ Founded as the Protestant Dissenters' and General Life and Fire Insurance Company.

¹⁵² Price, 'Egypt of Herodotus', *Eclectic*, 432; Richard Porson, Price insists, was 'a man without a heart'.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 430.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 433.

could be brought to bear in putting Germanic innovations to conscientious, Christian use. Price echoed Kenrick's own assessment: 'we must either learn this "New Calculus" ourselves, and enter the lists with them, or fall behind, worthless and despised'.¹⁵⁵ Dissenting ideals suffuse Price's prose and it is telling that this challenge to the classical establishment comes through Egypt, just as it did in Newcastle. Greece and Rome are seen as establishment possessions, to be challenged through dissenting use of what are once again referred to as the 'most ancient classics'.

However, Price goes on to undercut expectations of thorough-going radicalism. He sifts the German talent on offer in search of a valid parent for the 'manly and sound criticism' of the future. He settles on the singularly un-revolutionary figure of Christian Gottlob Heyne whose example could make the ancients into 'materials for making *us* better informed and wiser than *they* were; using their opinions as facts, while judging of their supposed facts for ourselves'.¹⁵⁶ Heyne has more or less slipped out of the canon of German criticism because he left no really substantial publication, but in the 1840s his presence, uncontroversial enough to be co-opted by almost anyone, was pervasive.

Like Heeren and Kenrick, Heyne was a Göttingen scholar. That town was regarded as 'Londres *en miniature*' and Hanover *en masse* retained a reputation as an outpost of English fashions. It was a borderland where the radical tendencies in German criticism and the conservative proclivities of the English washed into one another, producing criticism that could be called 'enlightened' while evading charges of scepticism.¹⁵⁷ Price invoked Thomas Arnold's *Thucydides* as the first British work to adopt techniques compatible with Heyne's criticism. These techniques included the vast inter-historical comparison embodied in Arnold's famous claim that 'the period to which the work of Thucydides refers belongs properly to modern and not to ancient history'.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, this insistent presentism might even

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. ¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas Biskup, 'The University of Göttingen and the Personal Union, 1737–1837' in Simms & Riotte (eds), *The Hanoverian Dimension in British History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); one Egyptological illustration can be found in the Göttingen Egyptologist Max Uhlemann's thousand-page dream-sequence, *Three Days in Memphis* (following the Graeco-Roman models of Barthelemy and Becker). This was translated into a three-volume English edition (1858) by E. Goodrich Smith and marketed as an antidote to destructive theories issuing from the Berlin of Lepsius.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Arnold, 'Preface to the Third Volume of Thucydides', *Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Arnold: Collected and Republished* (London: Fellowes, 1858), 396.

explain why Arnold's subject, Thucydides, made so many rhetorical appearances in the House of Commons at mid century (despite being contrasted disparagingly with *Times* journalists by Cobden in 1850). The most dramatic example was probably Disraeli's attempt to secure support for the Enlistment of Foreigners Bill in 1854 by encouraging Parliamentarians to 'refresh their memory' of the issues at stake 'by turning to the pages of Thucydides'. As these flighty evocations hint, Arnold had not embarked on a wholesale adoption of critical techniques; his was little more than a grudging recognition that the Germans might not be wholly mischievous.

The *Eclectic's* review revealed an important point about the priorities of Unitarian historians when it insisted that Kenrick's *Egypt of Herodotus* was the first work since Arnold to follow up the noble cause of reshaping German ideas for British readers. Part of what Price emphasized was that Kenrick engaged more fully with his German models, showing that the principles of criticism might eventually be held as dear 'by practical England as by speculative Germany'.¹⁵⁹ But the more important emphasis was on the 'philosophical' inclinations that led Kenrick to draw unusually solid parallels between ancient Egyptians and modern Britons. These analogies often related to his resentment towards Anglican authority: an overgrown and dogmatic 'sacerdotal caste', he claimed, had been instrumental in the decline of Egypt. But a review by Edward Hincks, this time of the *History of Egypt* by Kenrick's Unitarian peer Samuel Sharpe, pinpoints the trend more precisely:

Mr Sharpe aspires to the character of a philosophical historian. He is fond of pointing out analogies between the events of by-gone times and those with which we are familiar. Thus, he compares the position of the Greeks in Egypt with that of the English in India. Neither of these were the immediate conquerors of the native rulers of the country. They were the conquerors of these conquerors; the Greeks of the Persians; the English of the Mahommedans: and they were more indulgent to the votaries of the old religion of the country than those who first subjugated them had been. Mr Sharpe warmly commends . . . 'the statesman-like wisdom, and the religious humanity – of a conqueror governing a province according to its own laws, and upholding the religion of the conquered as the established religion of

¹⁵⁹ Price, 'Egypt of Herodotus', *Eclectic*, 435.

the state'. We hope and believe that our countrymen in India have not gone quite so far as this.¹⁶⁰

But Sharpe was not all facile harmonising; he styled himself 'heretic in everything, even among Unitarians', and was a regular contributor to reformist periodicals such as the *The Inquirer* and *The Christian Reformer*.¹⁶¹ Even more than Kenrick, his views became definitive in the public image of British Egyptology. His publications—including *The History of Egypt* (1846) and *Texts from the Bible Explained by Ancient Monuments* (1866)—almost all ran to many editions; they sold in numbers that less controversial scholars, even the great British Museum curator Samuel Birch, could not hope to achieve. Sharpe's friendship with Bonomi ensured his access to expansive audiences through texts like the 'historical notice of the monuments of Egypt' that constituted more than half the official guide to the Sydenham exhibit. Bonomi might now be a much more familiar name than Sharpe in the history of Egyptology, yet Sharpe provided the historical substance for almost all of Bonomi's own Egyptian publications.

Like John Marshall before them Kenrick and Sharpe demonstrated receptivity to ancient Egyptian thought that was rare in Britain before the 1870s. By recasting the Hebrew texts as powerful human efforts to comprehend the divine, rather than as the words of God himself, these Unitarians transformed the surrounding ancient Near Eastern civilizations from enemies of God into parallel traditions that also sought the truths that would later be revealed in the new dispensation of the Gospels. The achievements of ancient Egypt in monuments, irrigation, mathematics and astronomy suggested to them that the well-known biblical account of pharaonic despotism couldn't truly characterize this great civilization. In a pre-Ruskinian assertion that great architecture could only be produced by a free, healthy society they urged that 'enquiry into the political condition of any people who have left behind them works worthy of admiration, is of the highest moral importance'.¹⁶² 'That these should have been the works

¹⁶⁰ Edward Hincks, 'Egypt and the Bible', *Dublin University Magazine* (October, 1848), 371; these lofty philosophic aspirations did not preclude Sharpe from praise as a more accessible guide even than Gardner Wilkinson: e.g. 'Mr Sharpe has the great merit of having written almost the only book about ancient Egypt which people who are not professed "Egyptologers" can understand', 'Sharpe's History of Egypt', *Saturday Review* (15 September 1860), 336.

¹⁶¹ In Clayden, *Samuel Sharpe*, 72.

¹⁶² Sharpe, *Early History of Egypt*, 7.

of a people suffering under political disadvantages would contradict all our observations of the human mind and its powers. A tree is known by its fruit'.¹⁶³

The Egyptians were free and honest. But this didn't mean that they were right. Through Alexandria they had an immense influence on Greece, Rome, and modern Christianity, but an influence that was unwelcome to a Unitarian theologian: Egyptian religion encouraged Trinitarian 'superstition' rather than 'the simple religion which Jesus taught and practiced'.¹⁶⁴ 'Most of the so called Christian doctrines that have no place in the New Testament', Sharpe asserted, 'reached Europe from Egypt'.¹⁶⁵ Among the errors learnt from Egypt were 'the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, and the atonement by vicarious sufferings'.¹⁶⁶ Sharpe contended, on these grounds, that only by studying Egyptian religion could the true teachings of Christ be identified. But Sharpe's assessment of Egypt was—in true Unitarian spirit—always ameliorated by his recognition that 'the history of religious error is the history of the mind wandering in its search after truth'.¹⁶⁷ Hebrew, Canaanite and Egyptian: all generated beautiful errors despite their failure to achieve true insight.

Harriet Martineau travelled the Nile in the middle of the radical 1840s. She prepared by discussing ancient Egypt with Bunsen and was connected to Kenrick through her brother James, another profoundly influential Unitarian. Her travel narrative, *Eastern Life: Present and Past* (1848) contains one of the most searching philosophical accounts of Egyptian travel in English.¹⁶⁸ Her confrontation with ancient religion did not just reveal the nature of extinct worldviews:

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Sharpe, *Egyptian mythology and Egyptian Christianity* (London: John Russell Smith, 1863), vii.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. viii.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. ix, 160.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 1.

¹⁶⁸ Successive years of the 1840s saw major contributors to the 'woman question' become involved in debates on ancient Egypt. In 1846, Fanny Corbaux presented her first paper fusing Lyell and Egyptology; 1847 saw Eliza Lynn Linton's novel *Azeth, the Egyptian*, an ancient conversion narrative that aimed, over three volumes, 'to trace the gradual progress of a thinking and earnest soul from its first doubt of a false, to its final belief in a true, faith'; Martineau's *Eastern Life* followed in 1848; and in 1849 Florence Nightingale set sail down the Nile, soon to produce her own celebrated travelogue. Later in the century (thanks perhaps to the Egyptological turn of the popular novelist Amelia Edwards) leading contributors on both sides of the 'New Woman' debate, from Grant Allen and Florence Farr to Charlotte M. Yonge, also featured Egypt;

‘step by step as we proceeded, evidence arose of the true character of the faiths which ruled the world . . . I obtained clearness as to the historical nature and moral value of all theology whatever’.¹⁶⁹ Martineau’s narrative is less one of travel than of the development of religious thought from concrete and simple, to abstract and nebulous. She dressed her appeal to Egypt in the language of imagination:

If I were to have the choice of a fairy gift, it should be like none of the many things I fixed upon in my childhood, in readiness for such an occasion. It should be for a great winnowing fan, such as would, without injury to human eyes and lungs, blow away the sand which buries the monuments of Egypt.¹⁷⁰

But in the context of her penetrating text, the knowledge revealed is no idle fancy: it is social and religious threat: underlain with hints at historical discoveries that will undermine Victorian worldviews. This is at least how her prospective publisher John Murray read it. He found in this text the implication of a future attenuation of Christianity and rejected it on the grounds of this ‘infidel tendency’. Even the work’s most positive reviews balked at its ‘dash of egotism’ or ‘contempt for . . . small female proprieties’; others gave more detailed criticism of the historical and theological outrages concealed beneath the decorous veneer of a travel narrative.¹⁷¹

Eastern Life was followed by *Letters on the Laws of Man’s Nature and Development*, which went much further. Martineau claimed her text to prove that the study of human nature ‘is so incompatible with theology that the remaining prevalence of theology, circumscribed as it is, sufficiently testifies to the infant state of the philosophy of

e.g. Yonge’s *Two Sides of the Shield* (1885) with its mummy unwrapping and chapter entitled ‘An Egyptian Sphinx’ (even, surely coincidentally, a character called Flinders).

¹⁶⁹ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Linda Peterson (ed.) (Toronto: Broadview, 2007), 520–1.

¹⁷⁰ Harriet Martineau, *Eastern Life Present and Past* (London: Edward Moxon, 1848), 1:60.

¹⁷¹ e.g. J. Tayler, ‘Miss Martineau’s *Eastern Life*’, *Prospective Review*, 4 (November 1848), 524–38, also letters; and John Rely Beard, ‘Travel and Theology’, *British Quarterly*, 8 (November 1848), 432–72; but even reviews of other Egyptological works (Sharpe, Osburn, Bunsen) show *Eastern Life* to have made Martineau *persona non grata*: e.g. ‘whatever nonsense Miss Martineau and others may write on the subject, nothing has yet been discovered by which it can be proved that the Egyptian monuments go back to an epoch inconsistent with the received chronology’, Edward Hincks, ‘Egypt and the Bible’, *Dublin University Magazine* (October 1848), 388.

Man'.¹⁷² Tradition held that Italy schooled the wealthy English traveller in the arts of 'atheism', 'epicurizing' and 'poisoning'; but the waters of the Nile could be an equally powerful solvent of orthodoxy, helping, as they did, dissolve the last remnants of Martineau's Unitarian faith.¹⁷³

Even the few mid-century Egyptologists who were nominally more orthodox demonstrate remarkable openness to controversy. The Rev. Dunbar Isidore Heath published nineteenth-dynasty texts in translation as *The Exodus Papyri* (1855). In 1860, his *Sermons on Important Subjects*, which denied original sin in solidarity with the embattled F. D. Maurice, resulted in a Court of Arches judgement that cost him his living. Charles Wycliffe Goodwin was known at mid century for his translations of hieratic papyri that were celebrated as proof against 'the negative assertion that the Egyptians were destitute of history or literature'.¹⁷⁴ A lawyer by trade, he made himself an ostensibly dangerous figure, not by writing anything particularly devastating, but by contributing to the great theological [controversy] of 1860, *Essays and Reviews*. Goodwin's chapter tamely argued that although the Bible was inspired, its cosmogony did not contain 'physical truths' that could trump the discoveries of geology; yet the simple fact of contributing to this text permanently associated his name with scandal and with figures whose criticism of the establishment was much more radical. These included Rowland Williams, but also Benjamin Jowett, who saw the Old Testament as easy prey for the techniques of higher criticism, and Baden Powell, who argued that the 'self-evolving powers of nature' were the key to human purpose and that belief in biblical miracles had more in common with atheism than with a genuine Christianity derived from rational thought.

These progressive scholars of theology and ancient history were not isolated from one another. They pooled their knowledge in one of the great neglected movements in the history of Egyptology: the Syro-Egyptian Society of London. This society has received almost no historical coverage despite the fact that it stands at the intersections of some important developments in nineteenth-century history, and engaged with politics, theology and social change more vigorously

¹⁷² Martineau, *Autobiography*, 561.

¹⁷³ This Grand-Tour cliché is usually credited to Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594).

¹⁷⁴ 'Goodwin on Hieratic Papyri', *Saturday Review* (19 December 1863), 781.

than any other Egyptological organization. The Syro-Egyptian Society made its initial appeal to travellers. The press reports of the inaugural meeting in 1844 note the 'very gratifying sight' of 'many travellers whose first acquaintance had been made in the forest or in the field, recognizing one another after the lapse of years'.¹⁷⁵ One of these returned wanderers was the extraordinary John Kitto, familiar to readers of the *Penny Magazine* as the 'Deaf Traveller'. Kitto had been rescued from a Plymouth workhouse in 1823, became a missionary to Baghdad in the 1830s, and in 1848 founded the *Journal of Sacred Literature* which became instrumental in championing the Syro-Egyptian Society's cause (and is now among the chief sources of evidence for the society's activities).

Not all the society's members were as well-travelled as Kitto: the group that actually met each month to discuss and evaluate the 'scriptural and unscriptural, historical and unhistorical' discoveries of leading scholars in 'Göttingen, London and Paris' was a motley fellowship of Unitarians, Primitive Methodists, geologists, astronomers and surgeons most of whom never left Britain. When the establishment of the society was announced Samuel Birch wrote with evident excitement to Joseph Bonomi praising the latest development in 'our line' engineered by 'enthusiastic zealous men who wish to do good'.¹⁷⁶

Many members were among the leading scholars of ancient history in their generation. Thus when Goodwin used discoveries made by Dumichen to demonstrate that Egyptian priests possessed accurate histories of their country, the subsequent discussion saw an array of commentators including 'Dr Birch' and 'Mr Sharpe' enlarge 'on various points of Egyptian history' in speeches noted for their erudition.¹⁷⁷ Over more than two decades, Sharpe was among the society's most regular contributors and often took the chair. Under his influence, discussion leapt from the inauthenticity of the Holy Sepulchre to new understanding of biblical proper names achieved through knowledge of non-Hebrew languages.

Although initially intended to incorporate discussion of the 'antiquities, history, natural history and present condition' of Egypt and 'anterior Asia', this society soon focused almost exclusively on

¹⁷⁵ 'Syro-Egyptian Society', *Literary Gazette* (1844), 786.

¹⁷⁶ Birch to Bonomi, 11.6.1844, CUL, Add Ms 9389/2/b/52.

¹⁷⁷ 'Miscellanies', *Journal of Sacred Literature* (1865), 486.

scriptural history and the early church. Their principal aim was to establish a secular, chronological context for biblical events (Bunsen's 'external shell' that housed the 'divine kernel'). Thus Sharpe attempted to demonstrate that Vespasian was the Beast of Revelation and Apollonius of Tyana the False Prophet.

The society indulged in much speculation on possible discoveries that would settle vexatious scriptural questions: 'Jacob's body . . . embalmed after the royal fashion in Egypt' would feature 'Hebrew inscriptions and symbols . . . in the coffin or mummy' that could establish the much needed link between narratives of scripture and the chronology of Egypt. These efforts to collapse disjunctions between scriptural and secular history also involved intense focus on the mercantile economy of the Old Testament world. Modern trade concerns were mapped onto biblical texts in attempts to grant them practical, functional reality: Benjamin Harris Cowper's contributions typified this trend (for instance 'The metals mentioned in Holy Writ and the places they were derived from' which echoed the interests of Eneas Mackenzie in the 1820s).

Besides Sharpe, the dominant presence during the first decade of the Syro-Egyptian Society was a scholar who was never actually present: the great Göttingen polymath Georg Friedrich Grotefend. As an acolyte of Heyne, Grotefend epitomized the 'enlightened' but not 'sceptical' tradition advocated by nonconformist historians. Later described by A. H. Sayce as the 'inspired genius' of cuneiform decipherment, extraordinary excitement surrounded Grotefend's name in the 1840s and 1850s.¹⁷⁸ These were the decades in which Henry Rawlinson, Edward Hincks, Julius Oppert and W. H. Fox Talbot built on his advances in Old Persian cuneiform through their advances in Mesopotamian cuneiform (the older script of the Akkadian and Elamite languages). But besides Hincks, these scholars had surprisingly little to do with the Syro-Egyptian crowd. Even in their moment of triumph in 1857 they did not address the society; instead G. C. Harle produced a paper describing their discoveries. After Grotefend's death in 1853 he was still the cuneiform authority lionized at Syro-Egyptian Society meetings.

¹⁷⁸ A. H. Sayce, *The Archaeology of the Cuneiform Inscriptions* (London: SPCK, 1908), 10; on the process of decipherment see Kevin Cathcart, 'The Earliest Contributions to the Decipherment of Sumerian and Akkadian', *Cuneiform Digital Library Journal*, 1 (2011), 1–12.

During its first decade, the Society's most able scholars devoted great efforts to translating and presenting Grotefend's essays. The most prolific translator was George Cecil Renouard, who had been Professor of Arabic at Cambridge and was closely associated with the British and Foreign Bible Society's campaign to see scripture translated into Turkish and other 'eastern languages'. Many of Renouard's translations were then read to the Society by John Lee, a well-known combative Liberal (who had stood for Parliament against Disraeli) and pugnacious activist in the Gladstonian Broad Church cause. Lee was an inveterate collector whose geological and antiquarian collections at Hartwell House were significant enough for Bonomi and Sharpe to collude in publishing catalogues and descriptions.¹⁷⁹

The Syro-Egyptian Society's progressive experiments went much further than this. Among its regular contributors, on themes such as 'The Physical Geography of the Exodus' and 'The Egyptian Calendar', was the celebrated artist Fanny Corbaux. Corbaux was one of London's leading painters, honoured repeatedly by the Society of Arts although excluded by gender from the Royal Academy. Her turn to portraiture of biblical women in the 1840s ran alongside a deep immersion in Old Testament scholarship as well as increasingly vocal campaigns against the discriminatory politics of the artistic establishment. By 1846 she was presenting extraordinary papers that drew on Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* to demonstrate that the Egyptian topography viewed by modern travellers could not be equated with the landscapes of the Exodus. This drew praise from another Syro-Egyptian Society regular, the Nile explorer Charles Tilstone Beke. Drawing on Champollion's eminent rival and critic, Julius Klaproth, Beke's studies of ancient history dismissed hieroglyphic scholarship as a dead end. His approach to Egyptology involved attempting to match up the testimony of ancient authors (Pliny, Strabo, Diodorus, Herodotus and Moses) with the discoveries of Lyell. Beke's early work on this theme, *Origines Biblicae, or, Researches in Primeval History* (1834), had been credited as 'the first attempt to reconstruct history on the basis of the young

¹⁷⁹ Proceedings were not all shaped by the influence of Göttingen: Isaac Cullimore contributed arguments in favour of short dynastic chronologies to counter the 'unbiblical' history of Bunsen. Yet the tone of debate is consistently in keeping with the progressive Germanophile ideals that the names of Bunsen and Grotefend represented.

science of geology'.¹⁸⁰ Although it earned him few sales, this work did gain him an honorary doctorate from a German university more formidably radical than Göttingen: Tübingen, associated with the ominous names of Baur and Strauss.

Yet Beke was a biblical literalist who inserted Egypt into a huge narrative of civilization decline from Creation to Modernity. His theories demonstrate just how far from orthodoxy ancient history could carry even those students who were unflinchingly committed to divine revelation. Indeed, Beke went further than Corboux. He insisted that Lyell's methods demonstrated the Nile Delta of the Old Testament era to have been vast and surrounded by uncultivable marsh. His conclusions could barely have been more radical: Egypt was

NOT the *Mitzraim* into which Abraham went down, and after him Jacob and his family, and out of which Jehovah brought the children of Israel . . . the country of Egypt can have little or no connexion with the History and Geography of the Sacred Scriptures.¹⁸¹

'Mitzraim' was Sinai and Sinai alone. Only after the Babylonian captivity had Hebrew copyists muddled aspects of their inspiration and made the Nile Valley the site of their first oppression. Biblical prophecy did not refer to Memphis at all and the spectacular cities of Egypt were not the biblical enemy.¹⁸² The implication of this was that Egyptian civilization could be praised without fear of irreverence: geology was made into a tool that could renegotiate the geography of scripture while leaving its narrative intact.

The *Quarterly Review* commissioned a major public figure, the churchman and historian Henry Hart Milman, to review Beke's work. As Dean of St Paul's, Milman was an establishment pillar, and his biblical-dramatic poems were, like Robert Southey's, widely (if fleetingly) admired. His biblical views were, however, profoundly controversial. His *History of the Jews*, published as part of John Murray's Family Library, had been so unpalatable that it led to the collapse of Murray's series. It presented Abraham as a wandering

¹⁸⁰ H. H. Milman, 'Origines Biblicae', *Quarterly Review* (1834), 504.

¹⁸¹ Charles Tilstone Beke, *Origines Biblicae or Researches in Primeval History* (London: Parbury, 1834), 167; see also 267–8.

¹⁸² This desacralization of sacred geographies was a standard trope in the Holy Land most famously voiced by Edward Daniel Clarke: 'Jerusalem of Sacred History is in fact no more'; applying this to other biblical topographies was much less common.

desert sheikh of the mystical ancient east. It claimed the dates and quantities recorded in Exodus to be interpolations that could be ignored by a more rational age. Milman was, according to Samuel Smiles, 'preached against, Sunday after Sunday' as one of the most 'pernicious of writers' and J. H. Newman bemoaned his excessive respect for German liberal theology ('rank nonsense', Milman retorted in his usual Tiggerish mode). Beke's heterodox power is demonstrated by the fact that even Milman found him 'altogether subversive'.¹⁸³

The extraordinary Syro-Egyptian Society was subsumed in 1870 by the better documented (but less interesting) Society for Biblical Archaeology. With a membership ranging from Britain's leading hieroglyphic scholar, Samuel Birch, to those who rejected the very possibility of hieroglyphic scholarship, the Syro-Egyptians had brought together an array of high-powered scholars who grappled with the newest intellectual developments, however radical, to debate the identity and importance of ancient Egypt. Never again would an ostensibly Egyptological society attempt such wildly eclectic investigation of the primeval world.

By 1860, debate over the history and chronology of Egypt was sometimes played out on a distinctly national stage, contributed to by a roll-call of the most powerful figures on the political as well as ecclesiastical stage: it was part, albeit still a backwater, of an extensive rhetoric of ancient history that reached every institution, every part of national life. Not just learned societies, but the broader political culture of this era was steeped in ancient history; and ancient history was a politically charged, cross-party intoxication. Fear of nonconformity was now much less pervasive, and the great establishment ally of nonconformist politics, 'the people's William', was ascending the ranks of the newly formed Liberal Party.

Gladstone had already published the most extensive of his dozens of volumes on Homeric scholarship, which would soon include attempts to reconcile the *Iliad* with Egyptian chronology. Among the few other men to hold the post of Prime Minister for multiple spells Edward Stanley (Lord Derby) translated the *Iliad* and helped construct the late nineteenth-century image of Homer as the archetype of modern Toryism later described by John Ruskin.¹⁸⁴ Edward

¹⁸³ H. H. Milman, 'Origines Biblicae', *Quarterly Review* (1834), 496.

¹⁸⁴ John Ruskin, *Praeterita* (London: George Allen, 1885–9), 1:xiii.

Bulwer-Lytton sat in 1860 as Secretary of State for the Colonies; the discoverer of Nineveh, Austen Henry Layard, was re-elected in that year and was soon appointed Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs; the leading historian of Greece of the age, George Grote, had been Member of Parliament for the City of London, although by 1860 he was thoroughly absorbed in administration of the University of London he helped create.

Yet disdain for Egypt remained. Egypt's integration into the general obsession with 'the lessons of antiquity' often worked to emphasize dismissals of pharaonic achievements rather than to replicate the febrile excitement of the Syro-Egyptian Society. Layard himself sought to elevate the status of Assyrian art by contrasting it with the 'stiff and ill-proportioned figures of the monuments of the pharaohs [sic]'.¹⁸⁵ Egypt remained a byword for bombast and futility that could be contrasted with the productive powers of later ages. Some of the most colourful evocations of the futility of pyramids come from this decade; as the Congregationalist hymnodist Thomas Toke Lynch put it in 1861:

Pyramids are not likely to ascend in London - huge wastes of human toil and pain. But a railway is in intellectual cousinship to a pyramid; that is to say, as the one showed what man can do, putting forth united and massy strength, so does the other show what man can do, putting forth united and massy strength. But how much better is it that strength should be under the control of skill, and should work for the ends of welfare, than merely that strength, controlled, indeed by a true skill, though a lesser one, should build up a monument of power, the inscription on which is pride!¹⁸⁶

The most dramatic establishment dismissals issue from the loftiest political heights, penned by an ancient historian who was Home Secretary and editor of the *Edinburgh Review*. George Cornwall Lewis subjected 'Egyptological speculation' to coruscating mockery and diagnosed it as a pernicious symptom of the irrational irreverence and superficial scholarship of his age.

Cornwall Lewis's pedigree as an ancient historian was substantial. In the 1830s he had translated Bockh's *Public Economy of Athens* and

¹⁸⁵ 'Discoveries at Nineveh', *The Times* (30 January 1845), 6.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Toke Lynch, *Three Months' Ministry: Sermons* (London: W. Kent, 1861), 259.

Muller's *History of Greek Literature* and had produced his own studies of the origins and development of romance languages. A formidable critical thinker with prodigious historical and linguistic talents, he was celebrated by figures as elevated as George Hamilton-Gordon for his 'candour' and 'love of truth'. In 1862, having stepped down as Home Secretary and taken on the lighter load of Secretary of State for War, Cornwall Lewis decided to devote his newfound leisure to reviving his career as an ancient historian and produced a lengthy *Survey of Ancient Astronomy*, articles ridiculing Bunsen, and a short satire on Egyptological technique.¹⁸⁷

The latter mocked Egyptologists through a series of contrasts between the methods of writers of ancient and modern history. Lewis's cynical wit pervades his attitude to Egyptology.¹⁸⁸ He argues that where modern historians employ the minute scrutiny of evidence characteristic of lawyers, ancient historians discard all rules and stretch 'naked hypotheses' to the limits of credulity. He then applies his parody of Egyptological technique to the modern world. 'There is no part of the researches of the Egyptologists', he argues in full ironic mode,

more convincing and instructive than the discovery that dynasties, which are reported by the ancient chronologists as successive, are, in fact contemporary; and that different names occurring in different parts of the series represent the same king . . . Transferred to modern history, [this idea] ought to bear fruits worthy of its illustrious origin.¹⁸⁹

The result was that James II and Charles II were revealed to be 'a reduplication' of their earlier namesakes. 'Popular error or the misdirected ingenuity of learned annalists has, by a species of optical delusion, multiplied the objects, and has created two kings' bloating the Stewart reign far beyond its 'historical' duration.¹⁹⁰ If approached

¹⁸⁷ Lewis had recently suffered a major embarrassment, purchasing texts from a Greek antiquary (for the British Museum) and publishing his translations of them, only to have them declared forgeries. The works of the early 1860s were, at least in part, defensive attempts to restore his reputation.

¹⁸⁸ Lewis's habitual droll detachment is encapsulated in his most widely remembered remark 'Life would be tolerable were it not for its amusements'; *The Times*, 18 September 1872, 4; see D. A. Smith, 'Lewis, Sir George Cornwall', *Oxford DNB* (online edn, May 2009) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16585>>, accessed 31 May 2011.

¹⁸⁹ George Cornwall Lewis, *Suggestions for the Application of the Egyptological Method to Modern History* (London: Private Edition, 1862), 11–12.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 12–13.

with the mindset of true Egyptologists this hypothesis would be admitted to be ‘so luminous . . . commended by such internal probability, that the intelligent reader . . . will scarcely require any corroborative proof’. Similarly, Cornewall Lewis demonstrated Napoleon’s exile to St Helena to be a historical ‘reduplication’ of his banishment to Elba, with the result that the battle of Waterloo was consigned to the realm of myth.

Cornewall Lewis’s hostility to Egyptologists ran deep. He insisted (sincerely this time) that there was ‘no instance in which the interpretation of an unknown language in an unknown character had been successfully achieved’; the hieroglyphs had not been and would not be deciphered.¹⁹¹ He assured those who had been disconcerted by the chronological claims of Egyptologists that ‘next to nothing’, besides what was contained in scripture, would ever be known of Egypt anterior to Herodotus.

Although this publication was sufficiently prominent for reviews of Egyptian histories to draw on it for decades afterwards, Egyptologists of the 1860s were not too much concerned.¹⁹² Goodwin and Birch penned gentle rejoinders featuring some more optimistic intimations of the future of Egyptology, but by the time these reached the press Lewis’s premature death meant that they could only address his haughty marble bust in Westminster Abbey.¹⁹³ Yet this incredulity, which can be observed in many scholarly circles of the 1860s, emphasizes an important point. Ancient Egyptian society and history remained so intangible, with so little agreement on its fundamental dates and characteristics, that it still proved resistant to the narrative and ideological forms that British commentators insistently imposed on the past (the ‘tales’ of Carlyle’s ‘story-teller’). Its exposition was entangled in religious and political controversy. Something of the anxiety of the age of 1848 revolutions survived into the era of *Essays and Reviews* and controversies continued to flow with a force that gave any rendering of early Egyptian history the potential to alienate huge tranches of readers.

Much of the problem, according to Milman (in one of his characteristically devastating reviews for the *Quarterly*), could be traced to the overzealous quest for historical detail in scripture: ‘there is a kind

¹⁹¹ Philip Smith, ‘History of Egypt’, *Quarterly Review* (1879), 434.

¹⁹² e.g. Claude Conder, ‘Egyptian Chronology’, *Scottish Review* (1897), 116.

¹⁹³ ‘Goodwin on Hieratic Papyri’, *Saturday Review* (19 December 1863), 781.

of cabbalism at work, which is discovering not mysteries' in scripture, but imagining 'a whole series of historical facts in the simplest and plainest sentence'.¹⁹⁴ This was also the tendency that had been attacked by Josiah Conder: overenthusiastic travellers were liable to forget where 'sacred narrative terminates' and render wild supposition as divinely sanctioned fact.¹⁹⁵ Milman implied that the prevailing confusion was inevitable when cabals reconstructed history with the help of new techniques attached to geological science and radical criticism, yet failed to submit their work 'to all the severe rules of scientific disquisition'.¹⁹⁶ This quest for workable syntheses of science, history and religion would continue in subsequent decades, but it was about to take on some distinctly different forms.

¹⁹⁴ H. H. Milman, 'Origines Biblicae', *Quarterly Review* (1834), 496.

¹⁹⁵ Josiah Conder, *Literary History of the New Testament* (London: Seeley's, 1850), 1–4.

¹⁹⁶ Milman, 'Origines Biblicae', *Quarterly*, 496.

2

The First Intermediate Period

The Religion of Science and the Science of Religion

In 1864 John Ruskin found himself in a spiritual ‘mess’.¹ In a letter to the Oxford Professor of Medicine (and topographer of Troy), Henry Acland, he asked whether the men who built the Parthenon were ‘all wrong’, and if so whether those who designed St Mary’s Spire in Hinksey could be equally misguided. He hoped to find his way out of this conundrum through research into ‘how far Greeks and Egyptians knew God; or how far anybody ever may hope to know him’.² But he faced difficulties. ‘The only two works of value on Rome and Greece’, he wrote, ‘are by a polished infidel, Gibbon, and a vulgar materialist, Grote’ and the ‘state of Egyptian science’ was still worse.³ So, where should his research begin?

He started by exploring the antiquities in the British Museum: the ‘mighty lines of the colossal, quiet, life-in-death statue mountains’ of the Egyptians, with their ‘narrow fixed eyes’ and ‘rocky limbs’.⁴ He chose for his guides Gardner Wilkinson’s *Manners and Customs*, and Bunsen’s ‘mass of misarranged material’ that passed for a book.⁵ Like many British readers he drew radiant symbols from these Egyptological authorities but had little faith in their narratives or systems.

¹ For fuller analysis of twists and turns in Ruskin’s doubts and faiths see Michael Wheeler, *Ruskin’s God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

² E. T. Cook & Alexander Wedderburn (eds), *Works of John Ruskin* (London: Allen, 1903–12), 18:xxxiv.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1846), II:200–1.

⁵ *Works of John Ruskin*, 18, xxxiv.

Bunsen and Mariette stood as towering figures whose ideas had to be confronted by anyone interested in the civilization, yet they agreed on little. Where they did agree, many British thinkers, looking specifically for spiritual truth, were unwilling to follow.

The result was that Ruskin's scattered statements on ancient Egypt did not engage closely with the ideas of Egyptologists except where he borrowed imagery from mythology. In Ruskin's hands this imagery quickly lost its Egyptian identity and melted into a 'universal' myth that united Egyptian, Hebrew, Hellene and Briton. 'Hieroglyphical interpretation' still seemed 'bewildered by the Sphinx with reckonings and riddles' and Ruskin's engagement with Egyptian civilization was too casual to wander far into this maze.⁶ Yet, as the great artistic arbiter of mid-Victorian Britain, his statements on Egypt—contradictory as they could be—carried disproportionate authority. He encouraged his multitudinous readers to favour the biblical and classical associations of Egypt and pursue investigations into the broad spiritual character he ascribed to the civilization rather than its histories or chronologies.⁷

Ruskin constructed an ancient Egypt engaged in a primeval form of natural theology. Where early nineteenth-century natural philosophers like Buckland had turned their geologist's hammers and botanist's lenses to the natural world in order to know the mind of God, so the Egyptians had pored over charts of the heavens to interpret the divine through astronomy. Immersed in the development of critical standards for aesthetics and art history Ruskin used Egypt to help him think through the question of how scholarship could become analytic and rigorous while retaining space for the metaphysical and divine. This was far from unusual: most Egyptian works of the 1860s were heady and speculative: they drew on metaphysical astronomical schemes more than archaeology and partook as much of the character of wisdom literature as antiquarianism. At this moment Ruskin was cited as an authority on Egypt as frequently as the most pioneering Egyptologist of the period, Karl Richard Lepsius.

In the early 1860s this speculative Egyptology amused or delighted many and became the butt of numerous jokes. Except in the

⁶ 'Notes on Books', *Dublin Review* (1877), 257.

⁷ Over his long career Ruskin would also write much less flatteringly about Egyptian architecture, considering both Greeks and Egyptian styles to express a servility that inevitably infiltrated any productions created by slave labour.

flashpoint of *Essays and Reviews* (1860), the general tone of this engagement suggests that Egypt's controversial nature did not matter particularly deeply: writers who believed that Egyptology could genuinely prove or disprove the Bible were few or far between and the polemical language of proof was rarely chosen. But as the 1860s and 1870s progressed, speculative texts increasingly hardened into opposed polemic. The *Athenaeum* chronicled the beginnings of this shift in 1867 and remarked that 'Egypt and its antiquities are usually written about with a B (for bias) in the bonnet'.⁸ 'Illustration' of biblical themes increasingly became 'proof'; and archaeology was drawn deeper into controversies contrasting faith with doubt or science with theology. Even though the 1850s had seen the last period of serious geological disagreement over the disjunctions between Genesis and geology, the 1870s marked a substantive turn among leading historians, churchmen and dissenting ministers to the writing of tracts on this subject. The great Methodist leader, William Cooke, for instance, penned a volume entitled *Fallacies of the Alleged Antiquity of Man Proved* (1872) which was far from unusual.

At the same time, the radical biblical criticism of Tübingen was beginning to find numerous popularizing champions in Britain.⁹ In 1874, *Supernatural Religion: an Inquiry into the Reality of Divine Revelation*, published anonymously, provoked outrage. J. B. Lightfoot denounced it as unjustifiably cruel to his 'old friend' scripture and set about extensive rebuttals in the *Contemporary Review*. *Supernatural Religion* itself went into six editions within the year, and had a third volume added in 1877: revised editions and popular one-volume adaptations appeared until well into the twentieth century.¹⁰ The 1870s also saw what R. H. M. Elwes described as a 'stir of tardy recognition' for Spinoza, culminating in Elwes' authoritative translation of 1883.¹¹ The radical ideas of the preceding century received much wider circulation and much louder denunciation in the 1870s than in any previous decade.

⁸ 'Life and Work at the Great Pyramid', *Athenaeum* (July 1867), 71.

⁹ It is remarkable, noted by Brian Young amongst others, that those in the 1850s who attempted this (such as McKay and Frances Newman) seemed forgotten in the 1860s.

¹⁰ The author's identity was disclosed—as W. R. Cassels—in 1895.

¹¹ R. H. M. Elwes, *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza* (London: George Bell, 1883).

One result of this polemical intensification was a tendency towards vast historical and transcendental claims made for archaeological discoveries. Within a decade, the ‘true tomb of Christ’ had been discovered and authorized by the Church of England; the Flood of Genesis had received external corroboration from the translation of Mesopotamian Deluge narratives; Homer’s Troy had been excavated thoroughly enough for interested parties in Europe to ‘feel themselves transported’ when they gazed on Priam’s treasure and Helen’s shining jewels; the tomb of St Luke had been found at Ephesus; Noah’s Ark had been discovered, his home city excavated and the results of reading the log books of his journey on the flood were confidently awaited.¹² No period in history has ever seen so many widely publicized, intensely championed discoveries whose interpretation was defined primarily by wishful thinking.

This was also the moment when archaeology underwent one of its most substantive moments of popularization: several standard texts on ancient history, initially produced for classical scholars, were now reissued in popular editions. Greek parallel texts became ‘a costly and useless encumbrance’ and emotive English introductions for the general reader replaced them.¹³ Rather than becoming dry, dusty and forgotten, the elevated scholarly texts of one generation became the elementary reading of the next. This was the most substantial popularization of Egyptology since the Napoleonic era: where Layard’s ‘comet-like’ text had allowed the lion hunts of Assyria to sweep through fashionable British drawing rooms, the reorientation of the 1870s permitted readers to imagine themselves as Near Eastern

¹² ‘The Log of the Ark’, *Saturday Review* (21 January 1882), 71–2. Regular reports of the discovery of Noah’s Ark and its ‘log books’ generated substantial public interest and confusion, e.g. Arthur Day to Samuel Birch, 26 July & 8 June 1883: BM ANE, 1883/117–19: ‘Some months ago I heard a Mr H. Rassam lecture . . . and among other things he spoke of the discovery of Sepharaim and some thousands of inscribed tablets, these now being translated by the BM. He expressed his belief that these might be ante-diluvian records as Sepharaim he said was the traditional city of Noah—while in Switzerland last month a paragraph in a French newspaper was brought to my notice stating that Mr Rassam had discovered the prow of an enormous vessel covered with inscriptions which a French scholar had been sent out to interpret and it was believed to be an actual portion of Noah’s Ark. Having sought in vain for confirmation of this report I have thought I could not do better than apply to you to know if there is any foundation for so interesting a rumour’.

¹³ E. Richmond Hodges (ed.), *Cory’s Ancient Fragments of the Phoenician, Carthaginian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Other Authors* (rev. edn London: Reeves & Turner, 1876), ix.

adventurers and to rival even the greatest explorers of the previous generation in knowledge of the ancient world.

These trends towards popular and polemical uses of archaeology entangled it with other controversial sciences: many intellectual pursuits partook in the rising tension. The 1850s and 1860s had seen desire for consensus that allowed the cutting-edge ideas of figures like Kenrick and Matthew Arnold to be publicized without attracting violent censure; but as the 1860s ended this broad, inclusive outlook faltered, challenged by growing concern for the future. Britain's economic and political primacy was beginning to seem unstable, and increasingly defensive postures can be observed in debate over political economy, manufacturing and imperial policy as well as religion and science.¹⁴ In this atmosphere, the gradual popularization of biblical criticism unleashed a corresponding, but much more extensive, popularization of orthodoxy.

The nature of this polarization is most tellingly illustrated by the case of Darwinism, which popularizers of Egyptology increasingly railed against. In the early 1860s many leading churchmen found it easy to accommodate Darwin to their worldviews; they emphasized the most traditional aspects of his thought, and glossed over ideas that offered most divisive potential. By the 1870s, with Huxley's 'On The Physical Basis of Life', Tyndall's 'Belfast Address' and *The Descent of Man* added to the mix, the idea that Darwin and theology were in conflict accrued support, as did the principle that it was desirable for readers to take one side or the other. Too much was seen to be at stake for attitudes to Darwinian science to be casual or noncommittal. This intensification ran throughout relationships between scriptural religion and cutting-edge philosophies of science. The late 1860s and early 1870s saw increasingly polarized scientific debate over the nature of miracles and the efficacy of prayer, embodied in Henry

¹⁴ Some of this intensification in theological texts might be attributed to the reduced threat of legal action against heterodoxy as this period went on. At the beginning of the 1860s heresy was still a crime that the law might punish, but the shambolic trials of contributors to *Essays and Reviews* in 1861–4 and of Charles Voysey in 1869 showed that recourse to the courts was no longer viable. Except at a few key moments such as the aftermath of *Lux Mundi* (1889), the 'advanced party' could be confident that the judiciary would not be mobilized against even the most polemical statements. Conversely, the only tools the conservative could now wield against radicalism were public argument and Christian evidences: their discovery and production went into overdrive.

Thompson's 'The Prayer for the Sick: Hints towards a serious attempt to estimate its value' in the *Contemporary Review* (1872). Even authorities who sought to blur the quickly solidifying lines between rationalism and belief—such as W. K. Clifford in 'The Ethics of Belief'—walked with 'the swagger of brutal rationalism' (in the words of Helen Small).¹⁵ The ancient world suffused these discussions: Clifford used the siege of Syracuse to demonstrate the 'universal duty of questioning all that we believe'; an imperative that 'no simplicity of mind, no obscurity of station, can escape'; Tyndall famously drew Lucretius and 'ancient atomism' into his advocacy of modern physics.¹⁶ Figures like Huxley, Thompson and Clifford produced different interpretations of the relationship between the sciences, ancient history, metaphysics and morality, but the dogmatic definition of these relationships was a widely felt imperative.

The expansion of scientific naturalism in the public sphere is an essential story of the 1870s, and it runs in tandem with growing confidence amongst opponents of biblical authority. But it is far from the whole story: this period is characterized more by polarization of views than by a turn to Comtean positivism, rationalism or materialism. And it was through this polarization that archaeology was entangled with the natural sciences. It had become the other side to scientific naturalism's coin; it was widely deployed in defences of biblical religion, which were also newly galvanized and assured. The churchman and author of bestselling lives of Christ and St Paul, Frederic Farrar, had formed a celebrated essay of 1864 around the principle that scientific naturalism could be refuted 'by science only' and over the course of the 1870s Near Eastern archaeology was developed into just such a science.¹⁷ Archaeology seemed capable of vindicating Old Testament history by producing evidence that satisfied all the tests of scientific naturalists themselves. The generation of archaeologists who came of age in the 1870s displayed astonishing confidence in the idea that, while words could have multiple

¹⁵ Helen Small, 'Science, Liberalism and the Ethics of Belief' in G. N. Cantor & S. Shuttleworth (eds), *Science Serialized: representations of the sciences in nineteenth-century periodicals* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 240.

¹⁶ W. K. Clifford, 'The Ethics of Belief', *Contemporary Review* (January 1877), 307–8; F. M. Turner, 'Lucretius among the Victorians', *Victorian Studies*, 16:3 (1973), 329–48.

¹⁷ F. W. Farrar, 'The attitude of the clergy towards science', *Contemporary Review*, 9 (1868), 614.

meanings or no clear meanings at all, the material evidence recovered by archaeology was unmediated and uncomplicated.

The integration of archaeology into these tussles for authority is evident in the extent to which earnestness came to replace lightness-of-touch as a desirable character trait of the Near Eastern explorer and excavator. The most famous travellers from the 1830s to 1850s—Kinglake, Gardner Wilkinson, Richard Burton and Layard—had adopted *gauche* poses defined by playful unwillingness to conform to orthodox expectations. They were often men of wealth and social standing who enjoyed gently scandalizing their adventurous readers. Although some of these travellers (Burton for instance) would continue to produce socially and sexually intrepid works into the 1870s and beyond, those who shaped the field after 1870 pursued a new sense of public duty. They did not parade in local costume or purchase ('rescue') wives from slave markets. Desire to entertain was low on their list of priorities. George Smith (infamous moment of possible nudity in the British Museum aside), Heinrich Schliemann, Amelia Edwards, Édouard Naville, R. S. Poole and Flinders Petrie all approximate to this deeply earnest model.¹⁸ Intent on pursuing eternal truths and unequivocal messages about the status of ancient texts and the evidential power of archaeological knowledge, they eschewed Kinglake-like games and paradoxes. If the exploration of Egypt is used as a yardstick, the last quarter of the century was far more conservative and committed to religious orthodoxy than the high tide of evangelical revival. To put it another way, over the course of the 1870s the public face of Near Eastern archaeology underwent a gradual, contested change of emphasis. Radicalism, heterodoxy and social subversion had once been expected; conservative, orthodox and constructive expectations were increasingly generated and met. This is the sense in which the period covered by this chapter is 'intermediate': it did not see significant developments in Egyptological technique (as would the following decade), but the meanings attached to Egyptology during its glorious revival of the 1880s were created by the cultural turmoil of this decade.

It is frequently noted that Petrie's archaeology in the 1880s is difficult to interpret as a continuation of the developments of Gardner Wilkinson; the new Egyptology is interpreted as *sui generis*, without

¹⁸ For the tall tale of George Smith's nudity see David Damrosch, *The Buried Book* (Geneva, IL: Holt MacDougal, 2007), 9–12.

an ancestry in British intellectual life. In fact, the work of Petrie and the Egypt Exploration Fund (EEF) follows seamlessly on from the developments of the 1860s and 1870s; the links are simply found outside Egyptology. They are evident in Ruskin's art-criticism, Charles Piazzi-Smyth's astronomically inspired pyramid-measuring, George Smith's Assyriology and Heinrich Schliemann's Homeric archaeology. These developments helped define the ambitions of later British Egyptologists. Perhaps more decisively, they dictated the expectations of the expansive new audiences whose subscriptions would fund that Egyptology.

PRIESTS AND PYRAMID-BUILDERS: AN ALTERNATIVE 'RELIGION OF SCIENCE'

The young Ruskin was a keen admirer of Bulwer Lytton's novels, and Arbaces remained the one outstanding model of an Egyptian priest in British culture when Ruskin embarked on a literary career. In the year he read *Last Days* he observed that Lytton's works 'always refine the mind and improve us in the art of metaphysics'.¹⁹ But Ruskin later found the debasement of Egyptian civilization in the character of Arbaces inconsistent with an idealist conception of history that sought 'constant laws common to all human nature', and 'things which are for all ages true'.²⁰ He mocked his contemporaries for imagining the peoples of the past as caricatures and surveying their achievements with nothing but pious disdain:

Many a peace we have made and named for ourselves, but the falsest is in that marvellous thought that we, of all generations of the earth, only know the right; and that to us, at last, – and us alone, – all the scheme of God, about the salvation of men, has been shown. 'This is the light in which we are walking. Those vain Greeks are gone down to their Persephone for ever – Egypt and Assyria, Elam and her multitude,

¹⁹ John Ruskin, *Three Letters and an Essay, 1836–1841, Found in the Tutor's Desk* (London: Allen, 1893), 34; see Simon Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 194.

²⁰ John Ruskin, *Queen of the Air: a Study of the Greek Myths of Cloud and Storm* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1869), 21.

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– uncircumcised, their graves are round about them . . . Rome, with her thirsty sword, and poison wine, how did she walk in her darkness!²¹

Despite his misgivings concerning ‘want of freedom’ in their architecture, Ruskin tentatively resurrected the ‘polished’ Egyptians and insisted that the ‘moral significance’ of Egyptian myth was lost on his contemporaries only because of modern failures of imagination and empathy.²² Any society that conducted phenomenal feats of engineering must, he argued, be attuned to the divine; a civilization that granted its priests temporal authority must be spiritually astute. Ruskin’s rhetoric on the divine potency of desert spaces and the calm grandeur of Egyptian monuments would reappear, time and time again, in the writing of Amelia Edwards, Flinders Petrie and other popularizers of Egyptology in the 1880s and 1890s.

As Francis O’Gorman has emphasized, several digressions in Ruskin’s works are devoted to the idea that harmonious cooperation of spiritual and practical genius is the ultimate masculine ideal.²³ In *Valle crucis*, he pays respect to Bernard of Citeaux whose Cistercian monastery was possible only because of the draining of a foul marsh.²⁴ In *Modern Painters* he celebrates this feature of the ‘holiest of monarchs’, St Louis of France.²⁵ The priesthood of ancient Egypt are presented as the most ancient and institutionalized instance of this multi-competence: the one point in history when the ideal principle was reified into a system of governance. Egyptian theology provided the beginnings of the modern sciences as well as the foundations of law and politics.²⁶ Their vast sculptures and painted scenes were imbued with an ‘immortal calm’ that contrasted ‘the lower passions’ of late Roman art and ‘the kind of temptation which is continually offered by the delicate painting and sculpture of modern days’.²⁷

²¹ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, V:368.

²² Ruskin, *Queen of the Air*; see also ‘Ruskin’s Queen of the Air’, *Saturday Review* (1869), 258; Ruskin repeatedly challenged Egyptian aesthetics but praised the Egyptians’ productive capabilities: his aesthetic instincts seem at odds with his ideas on ethics.

²³ Francis O’Gorman, ‘To see the finger of God in the dimensions of the Pyramid: a new context for Ruskin’s *Ethics of the Dust*’, *Modern Language Review*, 98 (2003), 563–73.

²⁴ John Ruskin, *Valle crucis* (London: George Allen, 1894), 248.

²⁵ Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (1856), III:339.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 416. ²⁷ *Ibid.* 68.

Egypt itself symbolized this ideal in Ruskin's lectures on crystallography, *The ethics of the dust* (1865). The second of these straddles the spiritual and scientific by approaching the idea of a guiding force behind crystal formation and embodies this force as Egyptian deities.²⁸ Entitled 'The Pyramid builders', this lecture is an extended dream-sequence in which Neith and Thoth construct an enormous pyramid which is then transformed into an equally intricate tiny piece of rose-fluor. The children to whom the lecture is addressed are encouraged to wonder at the tiny crystal through its association with the grand religious and scientific mysteries of ancient Egypt.

Nonetheless, at the time of writing in the 1860s Ruskin's bullish advocacy was not enough to save Egyptian religion from charges of savagery: the image of Arbaces was perpetuated by a host of 1860s writers. Benjamin Harris Cowper (in the early stages of his translation of the Apocrypha) penned a chapter entitled 'Greek Atheism and its Egyptian Origin'. He wrote that

the great object and certain result of the Egyptian superstition was to oppress the intellect by an enormous weight of absurd and unintelligible legends; to reduce the popular mind into servile subjection to a dominating priesthood; and to pollute the source of all ethical perceptions by obscene, disgusting, and unmeaning ceremonies.²⁹

Harris Cowper was perfectly typical in his claim that the Egyptians priesthood's activities were absurd and degrading. He was not all that unusual in his implication that there was something purposive in their vulgarization of the masses. Even A. P. Stanley, prone to extended expatiation on the debt the Hebrews owed to Egypt, endeavoured to prevent his audience mistaking his meaning: he contrasted the 'spiritual liberty of the Christian faith' with the 'depressing superstitions' peddled by the priests of Karnak. Ruskin's priests were, therefore, emphatically counter-cultural (indeed he even drew on the anti-Christian polemic of Porphyry). Ruskin never made the extended study of Egyptian civilization he intended. Some of the existential troubles that had drawn his attention to primeval history receded as he drifted back towards a mildly heterodox composite of Protestant and Catholic belief; at the same time, his

²⁸ John Ruskin, 'The pyramid builders' in *Ethics of the Dust: Ten Lectures to Little Housewives on the Elements of Crystallization* (London: George Allen, 1866), 19–36.

²⁹ B. Harris Cowper, 'Ancient Atheism', *Journal of Sacred Literature* (1862), 24–56.

focus on aesthetics led him to emphasize the ‘slavish’ status of the hands that built both Egyptian and Greek constructions.

Yet Ruskin’s affinity with Old Testament peoples didn’t disappear. Instead, it took a voguish new form. In 1877 he identified himself with ‘the Twelve Tribes which are scattered abroad, the literally or spiritually wandering Israel of the Earth’.³⁰ By the mid 1870s the fate of these tribes was devoted intense attention thanks, in part, to the publications on ancient Egypt of the Astronomer Royal for Scotland, Charles Piazzi Smyth. The name of Piazzi Smyth is now inextricably associated with the idea that the dimensions of the Great Pyramid were dictated and controlled by Providence in order to enumerate cosmological distances, planetary dimensions and key events in world history (both past and future). Smyth had been brought up in a family obsessed with astronomy and Egyptology. His own middle name was given in honour of the Sicilian astronomer, while his sister was named ‘Rosetta’. At the core of Smyth’s most notorious theory was the principle that just as the Bible was the ‘Divine standard of religious faith’, the pyramid was ‘the Divine standard of measurement’: it gave supernatural sanction to inches, feet and other units of contemporary British science. Like generations of natural theologians Smyth looked in the physical world for evidence of divine action and thereby sidestepped what he saw as futile hair-splitting over the philology of scripture. The scientific support he mustered appeared unimpeachable: the mathematician Augustus de Morgan and the leading British astronomer Sir John Herschel both spoke out in favour of his theories.³¹

Smyth’s works were the most widely read in a long line of books that elevated the pyramid and its designer to superhuman status. They sought to decipher mystical and scientific messages encoded in the structure’s dimensions; they assumed that generations of ancients would not have laboured merely to entomb the unpopular tyrannical pyramid-builder described by Herodotus. Their true and noble purposes must be recoverable. Smyth’s texts, *Our Inheritance in*

³⁰ As so often in this period, this ‘Israelitism’ was not a ‘national’ or racial claim—Ruskin identified himself with the tribes of Israel in a way that specifically excluded most of the British population.

³¹ E. M. Reisenauer, ‘The battle of the standards: Great Pyramid Metrology and British Identity, 1859–90’, *The Historian*, 65.4 (June 2003), 937, 939–40, 956–7; for Herschel on Taylor see John Herschel, *Two Letters to the Editor of the Athenaeum, on a British Modular Standard of Length* (London: Private Edition, 1863).

the Great Pyramid, Life and Work at the Great Pyramid (1866) and *On the Antiquity of Intellectual Man*, are long narratives recounting his travels and exploring the geography and society of modern Egypt alongside the astronomical, mathematical and metaphysical knowledge of the ancients. These works credit the pyramid builders with extraordinary engineering precision and scientific ability as well as unrivalled spiritual insight. In investigating this insight Smyth aimed to institute a ‘religion of science’ that was robustly oppositional to the Huxleyan and Spencerian schemes usually associated with that term.

Smyth’s pyramids were the product of the most sophisticated civilization that had ever existed. However, he was not a Ruskinian admirer of ‘polished’ Egyptians. His pyramid builders were biblical Hebrews and his Egyptians were the ‘idolatrous and Cain-like’ supporters of a false metrology.³² Smyth composes lengthy fantasies around the affinities between Britons and Hebrews, implying similar equivalence between the ancient and modern advocates of profane measures: the Egyptians and the French. This argument makes it easy to fit Smyth into narratives of chauvinistic nationalism, but as usual, such narratives are also easy to subvert, not least through the dedication of *Life and Works* to Napoleon.³³ Smyth’s works was underlain by nationalistic and orientalist concerns, but these were chaotically and inconsistently pursued, emphasized or undercut by a host of other considerations. Equally, Ruskin’s identification of himself with ancient Israel is neither ‘national’ nor racial but personal: it includes those, irrespective of nationality, who share his aesthetic concerns, and excludes the majority of Britons.

Smyth’s reputation in the 1860s and 1870s was complex. His providential theories were frequently presented as eccentricities by the mainstream press. However, this rarely led to his works being dismissed. His scientific gadgetry—gyroscopic telescopes and electronically controlled clocks, experiments in photography, ‘time-balls

³² Charles Piazzi Smyth, *Life and Work at the Great Pyramid* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1867), 3:528.

³³ If the dedications of British works on ancient Egypt are taken seriously they undermine many assumptions of nationalistic intent; David Roberts’ famous volumes, considered to be a nationalistic attempt to produce a British answer to the *Description de l’Égypte*, are dedicated not to Queen Victoria but to Bismarck, for instance. Indeed, the *North British Review* considered Piazzi Smyth to be driven not by anti-French feeling, but ‘a holy horror of all Prussians’; ‘Life and Work’, *North British Review* (September 1867), 155.

and time-guns’—fascinated readers and reviewers alike. His studies of the Great Pyramid therefore received positive press even from those who rejected out-of-hand the ideas that are now most commonly associated with his name. His appeal was not only scientific: reviews find striking (and wholly unexpected) likenesses between his style of deduction and expression and those of Gibbon and Volney: he is disorganized and overblown but visionary, evocative and a committed searcher after truth.³⁴

Almost all these reviews praise the scientific credentials and devoted labour that make Smyth’s works significant even to those who reject the metaphysical ‘main conclusion’.³⁵ The title ‘Life and Work’, noted the *North British Review*, demanded the kind of ‘grand moral truth’ and ‘physiological necessity’ that are usually associated with ‘stirring lay-sermons’ and ‘Muscular Christianity’.³⁶ Smyth’s combination of expertise and ‘horny-handed’ graft ensured that these demands were amply met. This review explored *Life and Work* at length but simply sidestepped the ‘startling religious argument, bearing on metrology in general, which we fear could not properly be examined in an article like this’.³⁷ The reviewer went even further than his peers in stating that the precise identity of the pyramid builder ‘does not to us at least seem to be of much consequence’.³⁸

Until the 1870s few reviewers suggest that Smyth’s narratives are substantially compromised by the heterodox theology he weaves around them. Equally, it is only in the 1870s that his metaphysical conclusions gather large numbers of vocal and committed supporters: more works of pyramid metrology were published in the 1870s than any other decade. Smyth’s own work was rendered valuable by his scientific agenda: ‘there seems’ wrote a correspondent to the science journal *Knowledge*, ‘to be something connected with such speculations that has a fascination for a large class who would be wearied by a more cautious search after truth . . . such speculations are fitted to do a sort of missionary work for science’.³⁹ But *Knowledge*’s commentators became bitterly opposed to ‘the whole theory of pyramid coincidence’ when other writers loosed Smyth’s metaphysical

³⁴ ‘Life and Work’, *Athenaeum* (July 1867), 71.

³⁵ ‘Life and Work’, *North British Review*, 150.

³⁶ *Ibid.* ³⁷ *Ibid.* ³⁸ *Ibid.* 153.

³⁹ ‘Pyramid facts and fancies’, *Knowledge*, 1 (1881), 113.

speculation from its scientific mooring.⁴⁰ Throughout the 1870s this happened in numerous of sermons and lectures with titles like ‘The Great Pyramid: showing reasons for its sanctity in God’s sight and why it is not mentioned expressly as well as implicitly in Scripture’ (this particular sermon was the work of Flinders Petrie’s father).

From the outset reviews drew explicit attention to the polemical potential of Smyth’s theories by comparing them directly with Darwin. *The Athenaeum* in 1864 found the pyramid theory speculative, but not more so than evolutionary theory: both ‘must rank as yet among the pure fancies which men ride as hobbies’.⁴¹ *Notes and Queries* in 1866 praised the astonishing ‘learning and ingenuity’ of Piazzi Smyth in concocting a theory that, while not ‘as yet’ proven, was as defensible as others, ‘evolution for instance’.⁴² The *British Quarterly Review* a year later ‘sternly’ refused to accept Smyth’s inferences ‘in favour of revealed religion’ for exactly the same reason it rejected the ‘analogous inferences of men like Dr Darwin, Mr Tyndale, and others in contravention of it’: ‘scientific facts are one thing, theological inferences . . . another’.⁴³

After 1870 this potential was widely acted on. The idea that study of the Great Pyramid was doing for revealed religion what scientific naturalism claimed to do against it became key to Smyth’s popularity. One lecturer, J. T. Goodsir, argued that the pyramid was erected in ‘protest against astrology’ and sounded a similar warning against the false science of Darwinians.⁴⁴ Indeed, after 1870 the Great Pyramid was regularly identified as the literal or metaphorical ‘rock of truth’. M. W. Habershon’s lecture ‘The Wave of Scepticism and the Rock of Truth’ (reported at length in media ranging from newspapers to *The British Architect*) presented the Great Pyramid standing majestic and pristine with vast but ineffectual torrents of scientific irreligion crashing down around it like Turner’s plague of hail.⁴⁵ Typically, Habershon showed little real interest in questions of metrology: he

⁴⁰ A. C. Ranyard, ‘The Pyramid and Paradoxers’, *Knowledge*, 1 (1881), 111; Proctor, *Knowledge*, 1 (1881), 112.

⁴¹ ‘Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid’, *Athenaeum*, 1923 (1864), 295.

⁴² ‘The Standard Diaspora of Ancient Egyptian Music’, *Notes and Queries*, 9 (1866), 137.

⁴³ ‘Our Inheritance’, *Athenaeum*, 295.

⁴⁴ J. T. Goodsir, *Seven Homilies on Ethnic Inspiration* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1871), 27–67.

⁴⁵ ‘The Great Pyramid’, *British Architect* (22 October 1875), 224–5.

was enthused by the idea that astronomical science might undo the errors of physics and biology. The Tractarian poet and Palmerstone crony, Richard Monckton Milnes, voiced similar hopes that here the rivalry of sciences would be settled: ‘Fancy bows to Truth’ he suggested, when confronted by ‘fragments that the Deluge of Old Time has left behind in its subsidence’: ‘those works of man that rival nature most’.⁴⁶

Egyptology itself was often given an unfavourable place in this imagined maelstrom of colliding sciences: the press still associated Egyptian history and archaeology with Bunsen, Mariette and the Unitarian threat. The *Dublin Review* in 1877 counted Egyptology amongst those sciences that grant a ‘forlorn hope of infidelity’ to ‘desperadoes of darkness’.⁴⁷ Smyth himself aimed to bring ‘intellectualists . . . mathematical and Christian’ rather than ‘Egyptological and rationalistic’ into study of the Egyptian monuments. The ‘positive knowledge’ gained by measuring, he claimed, would not support a Comtean ‘positive philosophy’.

Strikingly, it was only at the very end of the 1870s that commentators began to argue that mathematics and astronomy were not the only skills Smyth required to understand the purposes and social context of the Great Pyramid. What did he know of the other pyramids of Egypt asked the *Saturday Review* in 1879? ‘He has not read, supposing he could read, a single hieroglyph. He has not the vaguest knowledge of early Egyptian history . . . he has probably never heard of . . . Lepsius . . . He has no more knowledge of the table of Sakkara or the table of Abydus than of the Turin papyrus’.⁴⁸ Only in the 1880s did Egyptologists including Flinders Petrie align with popularizers of the sciences like Richard Proctor to debunk Smyth’s wishful measuring (even then, this would, of course, have been a unique event if disproof of the theory had silenced its supporters immediately).

⁴⁶ Richard Monckton Milnes, ‘The Burden of Egypt’ in *Poetical Works of Richard Monckton Milnes* (London: Murray, 1867), 1:235.

⁴⁷ ‘Notes on Books’, *Dublin Review* (1877), 256; according to Mary Williams, Margaret Murray’s elderly relatives in the 1880s reacted to her pursuit of a career in Egyptology with the claim that ‘that way lies infidelity’, presumably combining gender and religion in disapproval of Murray’s ambitions.

⁴⁸ ‘The Pyramids Revisited’, *Saturday Review* (18 January 1879), 74.

ARCHAEOLOGIES OF THE IMAGINATION:
THE DELUGE

In 1865 interest in Egypt and Mesopotamia had been low enough for Professor Friedrich Max Müller, lecturing in Leeds, to ask, 'What do the tablets of Karnac, the palaces of Nineveh, and the cylinders of Babylon, tell us about the thoughts of men? All is dead and barren, nowhere a sigh, nowhere a jest, nowhere a glimpse of humanity'.⁴⁹ A decade later Müller's phrases were bandied round the periodical press, mocked by reviewers of George Smith's Mesopotamian translations. Smith's publications collated unprepossessing cuneiform fragments into a narrative described as 'vivid with light, life, and meaning', episodes in the tale of the hero 'Izdubar'. Smith's 'surpassingly marvellous history' was read 'with breathless interest... the length and breadth of the land'.⁵⁰ Gladstone himself spoke through various media, over two decades, to convey the profound interest and grandeur of Flood narratives that outdid Genesis for 'local colouring'.⁵¹ 'A new set of ideas altogether', claimed *The University Magazine*, had 'started into life', different in kind from the 'curiosity and wonder' associated with *Nineveh and its Remains*. Where Layard aroused the 'romance of adventure', Smith was said to inspire something altogether more profound: the 'romance of the intellect'.⁵² *The Daily Telegraph* enthused that 'History was jealous of Romance until last week' and the papers of the world reprinted their assessment.⁵³

This 'difference in kind' referred, of course, to Smith's linguistic facility and immersion in the literature of the Neo-Assyrian Empire which contrasted both the art-architectural inspiration of Layard and the stilted chronological and dynastic reconstructions produced by Henry Rawlinson's more traditional preoccupations.⁵⁴ As in the case of hieroglyphs, the first decades after cuneiform decipherment

⁴⁹ Reported in 'Recent Assyrian Discoveries', *University Magazine*, 84 (August 1874), 213.

⁵⁰ M. Bennet, 'The Chaldean Legend of the Flood', *Dublin University Magazine*, (1873), 143.

⁵¹ W. E. Gladstone, 'On the Recent Corroborations of Scripture', *Good Words* (1890), 676.

⁵² 'Recent Assyrian Discoveries', *University Magazine*, 214.

⁵³ 'The Flood', *New York Times* (27 December 1872), 4.

⁵⁴ For the contrasting styles and interests of Layard and Rawlinson see M. T. Larsen, *The Conquest of Assyria* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996).

provide scholars with a catalogue of mistaken identifications and linguistic blind alleys. This is, of course, entirely to be expected and is not intended to imply that early workers in this field were somehow deficient. But it is a necessary reminder that decipherment never amounted to a moment of conclusive revelation or dazzling epiphany. Scholars of Mesopotamia (even more than those of Egypt) found that the texts they pored over in the gloomy depths of the smog-enveloped British Museum were labyrinthine and cryptographic, as likely to detail extispicy (for instance, the procedures for predicting the outcome of a military campaign from the inconsistencies in the liver of a sacrificial ram) as to recount a narrative that could be subjected to established interpretative habits. At the same time, Assyria suffered biblical infamy even more profound than Egypt's. Assyrians were an accepted metaphor for a hostile other. The Bible made them wolves, while Nietzsche made ancient Israel's fears into metaphors for threats to the modern psyche: 'anarchy within and the Assyrian without'.⁵⁵ In the nineteenth-century arts Assyrians occupied the eclipsed, gloomy world described in Nicholas Michell's *Ruins of Many Lands*: Nineveh was the City of Darkness no matter how brightly archaeological scholarship shone through its ruins. Undercutting all these expectations, the intelligible and narrative 'flood tablet', the first fragments of which Smith chanced upon in November 1872, remains the most famous cuneiform inscription in the world.

From a relatively lowly background (the occupations of his parents are unknown), without the traditional education that would have allowed him access to classical training within the establishment, Smith had been apprenticed to a firm of printers in 1854 and taught engraving. His interest in ancient Mesopotamia took off when his career (as well as his emotional life) was set back by the suicide of his mentor, Henry Bradbury. Smith began to make frequent recourse to the galleries of the British Museum and became familiar to its curators. They soon recognized the potential of his engraver's training in helping reconstruct texts from the heaps of sherds in the Museum's basement.⁵⁶

When Smith gained access to this material he was faced with over 100,000 fragments of clay, inscribed with texts in multiple, very

⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Works of Friedrich Nietzsche Vol. XI: The Antichrist*, (trans. Thomas Common, New York: MacMillan, 1896), 270.

⁵⁶ On Smith see David Damrosch, *The Buried Book* (New York: H. Holt, 2007).

different, languages from several centuries and in diverse genres. Most of them were illegible because of the filth accreted on them. It was surprising enough that Smith succeeded in recovering from this a coherent snatch of narrative describing instructions for the building of an ark; a divinely inflicted ‘deluge over the people’ for ‘six days and nights’; the sending out of dove and raven (and swallow); then the restoration of animals onto dry land.

Yet the greatest surprise was yet to come. Excitement was such that *The Daily Telegraph* had soon raised £1,000 to send Smith on an unlikely mission to recover more fragments of this narrative. His rapid success in this task (naturally publicized with great enthusiasm by *The Telegraph*) contributed to growing confidence that archaeology could recover specific ancient items. These high expectations persisted for more than two decades. They saw Flinders Petrie grubbing around in the 1890s for stones hidden by the biblical Jeremiah; they conditioned the public for Heinrich Schliemann’s extravagant claims to have recovered the personal belongings of Homeric heroes. Like most of the discoveries referred to in this book Smith’s fragments were soon declared the most important archaeological discovery in history.⁵⁷ The brief narrative passage was intelligible because its intersection with the book of Genesis made sure it was read as a flashpoint in an extended text; its cultural power was also derived from this intersection. Smith insisted that ‘the brief narration given in the Pentateuch omits a number of incidents and explanations’ and implied that he could fill the gaps between these Bible verses to resurrect the history of the patriarchs.⁵⁸ These discoveries were not a quickly forgotten event: Smith’s continued work gradually brought more and more Bible stories, from Creation to the building of the Tower of Babel, into the realm of archaeology.

Twenty years later, these tablets were still used to challenge philological scholarship. The Deluge Tablets show, contended the *Academy* in 1895, that if critics are right in distinguishing an Elohistic and a Jehovistic narrative in the Biblical text, the two narratives must have been compiled at least a thousand years before the traditional birth of Moses: those who suggested these traditions to be late and inauthentic

⁵⁷ e.g. Amelia Edwards, ‘Was Ramases II the Pharaoh of the Exodus?’, *Knowledge*, 2 (1882).

⁵⁸ George Smith, *Chaldean Account of Genesis* (New York: Scribner, 1876), 14.

were proved wrong.⁵⁹ The relationship between the Old Testament and archaeology had become more immediate and inextricable than ever before. Thanks to the ‘uncorrupted evidences of the monuments’ provided by Layard and Smith a visitor to the British Museum could ‘stand as a witness to the combats of Nimrod, “the mighty hunter before the Lord,” with lions’ and ‘listen to the story of the Flood told by Noah to his great-grandson, the same [Nimrod]’.⁶⁰ These monuments evoked Bible verses as vividly as the canvases of John Martin, yet they carried an authority derived from their material authenticity (a kind of authority that was not subjected to real epistemological scrutiny until much later).

This was a new environment from that in which Max Müller had dismissed the Near East’s appeal; scholars and the press now used their reviews of Smith to ‘clamour for the introduction of Egyptology and Assyriology into the regular studies of our Universities’.⁶¹ Had Müller’s statement been delivered in 1878, instead of twelve years earlier, W. H. Rule speculated in the *London Quarterly*, ‘we scarcely think he would have committed himself to such an assertion’.⁶² Potential nominees for the first chairs of those disciplines that were (once again) styled ‘the most ancient classics’ included the editors and authors of a series of volumes that between 1875 and 1899 attempted to set the texts of the ancient Near East before expansive new audiences: *Records of the Past*.⁶³ Initially edited by Samuel Birch and published under the auspices of the Society for Biblical Archaeology, this series employed a popularizing rhetoric wholly symptomatic of its moment. Where previous textbooks stressed their desire to make translations as ‘accurate’ or ‘reliable’ as possible, the preface to the first volume (Assyrian texts) did not even mention those watchwords and instead emphasized ‘simplicity’ and ‘intelligibility’. The series was ‘without philological exegesis’ in order to ‘render the volumes as

⁵⁹ ‘Two Books on Old-Testament Archaeology’, *Academy* (9 November 1895), 392.

⁶⁰ ‘The British Museum and the People who go there’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 144 (August 1888), 196.

⁶¹ ‘Recent Assyrian Discoveries’, *University Magazine*, 213.

⁶² W. H. Rule, ‘Assyriology’, *London Quarterly* (1878), 265–96; beginning in 1855 Rule published a long series of articles on the confirmation of the Bible by archaeology in this journal (‘the unofficial voice of Methodism’); these were reworked into *Oriental Records, Monumental and Historical, Confirmatory of the Old and New Testament* (London: Bagster & Sons, 1877).

⁶³ W. G. Ward, ‘Notes on Books’, *Dublin Review* (1877), 256; ‘Records of the Past’ *Saturday Review* (1881), 832.

popular as possible'.⁶⁴ The preface to the second volume (Egyptian texts) expresses its aim 'to popularize the texts themselves' not among Europe's leading scholars but amongst a public who might then be inspired to 'enrol themselves in the ranks of the corps of interpreters of the Past'.⁶⁵

The novelty and 'authority' of this endeavour was impressed on readers through the distinction between these new enunciations from 'the beating heart of primeval life' and the more familiar accounts filtered through well-known Greek and Roman interpreters with their 'dim, shattered, or distorted reflection of the splendours of the ancient Eastern monarchies'.⁶⁶ Even a decade earlier it would have seemed eccentric to place cuneiform and hieroglyphic texts in this superior relationship to their Greek interpreters. By 1875 this inversion flourished.

If anything can drive the importance of this moment home it is the reframing of what had, since 1828, been a standard textbook on Egypt and Mesopotamia, *Ancient Fragments*, by the Cambridge Hebrew scholar Isaac Preston Cory. The 1832 revised edition of this work, often known affectionately as *Cory's*, was reprinted unchanged in every decade of the mid century. It was aimed at the trained antiquarian and consisted of parallel texts of Greek remnants of ancient literature with their English translations. It was universalist in ambition, though small in scale. In 1874–5 Cory's text was overhauled into a substantively new edition, published in 1876. Its editor, E. Richmond Hodges, dedicated the new volume to Birch, as the mastermind behind *Records of the Past*. Hodges expunged Greek parallel texts and added explanatory introductions intended for untrained readers. The whole work was reformed as a popular book for a mass audience. As Hodges wrote, *Cory's Ancient Fragments* is not now a complete text on the preclassical world as it once aspired to be, but

a fitting supplement to the fragments which have been exhumed from the mounds of Nineveh, and rescued from the tombs and mummy-pits of Egypt... Having set aside the Greek text as a costly and useless encumbrance, [the book is now addressed] to the ordinary English student, who does not happen to have enjoyed the advantages of early

⁶⁴ Samuel Birch (ed.), *Records of the Past: being English Translations of Assyrian and Egyptian Monuments* (London: Samuel Bagster, 1875–82), 1:i.

⁶⁵ Birch, *Records of the Past*, 2:vi.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

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classical training. In carrying out my plan I shall explain Hebrew, Assyrian, Greek, Phoenician, and Egyptian words wherever they occur, and thus endeavour to place the English reader . . . on a level with the best Oriental scholars of our day.⁶⁷

Hodges purged Cory's text of any features that rooted it in its 1820s antiquarian context. Germanic biblical names (Noe, Elias, Eliseus) were replaced with anglicized equivalents (Noah, Elijah, Elisha). References to the mythological studies of Bryant and Faber were removed, as were Neo-Platonic texts and other postclassical fragments in which Hodges found a 'farrago of metaphysico-philosophical nonsense'.⁶⁸

To make up these reductions Hodges added a brief popular history of decipherment which credited the 1865 discovery of the San inscriptions as confirmation that hieroglyphic decipherment was genuine; he blamed a long list of previous 'charlatans and pretenders' for the continued scholarly scepticism that still surrounded the decipherment of cuneiform.⁶⁹ He ended his introduction with a rousing call to arms:

Let not those relics of a past age lie mouldering in their grave. Let England's sons, who prize and love the Bible, exert themselves, and show a deep and sincere interest in excavations and discoveries which throw light on its sacred pages, and confirm its hallowed truths.⁷⁰

The roving intellect and 'metaphysico-philosophical' predilections of Cory himself were almost entirely buried under the characteristic questions, and fashionable answers, of 1876. The one tribute to the volume's originator was the retention of his title, now strangely at odds with the volume's contents: *Cory's Ancient Fragments: a Manual for the Chronologist and Mythological Antiquarian*.

ARCHAEOLOGIES OF THE IMAGINATION: TROY

Hodge's call to arms occurred alongside a still more powerful rallying cry to the lovers of ancient literature. In the same month as the new

⁶⁷ Hodges, *Cory's*, vii. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.* viii.
⁶⁹ *Ibid.* xviii. ⁷⁰ *Ibid.* xxxi.

edition of *Cory's* reached the public, W. H. Mason addressed the readership of *Macmillan's Magazine*:

The excavations of Dr Schliemann in the Troad have placed on a new basis the vexed question as to the site of Troy. Homerology (to use the word just coined by Mr Gladstone) has advanced a step. Its devotees ask no longer 'Where is Troy?' but 'What do we learn of Troy from Hissarlik?'⁷¹

The life and works of Heinrich Schliemann have been recounted by an array of historians. In the mid twentieth century, in early attempts to write the history of archaeology, his life was accepted as the fairy-tale he made it out to be. Recounting fulfilled childhood prophecies and fairy-tale heroism realized through pure charisma, Schliemann convinced scholars that he was the romantic lead in the triumph of archaeology over uncertainty and scepticism. From Ceram to Steibing, historians of archaeology perpetuated a myth as engaging as it was false.⁷²

In works like *Schliemann of Troy: Treasure and Deceit* (1995) David Traill began a polemical deconstruction of Schliemann's mythology by recounting his wilful misreading of sites and mendacious treatment of both evidence and colleagues. More recently Susan Heuck Allen has written the history that Schliemann endeavoured to unwrite, placing Frank Calvert at the centre of the story of Hissarlik.⁷³ Equally incisively, Cathy Gere has analysed some of the cultural resonances that allowed Schliemann's preposterous claims to dominate classical scholarship at the turn of the century.⁷⁴

These accounts render another full treatment of Schliemann superfluous, but his reception in late nineteenth-century Britain remains misunderstood. Gere's incisive study focuses on readings of Schliemann that were transmuted through Nietzsche and racial theory. These, from the beginning, were dominant lenses in the newly unified German states, and they became increasingly significant in Britain after 1890. But another, very different, rendering of

⁷¹ W. H. Mason, 'Homer and Dr. Schliemann', *Macmillan's Magazine*, (September 1876), 454.

⁷² e.g. C. W. Ceram, *Gods, Graves and Scholars* (London: Gollancz, 1952); W. H. Steibing, *Uncovering the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁷³ Susan Heuck Allen, *The Walls of Troy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁷⁴ Cathy Gere, *The Tomb of Agamemnon* (London: Profile, 2007).

Schliemann fed into revived traditional narratives rather than incipient modernist ones. In 1870s London he was filtered through the High Victorian antiquarianism of Gladstone more frequently than the radical philology of Nietzsche. An immensely popular political figure—‘the people’s William’—and the most prolific Homer scholar of the nineteenth century, Gladstone gave Schliemann’s discoveries, and the *Iliad* itself, meanings that were rarely attached to them outside the English-speaking world. Favouring chronological rather than geographical affinities, Gladstone emphasized Homer’s position as a contemporary of Old Testament prophets instead of as the forefather of classical Greece. Gladstone’s Homer effortlessly straddled the Arnoldian dichotomy of Hellenism and Hebraism. Like Ruskin and Talbot, Gladstone constantly insisted on the emergence of the ‘mystical and ideal’ elements of Greek culture from Phoenicia, Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Gladstone’s career was punctuated (if not dominated) by events in regions he saw as intrinsically Homeric: the borderlines across which an expansionist Western Europe confronted the unstable Ottoman Empire. One of his first official roles had involved overseeing British interests in the constitutional crisis triggered by Ionian desire to reunite with mainland Greece. He had been tempted into this precarious task by appeals to his love of the ‘land of Homer’ made by George Ferguson Bowen (diplomat and author of the *Murray’s Handbook to Greece* 4th edn), Lord Derby (Prime Minister and translator of Homer) and Edward Bulwer Lytton. For Lytton and Derby this was a convenient ruse to remove a troublesome political opponent at the same time as filling a diplomatic position that was rendered deeply unattractive by probability of failure.⁷⁵

Over the following decades Gladstone coordinated and enacted many debates, policies and *voltes faces* on the Eastern Question, including the occupation of Egypt in 1882. He ended his parliamentary career with the epithet ‘Scourge of Turkey’. This was a political epic that Lord Stanley, speaking in the House of Commons, chose to tell in mock-Homeric terms:

the Prime Minister, like all great actors, was envious and jealous of performing all the parts of a drama. His Homeric studies naturally

⁷⁵ Thanks to Callum Barrell for introducing me to Bowen and demonstrating Gladstone’s Ionian role.

made him commence with that of Agamemnon. After that, in Mid Lothian, he rendered with great success the minor part of Thersites. Lastly, he had played the part of Ajax contending with Ulysses for the shield of Achilles; he strove with Lord Beaconsfield for the mantle of Pitt and Palmerston, and with the result that, like Ajax, he went mad and turned his powerful arms against the sheep; so that from 1,500 to 2,000 Egyptians were slaughtered like sheep in from 15 to 20 minutes. This was the Minister who so lately feared blood-guiltiness.⁷⁶

Gladstone's Homeric obsession was well known. His opponents made much of it in satire as well as across the Parliamentary floor. The fact that the *Iliad* retold events in exactly the contested regions whose future Gladstone aimed to shape was widely noted; to some it made him eminently qualified, to others it revealed him as an enthusiastic amateur. To Gladstone and his followers these western fringes of Ottoman rule were that grand, simple, violent world ravaged by the armies of the Atreides and by Agamemnon's British namesake (a ferociously modern 91-gun steam-fitted battleship that bombarded Sebastopol in 1852).⁷⁷ General Gordon aimed to find holy corners of Jerusalem for Protestant appropriation just as crusaders had sought to ensconce Christendom in Palestine. Schliemann's explorations, and Gladstone's foreign policy, were enacted on an imagined fault-line that was 'by the hand of nature formed... to be the scene of collision between East and West'.⁷⁸

From the beginning of the nineteenth century to its end, this slippage between ancient and modern also merged the sacred into the secular. St Paul travelled the Troad *en route* to Ephesus, and his footsteps were followed by countless pious Britons. New Hittite discoveries, alongside the persistent theory that Eden lay beneath the Mediterranean, meant that the Old Testament constantly invaded the associational matrix of this bitterly contested region.

The Levant was contested intellectually as well as politically: 'a battlefield', as the *Morning Post* put it, 'not just of heroes but of scholars and geographers'.⁷⁹ Eighteenth-century travellers explored the Troad aiming to decide which ruins and tumuli might be the walls

⁷⁶ HL Deb (26 October 1882) vol. 274 cc133–54.

⁷⁷ The older but less imposing sibling, HMS Menelaus, was by this point a distinctly shabby quarantine ship confined to harbour at Perth (Rupert Brooke's Menelaus perhaps?).

⁷⁸ Mason, 'Homer and Dr Schliemann', 448.

⁷⁹ 'Review', *Morning Post* (June 1869).

of Homer's city and the tombs of his heroes. Critical enunciations had, however, made this unselfconscious pursuit of Homeric locales difficult. Wolff's *Prolegomena* in Germany and Jacob Bryant's *Dissertation on the War of Troy* (1797) insisted that the war had never taken place, that its heroes were the imaginary friends of a childlike race who did not have the mental faculties to distinguish between myth and history, and that 'faith in Homer' was a shocking symptom of the naivety of complacent, 'progressive' Europe.

The literary reaction against this criticism was forceful and heartfelt. The most widely reprinted complaint was Byron's:

I stood upon the plain daily, for more than a month, in 1810; and if anything diminished my pleasure, it was that the blackguard Bryant had impugned its veracity . . . I venerated the grand original as the truth of *history* (in the material *facts*) and of *place*. Otherwise, it would have given me no delight. Who will persuade me, when I reclined upon a mighty tomb, that it did not contain a hero? – its very magnitude proved this. Men should not labour over the ignoble and petty dead – and why should not the dead be Homer's dead?⁸⁰

Nearly half a century later, an equally revealing protest was made in one of the great literary events of nineteenth-century culture, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. Barrett Browning presented the critical deconstruction of a single pagan text as a rebellion against the divine nature of the cosmos itself:

Wolff's an atheist;
And if the *Iliad* fell out, as he says,
By mere fortuitous concurrence of old songs,
We'll guess as much, too, for the universe.⁸¹

Her husband blamed childhood immersion in Homeric narratives for the complete inability of moderns to 'get truth and falsehood known and named as such'.⁸² Through the sixty-five years between Byron's dejected whining and Schliemann's triumphant fanfares, dozens of European writers had visited the supposed sites of Troy. Many had attempted to rehabilitate Homer as historical; others had mocked the

⁸⁰ Thomas Moore, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron* (London: J. & J. Harper, 1833), 101.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (London: J. Miller, 1864), book V.

⁸² Robert Browning, 'Development', *Poetical Works, 1888–94* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 102–3.

wishful thinking that allowed muddy rivulets to become the mighty Scamander and fudged multiple tepid water sources into Homer's two hot and cold springs. Homeric literalists and deconstructive critics occupied a range of positions that mirrored contemporary attitudes to scripture. Many of them, including Gladstone, were profoundly aware of this affinity. Schliemann, pithily defined by Gere as an 'evangelical Homeric literalist', grabbed this repetitive debate by the scruff of the neck, shouldered aside the sceptics and attempted to restore Achilles and Priam to their pedestals as historic heroes; in doing so, he seemed to encourage credulity towards Moses.

The associational matrix that Schliemann's excavations conjured—Agamemnon and HMS Agamemnon, Ottomans and Greeks, St Paul and Eden, Jerusalem and Gordon—reads like an account of Gladstone's personal passions and political entanglements. And before long, Gladstone and A. H. Sayce were Schliemann's most committed advocates not just in Britain but in the world. They penned prefaces for his works which praised him more uncritically than those by his German supporters, and they merged his interests with their own, bringing Troy into the same debates that problematized and inspired Egyptology and Assyriology: Gladstone's neologism, 'Homerology', is a symptom of this conflation. Sayce read Schliemann's excavations as the beginning of 'an archaeological revolt against the fantasies of subjective criticism'.⁸³ The 'halo' of ancient literature that William Smith had attempted to dislodge was being actively restored.⁸⁴

Initially, Gladstone and Sayce's advocacy was countered with formidable opposition from leading classical scholars such as Richard Jebb, but Schliemann's irrepressible enthusiasm and high-profile support soon drew scholars and public alike into this fit of extraordinary literalism. It might once have been excusable 'to entertain some lingering doubts whether Schliemann had found the site of Homeric Troy', wrote the *Athenaeum* in 1900, but 'no one can doubt any longer'.⁸⁵

When British excavation in Egypt began in earnest in 1883, funding was entirely secured through the relationship forged with public subscribers; among those who left written testimony of their

⁸³ As the next chapter will recount, the culmination of Sayce's revolt took place in Middle Egypt.

⁸⁴ See chapter 1 above.

⁸⁵ 'Murray's *Handbook for Constantinople*', *Athenaeum* (1 September 1900), 276.

reasons for subscribing almost all mention Schliemann and Homer, or George Smith's Deluge Tablets. Their adulation of the Hissarlik Troy is essential to comprehending why British audiences supported the archaeology of the 1880s and 1890s and to understanding what directions the new Egyptology carried them in.

The figure of Gladstone, despite (as four-times Prime Minister) being wholly unrepresentative, is nonetheless a helpful point of access to these readers. Gladstone did not just write more words on Homer than any other scholar of the century: he became dedicatee of a vast array of diverse Homeric works and his copies of some of these survive in his personal library for 'Godly learning' at Hawarden in Sir y Fflint. Gladstone was not always enamoured of the popular Homer industry he helped inspire: some of these votary offerings still have their pages uncut and few were subjected to his famous habit of profuse annotation. But these works are astonishing in their diversity and earnestness. Poetic contributions range from epic poems that tie the Bible and Homer together through either geographical setting or providential inspiration, to collections of shorter poetry that Christianize Homer by filtering the events of the Odyssey through forms derived from Milton ('Our English Homer').⁸⁶

There were texts that credit Solomon with the authorship of the *Iliad*; maps that attempt to demonstrate how the Homeric epics were inspired by the plight of Hebrews detached from the main cohort of the Exodus and settled in Greece; and romances that draw on Gladstone's authority when they describe Odysseus' presence at the court of Moses' Pharaoh. One of the strangest texts is a plush, gilt-edged, leather bound volume, *The Homeric Birthday Book*, which imitated the scriptural diaries poured forth by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, the Religious Tract Society and the multitude of other British mission organizations. Instead of Bible verses to

⁸⁶ Theodore Alois Buckley (ed.), *The Iliad of Homer: translated by Alexander Pope* (London, Ingram & Cooke, 1853), xxx; this 'Protestantization' of ancient and medieval material through the intermediary of Milton was a commonplace from the 1850s to the 1890s, e.g. William Bosanquet, *The Fall of Man, or Paradise Lost of Caedmon* (London: Longman, 1860) and S. Humphreys Gurteen, *The Epic of the Fall of Man: A Comparative Study of Caedmon, Dante, and Milton* (New York: Putnam, 1896), both of which will be scrutinized in the forthcoming work of Helen Brookman. In a subtly different way, Homer also helped aggrandize medieval English, e.g. Stopford Brooke, *History of Early English Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1892), 1:6, 'Widsith is our Ulysses'.

compose and fortify readers for the coming day, this volume contained short passages from the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. Not all these texts were obscure; many went into multiple editions. Henry Rider Haggard and Andrew Lang wrote a literary depiction of Moses and Odysseus meeting at the court of Pharaoh in *The World's Desire*. Lang, at the height of his critical influence, penned an introduction that used the authority of Gladstone to historicize this fairy-tale.⁸⁷ However, the influence or irrelevance of individual examples is perhaps less important than analysis of the impulses that generated this flood of profoundly eccentric enthusiasm for the preclassical world.

These impulses were rooted deep in the cultural conflicts of this period. They triggered Arthur Hugh Clough's anguished appeal for 'the word that could reconcile ancient and modern' when he found the Vatican adorned with pagan gods; they were at the core of the 'struggle' that Friedrich Delitzsch claimed occupied 'the mind of every thinking man'; they bit deep into debates on the nature and purposes of education just as the state finally began to provide compulsory schooling.⁸⁸ This was a battle of ancients and moderns just as existential, if less bloodthirsty, than that in eighteenth-century France. But many of its features were specific to the precise moments at which the debate was fought out. Gladstone's most earnest and enthusiastic Homeric work, *Studies on Homer* (3 volumes, 1858) claimed to show that the two great texts of the early world, the Old Testament and the *Iliad* could be used to elucidate one another; the details of society left out of one could be filled in from the other: the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* 'afford a most valuable collateral support to the credit of the Holy Scripture, considered as a document of history'.⁸⁹ He was explicit about the work's purpose as a challenge to textual criticism: it aimed to 'recover as substantial personages, and to bring within the grasp of flesh and blood some of those pictures, and even of those persons, whom Mr Grote has dismissed to the land of shadows and dream'.⁹⁰ Yet Gladstone went much further than this: Homer was raised to the status of sacred history with the argument that elements of divine revelation could be unpicked from the *Iliad*

⁸⁷ H. Rider Haggard & Andrew Lang, *The World's Desire* (new edition, London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1894), Preface to New Edition, xi.

⁸⁸ Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel and Bible* (trans. Thomas McCormack, London: Kegan Paul, 1902), 1.

⁸⁹ W. E. Gladstone, *Studies on Homer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1858), 2:8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 1:81.

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and *Odyssey*. The gods of Olympus were corruptions of, but corruptions only one small step removed from, the pure religion of the patriarchs; unprejudiced analysis of the *Iliad* would find Broad Church Christianity inscribed therein. This extraordinary work was the century's most sustained assertion that divine providence had been a universal commodity in the early world, and that the Homeric poems contained the most complete recollection of a genuine heroic age. Many of the eccentric works dedicated to Gladstone pursued his aim of casting off the pagan bricolage to recover the wholesome fare that lay beneath.

While Gladstone's ideas received short shrift from the press in 1858, their influence grew alongside the number of his imitators and the perceived relevance of his themes. This was in part because Gladstone's status as one of the century's greatest public figures meant that, amidst the archaeological enthusiasm of the 1870s, he was able to invest himself in the role of mediator between archaeologists and the public; but it was also a result of the building polemic, described above, in which the archaeology of the Near East became anti-Darwinian. Amidst intensifying debates over the epistemologies of religion, science and history, theologians and churchmen worried intensely about the relationship between biblical and classical literature. In the 1850s, scholars like William Smith and George Cornewall Lewis had countenanced the break-up of ancient texts like Homer and Livy while assuming that the Bible stood apart and could remain intact. But after 1860 Samuel Wilberforce's impassioned responses to *Essays and Reviews* presented critical assaults on the classics as a mere prelude—a warm up—for the unchecked aggression against the Old Testament that followed inevitably. Like Wilberforce, Gladstone believed that all forms of preclassical written authority had to stand or fall together. In 1858 this perspective had looked eccentric and reactionary. But the archaeological achievements of George Smith and Schliemann gradually reversed the balance of power. Gladstone's attitudes to the ancient world, once improbable and dogmatic, could now be asserted with confidence as empirically true.

Events at the modern site of Troy were given a broad archaeological context that drew them into an Eastern Mediterranean world encompassing Egypt and Mesopotamia. Schliemann inherited the mantle of Layard. Both were creators of 'intense sensations' that restored ancient literature to its rightful status as record of fact, not

tissue of fictions.⁹¹ At the end of the century Assyriologists and Egyptologists alike would look back to Schliemann's excavations as a turning point towards the empowerment of their disciplines. As A. H. Sayce put it:

With the excavations of Dr Schliemann a new era began in the study of antiquity. Criticism had either demolished the literary tradition or thrown such doubt on it as to make the scholar hesitate before he referred to it. The ages before the beginning of the so-called historical period in Greece had become a blank or almost a blank. They were like the maps of central Africa made some fifty years ago in which the one-eyed monsters or vast lakes which had occupied it in the maps of an earlier epoch were swept away and nothing was put in their place. It has been reserved for modern exploration to supply the vacant space, and to prove that, after all, the mountains of the moon and the lakes of the Portuguese map-makers had a foundation in fact.⁹²

After 1880, politics and archaeological discoveries turned the eyes of European antiquarians and historians towards Egypt. Following that trend, Schliemann sought permission to search for the tomb of Alexander the Great in the environs of Alexandria; and his spade was coveted by freshly established Egyptological societies. Only the veto of the Egyptian antiquities service (under continuing French control, one of the few institutions entirely immune to his charms) prevented British institutional Egyptology from beginning with Schliemann as its agent. Even that veto could not prevent Schliemann-mania shaping the British approach to archaeology along the Nile.

⁹¹ 'From our Constantinople Correspondent', *The Times* (5 June 1876), 12; Anon., 'Troy and Mycenae', *The Times* (12 April 1877), 8.

⁹² A. H. Sayce, *Higher Criticism and the Verdict of the Monuments* (London: SPCK, 1894), xiv.

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The Middle Kingdom

Orthodox Egypt, 1880–1900

Historians of nineteenth-century Britain write of the last quarter of the century as a period in which interest in the past lost its central position in British public life. Tudor history, Peter Mandler demonstrates, had galvanized popular interest until the 1870s; Jose Harris finds a ‘unique dominance of the present time’ in *fin de siècle* culture.¹ Duncan Bell has shown how the salience of Greece and Rome as models for political behaviour was gradually contested and cut away.² These analyses capture the etiolation of historical interests that had previously been intense and focused. However, both the volume of writing on historical themes, and the range of historical settings that were written about, continued to grow. The previous spotlight-intensity of debate on Tudor polity, Athenian democracy and medieval court-life spiralled outwards into diverse interest in dozens of historical arenas from ancient China to medieval Persia and the classical civilizations of Central America. A range of ‘Neo’ trends from Egyptian, Assyrian and Byzantine to Aztec, proliferated, providing diverse new historical models, but also fuelling concerns that British culture had lost its core. The volume of writing on Greece and Rome also rose, although it would never again be integrated into public life as it was during the premierships of Gladstone and Disraeli. Nor was the taste for gothic architecture spent: as Charles Dellheim argued,

¹ Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

² Duncan Bell, ‘From Ancient to Modern in Victorian Imperial Thought’, *Historical Journal*, 49:3 (2006), 1–25.

London appeared more medieval in 1900 than at any point since 1666.³

The 1880s press recognized the persistence of appeals to the historical. They were aware that even while the direct political usefulness of the past declined, its cultural presence refused to diminish. 'Much of the poetry of the present time is critical or archaeological', wrote *The Academy* in 1882, 'that is to say, our poets, sharing the main tendencies of the epoch, manifest a bias toward the past'.⁴ British music of this period from Granville Bantock's youthful ballet on *Ramses II* (the first of a projected six-part sequence of Egyptological orchestral works) to Edward Elgar's *Froissart*, took ancient and medieval history as a chief thematic resource. The ambitious *New Music Quarterly Review* decided to announce its foundation in 1893 with a series of 'progressive' articles on opera. It was perfectly typical of this moment that 'progressive' did not preclude the preclassical: the series opened with Rubinstein's *Moses* before Berlioz's *Troyens*; it then leapt forward to the comparative modernity of Enna's *Cleopatra*. The magnum opus of one of the journal's editors was an opera set in medieval Persia (on the life of *Omar Khayyam*); the other editor's crowning achievement was a primeval *Creation Symphony*.⁵ Architects and artists, too, discovered the modernism that supposedly released them from the distant past only in the new century.

Egypt benefited greatly from this diversification and cultural empowerment of the past. Increased British entanglement in Egyptian politics meant that Egypt even bucked the trend of history's attenuation from political life. Fed by both political associations and surging archaeological enthusiasm, ancient Egypt's reception was strikingly different after 1880 from everything it had been in the mid century. The wanton Egypt of Ezekiel and Pusey slid into the void; in its place there flourished a different imagined society celebrated for creativity

³ Charles Dellheim, *The Face of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 10.

⁴ 'Tristram of Lyonesse', *Academy*, 22 (1882), 93.

⁵ The ostensible denial of 'history' in the arts over the following decades frequently involved turns to the ancient Near East via Homer and the Bible: one has only to think of Patrick Kavanagh's invocation of Adam's naming of the beasts in the very breath that asserted his exclusively presentist concerns, or the density of typological reference in the modernist novel from Proust to Joyce and beyond: H. D.'s Egyptian Helen, Schönberg's *Moses und Aron*, and Yeats's sphinxes and mummy-cloth paradoxically enwrapped modernism's denial of the high Victorian age.

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and vigour. The towering storm clouds of Turner and Martin had been dispersed by the beating sun, perfumed groves and azure firmaments of Alma Tadema and Edwin Long. Fearsome prophets had been replaced by sensuous queens, priestesses and concubines. Pharaohs, from Ramesses II to the great new celebrity of the 1890s, Akhenaten, gained something akin to personality, even individuality: they became more than mere ciphers for debased grandeur or targets for holy wrath. Indeed, like Thomas Mann's Jakob and Joseph they became fundamentally modern. Pharaohs, whether in Egyptological publications or the burgeoning field of historical fiction, were now more likely to be pugnacious engineers or visionary astronomers than blood-soaked tyrants. Hieroglyphic texts were finally worked deep into histories of ancient Egypt, and at the beginning of this decade the first British texts were produced that conform loosely to the generic conventions of the excavation report.

This all seems to imply a substantive revocation of biblical Egypt, a turn to secular and historical concerns, and the creation of a disciplinary identity for Egyptologists at one remove from their church and chapel audiences. Few implications could be more misleading than these. The 1880s are in fact the high tide of the British public's relationship with biblical Egypt and the moment when Egyptologists in Britain were most intensely engrossed in the pages of the Pentateuch. Egyptology's publicizers badgered away at the biblical text, shifting emphases from oppression to freedom, from barbarity to spirituality. Joseph's career (despite its unfortunate accidents) demonstrated the egalitarian potential in Egypt's social structure; Moses' education in the wisdom of the Egyptians was a legacy that persisted in the present thanks to practical-spiritual England; Egyptians were not pantomime villains, but Ruskinian initiates whose king was father-in-law to Solomon.

Egyptological authority remained gloriously diffuse, uneasily shared between museum curators, historians, astronomers and clergymen as well as excavators. The distinction between popularizer and practitioner remained impossible to draw. Interpretation of Near Eastern archaeology was still dissonant with that of Europe because of continuing insistence that Egypt and Babylonia had no prehistory. This helped Egyptology develop an extraordinarily close relationship with church and chapel readers. In the 1880s a biblically inspired constituency provided the bulk of Egyptology's readership: they revelled in the proofs and illustrations of the Bible that archaeologists,

year on year, appeared to unearth, and they clamoured to assist in the recovery of more.

Much of the Egyptological writing of this period is exceptionally vivid and infectiously celebratory. It draws Egypt into an integrated Mediterranean world; it domesticates instead of exoticizing and stresses creativity and civility rather than futility or bombast. With discoveries coming thick and fast, and British archaeology briefly moving to the cutting edge of international Egyptology, the writers of the 1880s had an astonishing range of material to work with. The British Museum antiquarian R. S. Poole set out the salient features of this exuberant new Egyptology in his 1882 *Cities of Egypt*. ‘Buried cities’, he wrote, ‘have thrown off the grave-clothes which had enwrapped them for thousands of years, and risen to tell us their story . . . to fill the ages of oblivion once more with the joy of overflowing life’.⁶ ‘Egypt’ he stated, ‘obliterates time and brings the present and the past together as by magic art’; Memphis and Thebes ‘of all the capitals of the world speak most eloquently of the times that are past, and echo the thoughts of forgotten ages’.⁷ The imaginative barriers between the modern world and the biblical era seemed to be crumbling at unprecedented speed as Egypt was humanized and its prophetic sting neutralized.

Assessments of the ancient Egyptian ‘national character’ were now almost universally positive, defined by vivacity and intense spirituality rather than the barbarity and fatalism that had once been attached to them. To Flinders Petrie the Egyptians of the Old Kingdom were ‘one of the finest peoples ever seen . . . full of grand conceptions, active, able, highly mechanical, and yet splendid artists . . . no later age or country has advanced beyond their early ability’; their moral character was one of ‘reserve, steadfastness and kindness’ evident in their literature and portraiture.⁸ Egypt was now the stem on which Greek thought was grafted; a ‘wondrous school’ that would never be effaced from modern science: it was ‘the grand ancestor of us all’.⁹ For all the careless cruelty and severe discipline described in *Exodus*, wrote Margaret Benson in the *Edinburgh Review*, this was a nation that upheld a standard of equal justice, a devotion to mercy and the

⁶ R. S. Poole, *Cities of Egypt* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1882), 33–4.

⁷ *Ibid.* 63.

⁸ Anon (ed.), *Progress of the Century* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1901), 83.

⁹ W. M. Flinders Petrie, ‘Archaeology in Egypt’, *Archaeological Review* (1888), 413.

duty of the rich towards the helpless; 'there is a fullness of life and youth about the Egyptians which renders even ludicrous the conception of them as a monotonous people under the shadow of the grave'.¹⁰ In Egyptian religion each soul stood before the judgement seat of a righteous God to attest that he had not oppressed the poor nor caused the slave to be ill treated. 'Faith, Hope, and Charity are manifested at every step' in the history of the 'cradle of the religion of the Western World' wrote Erasmus Wilson; study of pre-Christian Egypt was required in order to 'comprehend Christianity fully'.¹¹

Travellers, too, were carried away by this new spiritual Egypt. Margaret Benson (*The Edinburgh's* writer, above) was daughter of an Archbishop of Canterbury; in the 1880s she became enamoured with Egyptian 'beliefs about the soul'.¹² She journeyed to Egypt, where her diaries and letters demonstrate a rapid accumulation of surprise and bewilderment as pharaonic antiquities begin to resonate with unexpected intensity: 'I never thought I should care about Egyptian things so much'; 'Do you know how much ritual Moses got from Egypt? It was quite new to me'.¹³ She extolled the worthy 'moral maxims' of the Egyptians, and even wrote of confessing sins to the sphinx.¹⁴ The tightening grip of Egyptian spirituality led Benson, with Janet Gourlay, to excavate the Temple of Mut at Ashur, near Thebes, becoming the first women to lead Egyptian excavations. 'A friend', her brother recorded, said that 'there was something in the mystery and dignity of those old beliefs that corresponded to the awe and reverence for religion that existed in her own soul'.¹⁵

Benson was not at all unusual in this embrace of Egyptian 'mystery and dignity'. The different attitudes of two Bishops of Bath and Wells can illustrate the widespread reorientation of attitudes. The mid-century Bishop, George Henry Law, had constructed a megalithic folly in his garden, versifying in its inscriptions his mockery of all pagan societies; his evangelical successor Lord Hervey, under the influence of Gladstone, committed vocal (and material) support to

¹⁰ Margaret Benson, 'The Plain of Thebes', *Edinburgh Review*, 186 (October 1897), 482, 481.

¹¹ Erasmus Wilson, *Recent Archaic Discovery of Ancient Egyptian Mummies at Thebes* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883), v.

¹² A. C. Benson, *Letters and life of Maggie Benson* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1917), 153.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 164–6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 152.

excavations in Egypt intended to rediscover and rehabilitate this pagan but worthy ancient culture.¹⁶

The practical, technical Egyptians were also revived. Speculation on Egyptian technology became a frequent feature of fiction (often echoing Poe's 'Some Words With a Mummy' of 1845); Grant Allen, for instance, gave his Egyptians Lucifer matches and chloroform.¹⁷ This speculation also appeared in works on engineering and architecture where pyramids continued to be compared with railways (although rarely now with Thomas Toke Lynch's outrage at unconscionable 'pride!'). It flourished in archaeological texts, where A. H. Sayce insisted that

Professor Flinders Petrie has shown that some of the blocks used in the construction of the great pyramid at Gizeh were cut by means of tubular drills fitted, if not with diamond points, at all events with a similar material. The invention was rediscovered in our own day when the Mont Cénis tunnel was half completed.¹⁸

The archaeology of the previous decade fertilized the ground in which new attitudes to Egypt were propagated. References back to Schliemann and George Smith are frequent and deliberate reminders of the proven power of the spade. To Isaac Taylor progress in identifying events and places in ancient Egypt could only be made 'in the way by which Schliemann determined the site of Troy, namely by systematic excavation'.¹⁹ Amelia Edwards preferred to evoke the discoveries of Smith, advocating Egyptology as

a cause of such supreme interest, biblically, historically, archaeologically that one marvels how it should need advocating at all. Remembering the

¹⁶ A. C. Hervey was a subscriber to the EEF who crops up repeatedly in their archival material. For an account of Law's attitudes to pre-Christian religion see Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999, 2001 edn), 10.

¹⁷ Allen wrote this piece under the pseudonym J. Arbuthnot Wilson: 'My New Year's Eve Among the Mummies', *Belgravia* (1879), 93–105; he penned two other Egyptologically inspired short stories: 'The Miraculous Explorer' and 'A Professor of Egyptology'.

¹⁸ A. H. Sayce, 'Egypt' in Hermann Hilprecht (ed.), *Recent Research in Bible Lands* (Philadelphia: J. D. Wattles, 1896), 102.

¹⁹ Isaac Taylor, 'The Hebrew Exodus', *Good Words* (1889), 462; Taylor was an extraordinary late nineteenth-century polymath, equally notorious for his prediction that Islam, not Christianity, would 'civilize' Africa as for his theory that European cultures from the Basques to the Finns were Etruscans in disguise.

enthusiasm excited by the discovery of the Chaldean deluge tablets, one asks with wonder how that enthusiasm is compatible with our indifference to the far more momentous discoveries which await the Egyptian explorer.

Egyptologists used Schliemann and Smith to demonstrate to their audiences that archaeology could be constructive of biblical authority and, Smith having passed away in 1876, they clamoured for Schliemann's services. Over the course of a single decade the impulse to fear Egyptian discoveries had been overturned and their ensuing embrace radiates something akin to relief. Resistance to radical-critical ideas and openness to the idea of Egyptian wisdom show just how far the Egypts of Bunsen and Pusey had fallen from favour.²⁰

This shift is not just evident in the book-length publications of Petrie or Poole, but leaps from the pages of the press across all the spectra of politics, religion and social class. Through the late 1870s Amelia Edwards had campaigned tirelessly for newspaper coverage of the work of Egyptologists. By 1880 she was able to congratulate herself that columns had been 'thrown open' to archaeology and papers had developed their own specialized interests. Extensive coverage of ancient Egypt could soon be found in periodicals ranging from the eclectic but elite *Academy* (whose founding editor died on an Egyptological tour in 1879) to the 'puritanic' *Daily News*, the Methodist *British Critic*, the rationalizing *Nineteenth Century* and the less portentous pages of illustrated media like *The Graphic*.

In all these periodicals a new generation of writers on Egypt cut their teeth through criticism of traditional approaches to the civilization. In her *Academy* review of Erasmus Wilson's *Cleopatra's Needle*, for instance, Edwards aims to dissociate Egypt from the vulgarity and bombast Wilson had ascribed it. She chastises him for failing to recognize that an obelisk is not a mere 'triumphal erection' but a 'divine symbol', its construction 'a pious act rather than an act of self-commemoration'.²¹ At the same time, major works of French and German Egyptology of the previous generation were translated into English for the first time, including those of Dumichen, Lenormant, Lepsius, and Maspero. These opened up a new ancient Egypt not

²⁰ For instance, Poole, *Cities of Egypt*, 32.

²¹ To Egyptology's great benefit, she soon won the wealthy industrialist round to her view of the pharaohs; Amelia Edwards, 'Review of Sir Erasmus Wilson, *Cleopatra's Needle*', *Academy*, 21 (1882), 183.

shaped by the sternest traditions in British religion, but originator of much of the best in modern civilization.

The intention of this chapter is to elucidate and explain the development of these new emphases in Britain's repertoire of ancient Egypt. But first it is necessary to say a little about the histories of Egyptology that this analysis contradicts. Accepted wisdom in some academic circles holds that

the last traces of the Hermetic, Platonic and Masonic respect for Egypt were being expelled from academia [in the late 1870s and 1880s], and a full-scale attack on the older Egyptology was launched a few years later. . . . One might think that having been stripped of civilisation, religion and philosophy, the Egyptians might have been allowed the shred of metaphysics. However, the tidal wave of racism could not even tolerate this. . . . I think it is fair to say that this essentially racist attitude of scepticism about, and scorn for, Egyptian achievements was predominant in Egyptology throughout the high tide of imperialism between 1880 and 1950.²²

This comes from the second volume of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*, the most canonical (though far from foundational) text of Afrocentric readings of Egyptian history. While I have nothing of interest to say concerning Bernal's arguments on the origin of Egyptian civilization itself, this treatment of late nineteenth-century Egyptology demands a rebuttal: it almost perfectly inverts the changes that were underway.

It has also been assumed that this moment saw the separation of the new discipline of Egyptology from tired traditions of biblical archaeology: that technical development and disciplinary secularization were inseparable, and that 'real' archaeology began c.1880, at which point 'objectivity' conquered a field that had previously been shaped by hazy metaphysical speculation. Within this framework, the biblical enthusiasms of the new Egyptological organizations of the 1880s have been studiously ignored, as have the scriptural preoccupations which remained with Flinders Petrie long after the rejection

²² Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: the Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 1:259. Bernal has influenced a large body of Afrocentrist literature, and similar sentiments can be found in much post-Said Orientalism scholarship, such as Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; 1986); the scheme has also been accepted by most studies of twentieth-century Egyptology, e.g. Claudia Breger, 'Imperialist Fantasy and Displaced Memory: Twentieth-Century German Egyptologies', *New German Critique*, 96 (2005), 135–69.

of his wildest, Piazzì Smyth-inspired, early theories. In conjunction with this it is often assumed that expertise in the Egyptian language quickly undercut the need for reliance on the Old Testament: Egyptological works that employ hieroglyphic and hieratic texts are assumed to be secular in comparison with earlier models that are shaped by interests born in the pages of the Old Testament and elaborated through the claims of Strabo and Diodorus Siculus. None of these assumptions holds true: it was resurgent interest in biblical and classical questions that inspired and drove the great technical developments of the 1880s and early 1890s.

One problem that has compromised interpretation of this period's Egyptology emerges from confusion surrounding the issue of secularization itself; many histories of Egyptology are still founded on the assumption that a simple and monolithic process of secularization underlay the 'progress' of these decades. This is not the place to embark on detailed argument over the truths and fallacies contained in the idea that society in 1900 was more secular than in 1800; but any attempt to analyse the development of Egyptology over the *fin-de-siècle* decades, in which its relationship with religion was transformed, does demand that we ask what forms of secularization were at work as the process of disciplinarization took place.

The history of ideas is more relevant to this study than the social history that dominates current debate over secularization. Statistics that chart the number of churchgoers in Britain might be helpful indicators of changes in the 'religious fabric of the nation', but they tell us nothing about the presence of religious ideas in cultural and intellectual life, or about prevailing perceptions of the nature and scope of religion itself. The great social and political developments of *fin-de-siècle* Britain were, to an astonishing degree, infused with religious ideals. Nowhere else in the world would the new socialism that displaced nineteenth-century radicalism be so profoundly religious ('Pray devoutly, hammer stoutly' ran the Fabian motto; Labour churches and socialist Sunday schools developed hymns, catechisms and commandments).²³ At the same time, intense and existential disputes over the fundamental relationships between reason and faith generated a dizzying panoply of alternative spiritualities (and

²³ On the idiosyncratic nature of British socialism see Ross McKibbin, 'Why was there no Marxism in Great Britain?' in *Ideologies of Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Egyptologists were frequently drawn into this spiritual diversification). Despite A. N. Wilson's claim that 'by the end of the nineteenth century almost all the great writers, artists and intellectuals had abandoned their belief in Christianity', secularism, as the outright rejection of belief, is barely a significant story of the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Even the most outspoken critics of contemporary Christianity, such as Goldwin Smith, were usually disdainful of secularism: the term agnosticism was anathema to this great freethinker because it implied 'despair of spiritual truth'.²⁴ Apart from a few exceptional figures it is phenomenally difficult to find genuinely secular thinkers in these decades. Despite gaining their first MP in 1876, the 'atheists' about whom religious thinkers complained usually turn out to be rhetorical devices—bogeymen lurking in the urban smog—rather than living advocates of a genuinely materialist philosophy. The politician and novelist Justin McCarthy recognized this, admitting that although they were rumoured to be 'a power in the land' all the 'positivists' in London would fit into 'a small drawing room'.²⁵

The secularization of political institutions did contribute to perceptions of a society in which religion was stripped of some former powers (a trope that had existed since the sixteenth century). But in the 1880s this brand of secularization was famously driven by zealously religious figures who resented establishment monopolies. The flashpoint of this process might be identified in Gladstone's betrayal of his devout nonconformist supporters when he reneged on his alleged agreement to disestablish the Church of England.²⁶ Uneven moves towards institutional secularization were accompanied by contested and gradual transfer of some domains of knowledge from the umbrella of religious authority to secular epistemologies: sexuality, moral psychology and racial theory are prime late nineteenth-century examples. These trends were far from novel, however; they might be identified a century earlier, at the apex of the archetypal religious revival, when history itself was loosed from its theological anchorage.

²⁴ Goldwin Smith, *Guesses at the Riddle of Existence* (New York: Macmillan, 1897), vii.

²⁵ Justin McCarthy, *Reminiscences* (London: Harper, 1899), 2:206.

²⁶ Stewart Brown, *Providence and Empire* (Harlow: Pearson, 2008), 312–18.

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It was through reflection on, and resistance to, these slow reorientations that discussion of secularization gained wider currency in the 1880s than ever before. This intensified perception of a secularizing society is the important development for our purposes here. Egyptology, now figured as a Christian science, played a significant role in the debate inspired by the idea of secularization; enthusiasm for Egyptology was encouraged by public belief in the embattled character of British Christianity (and, in putting Egyptological science at the service of religion, clergymen showed that they were not above making use of the pluralization of authority). This debate, too, had a long prehistory. In the late eighteenth century, the loosening grip of religion had been a favourite theme of revivalist preachers who lamented the moribund state of religious institutions in industrial centres.²⁷ The phenomenon then took a very different form amongst elite *litterateurs* after 1860 whose ‘crisis of faith’ and later ‘warfare of science with religion’ provided the conceptual frameworks that would be elaborated into secularization theory by turn-of-the-century sociologists. The phenomenon underwent further transformations in the late nineteenth century as biblical criticism, rationalist science and secular philosophies became everyday, familiar presences in a mass-circulation media. Associated with this popularization, the period saw unprecedentedly diverse interrogation of the possible place of religion in a world of diffuse authority.

A. H. Sayce noted, with dismay, the flowering of dangerous ideas, drawn from sceptical German criticism, in the popular press after 1870s. By the 1890s he had fashioned a public persona as publicist for the knowledge of ancient history that could equip readers to evade the higher critics’ grasp. This circulation of controversial knowledge, and widening recognition of the potential for secularism, was identified with characteristic precision by a shining star of one of the great (but strangely forgotten) intellectual clans of the period, William Henry Simcox:

²⁷ For the modalities of this see William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country as Contrasted with Real Christians* (London: T. Cadell, 1797); an indication of the familiarity of this trope in the early nineteenth century can be found in Carlyle’s ‘Signs of the Times’: ‘the “State in Danger” is a condition of things, which we have witnessed a hundred times; and as for the Church, it has seldom been out of “danger” since we can remember it’.

there is probably still a majority of educated Englishmen who believe as heartily as they believed five-and-twenty years ago, not only in the truth of the Bible, but in the plenary inspiration of the Bible. Still, before 1860, they not only believed in these doctrines, but thought that the world was agreed on them, that all who doubted them were actuated by dislike of moral restraint, or vanity, or at best by a habit of paradoxical reasoning that had destroyed their common sense. But between 1860 and 1870 they learnt that in both points their belief was rejected by men who were virtuous, candid and intelligent; between 1870 and 1882 they have learnt that virtuous, candid, and intelligent men may be not only unorthodox or rationalistic thinkers, but in the common sense of the words, atheists and materialists.²⁸

What Sayce and Simcox observed is not secularization itself but a gradual ‘putting into discourse’ of secularization in the generation before secularization theory proper was formulated. They indicate a shift of emphasis: this was not just the age-old concern for those whose Christianity was attenuated by the twin threats of the gaming-table and public house; it involved attention being turned towards thinkers (prominent, but still small in number) whose earnest pursuit of moral truth found its metier outside Christian cosmologies and in nominally secular philosophies. The responses this discourse drew forth can be characterized only by their diversity (some of them are mapped with extraordinary sensitivity by Alex Owen in *The Place of Enchantment*); many of them contributed to intensified attachment to religious denominations and, more importantly for our purposes, to scriptural narratives.²⁹

The American Presbyterian minister Charles Robinson in 1887 exemplified one of these possible responses in his exposition of reasons for donating money to London Egyptology and publishing in its support:

Volumes and tracts are issued, entitled ‘Moses demolished’ and ‘Moses defied by history’; and hitherto the church of the living God has had to labour under a serious embarrassment. The annals of that land where beginnings had been located were so scant that it was

²⁸ W. H. Simcox, ‘Natural religion by the author of *Ecce Homo*’, *Academy*, 22 (1882), 41.

²⁹ Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); see also Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 63–110.

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difficult to keep our hold against the repeated derision of ribald sceptics.³⁰

Robinson's polarization of anti-biblical/biblical and sceptical/Christian is characteristically Presbyterian in its starkness. But many other impassioned advocacies of Egyptian mysticism, including those penned by Margaret Benson and R. S. Poole, demonstrate warmer, less chiliastic, expressions of the same distinction between secular and Christian that pervades discussion of Egyptology in the 1880s press.

Egypt was now almost exclusively a resource of the Bible Christians: deist Egypt, higher-critical Egypt and Unitarian Egypt had been entombed for good. Egyptology entered sermons and devotional aids not as Pusey's retributive threat, but as a source of hope. Egyptologists and Assyriologists became prophets fulfilling a divine appointment, comparable to Old Testament patriarchs in that they were entrusted with the task of conducting God's word to the people of their age:

God had a purpose in hiding [Egypt's confirmation of the Bible] beneath the accumulation of ages. When in our day infidelity has become rampant, when the Old Testament has with great confidence been pronounced a mass of fables, the very stones have risen from the ground to verify in baked brick and tablet and rock and cylinder what of the sacred records had been fiercely assailed by a sceptical criticism.³¹

This popular discourse defined late nineteenth-century Egyptology by dictating how its practitioners and popularizers communicated with the expanding audiences that funded them. Egyptology's new-found popularity was formed and sustained by this range of efforts to undercut scientific naturalism, rationalism, sceptical criticism of the Bible, and secularism itself. Indeed, the central assertion of this chapter is that after 1880 Egyptology became a powerful component in a broad fight-back of popular religion against perceived 'irreligious' tendencies in British intellectual life.

This book has so far emphasized the persistence of biblical and classical sources in interpretation of ancient Egypt, and the very

³⁰ Charles Robinson, *Pharaohs of the Bondage and the Exodus* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1887) 17; Robinson was an American minister and frequent visitor to London where he lectured in association with the EEF. The first chapter of *Pharaohs* explains that it was in London rather than New York that he partook in the popular ferment surrounding the new Egyptology.

³¹ Andrew Archibald, *The Bible verified* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board, 1890), 234.

gradual adoption of material derived from Egyptian texts and archaeology. Since this chapter deals with the moment when hieroglyphic, hieratic and archaeological sources finally began to define the shape of histories of Egypt its emphasis will be different. Yet there is a new and unexpected paradox to negotiate: there has been no moment in the history of British Egyptology when the Bible and Herodotus have played a more powerful and prominent role than they did in the 1880s. As the closest comprehensible sources to baffling texts like the Book of the Dead, these familiar traditions became crucial bridges from the modern world into the seemingly incomprehensible chaos of primeval mythologies.

When Egyptian cosmology became apprehensible through translation, existing texts became the mediators that could make what was apprehensible comprehensible (to borrow T. S. Eliot's favourite distinction). Similarly, when structures submerged in Egyptian sand became accessible through archaeology, well-known traditions promised to render the accessible legible. One way of interpreting this use of familiar biblical books to comprehend unfamiliar Eastern landscape would be to consider the Old Testament an 'enframing' device. This Heidegger-inspired term is used by Timothy Mitchell, in his magisterial study of the imposition of Turkish and European power on Egyptian society, to indicate outside practices for imposing orderly, over-determined plans on colonized societies in order to render a country object-like, 'picture-like and legible... readable, like a book'.³² Indeed, few assertions could be more 'colonialist' than that which made the religion of intruders rather than that of inhabitants the 'correct' means of making sense not only of landscape, flora and fauna but also of modern social 'manners' and 'customs'. However, I want to leave this important power relation to one side for the moment simply because it can so easily overshadow the fact that there are many other revealing dynamics at work. In particular, it is important to recognize that these 'enframing' devices were often used for local rather than imperial purposes. The legitimacy that writers on Egyptology seek rarely relates primarily to political and international insecurities, but rather to ones that seem superficially much more parochial and personal; the most complex and revealing arguments these writers deploy concern existential questions rather

³² Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 33.

than issues of international relations. To consider this phenomenon only in its colonialist aspect is therefore to flatten out the intricate textures of the religious, historical and scientific thought that is on show. Equally, it is important to determine why, as well as how, late nineteenth-century successors to Eneas Mackenzie's Newcastle non-conformists imposed particular models of historical time on the Egyptian past.

The forcing-together of venerable and novel forms of knowledge—the relative authority of which was always open to negotiation—makes this one of the most intriguingly complex periods in the history of Egyptology. The fact that the political setting in which Egyptologists worked was also fractured and contested in increasingly complex ways adds a further dimension to an already kaleidoscopic phenomenon. The 1880s and 1890s were therefore a far more important and revelatory moment in the history of Egyptology than any existing text lets on. The fact that this chapter will undercut so much accepted wisdom concerning Egyptology after 1880 places an imposing burden of proof upon it. This will be the chapter in which the injunctions of the introduction are carried out most fully, and in which the largest range of evidence from published and unpublished primary sources is set to use. This evidence is astonishingly lively and exciting in its own right; it is also of peculiar importance: it brings into focus the work of Flinders Petrie, indisputably the most significant figure in the history of British Egyptology. Reconstructing his gravitational influence on the slowly coalescing nebulae of a discipline is crucial to everyone with an interest in Egyptology's past.

OCCUPATION AND ARCHAEOLOGY

In 1882 John Bright (impassioned advocate of Lewis Morris's *Epic of Hades*, above) resigned from Gladstone's cabinet in the face of what he called 'a manifest violation both of International Law and of the moral law'. This was the British occupation of Egypt that followed the decades of increasing European interference in Egyptian affairs described so compellingly by Timothy Mitchell. Even hardened Tories had once insisted that direct political meddling in Egypt was highly undesirable, yet Gladstone's supposedly anti-imperial cabinet chose to safeguard British assets in Cairo and Alexandria by dispatching a

fleet to quell the Urabi revolt. They bombarded Alexandria then embarked on terrestrial conflict around Cairo and ultimately engaged militia throughout much of the Delta. What followed can only be called ‘mission creep’, as the British government pursued an occupation from which they frequently spoke of extricating themselves but always found excuses to remain.

The confusion and contingency of the political compromises that emerged when the first waves of fighting stopped were shaped by the extraordinary complexity of urban society in the Eastern Mediterranean. Glorious cosmopolitan centres like Smyrna, Alexandria, Cairo and Beirut had become increasingly adorned with the cultural utilities that also graced the capitals of Europe: theatres, museums and sweeping boulevards. Palaces, harbours and monumental sculpture acted as flamboyant enunciations of the royal and mercantile power that thrived on the region’s pre-eminent position in international trade. Praise of the cosmopolitan grandeur of these cities was sung loudly. *All the Year Round* featured frequent criticism of the region’s Westernization; one correspondent noted French eulogies to Alexandria and commented on the contemporary consensus that the city seamlessly fused ‘all the splendours of Paris with the mysterious interest of Damascus’.³³

As Egypt’s face onto the Mediterranean, Alexandria had a diverse populace which was seen to interact differently from similarly booming cosmopolitan centres like New York. In Alexandria, commentators noted, linguistic and cultural diversity was high, with less apparent pressure towards cultural assimilation and greater openness to the economic and social specialization of cultural enclaves. Banking, for instance was largely conducted by those—British, Greek, Jewish and French—who were more comfortable with usury than the Muslim majority. As the economic power invested in pursuits like banking grew, the strings of power had been distributed between an array of puppeteers whose origins and commitments were as diverse and potentially fractious as their understanding of political economy and moral propriety. There were those from all parts of this population who saw European possessiveness over antiquities as a potential source of political conflict.

³³ ‘A Short Flight into Egypt’, *All the Year Round* (9 September 1882), 158.

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In 1856, the first railway outside Europe was opened: it ran from Alexandria to Cairo. Designed by Robert Stephenson and commissioned by Ibrahim Pasha's short-lived successor Abbas I (assassinated before its opening), it was extended to Luxor by the end of the century. The Suez Canal, with its attendant conflicts and jealousies, further ingrained French and British interests and facilitated the easy movement of European traders and travellers. It became a symbol of engineering power that was given grand historical pedigree, 'ancient and modern' in W. S. Lindsay's *History of Merchant Shipping and Ancient Commerce* (volumes 3 & 4, 1876). In the year of its opening, 1869, 'Mr Thomas Cook, wood-turner, printer [and] Baptist missionary' used steamships to 're-open the Nile lands for Western and Northern holiday-makers' and the number of European visitors increased as rapidly as the costs and hardships of travel plummeted.³⁴ The first tours were peopled by an incongruous combination of Bible-wielding churchmen and social gadflies, the latter drawn into a burgeoning tourist infrastructure not by temples and tombs but by 'admirable *table d'hôte*, the ministrations of a competent *chef* and *maitre d'hôtel*, a good orchestra, a commodious lounge, a cosmopolitan society in the best of tempers [and] perhaps a dance'.³⁵ The Prince and Princess of Wales, on their own 1860s Egyptian trip ('since the Crusades . . . no European princess had ever been seen in the land of the Pharaohs'), were as great a tourist-draw as the monuments of ancient royals:

Imagine Thebes, the hundred-gated city, with a tourist at each portal to intercept the royal visitors! Picture the most enterprising of Cook's party perched among the ruins of Luxor and Karnak, armed with the newest binoculars! And last, but not least, conceive the feelings of the occupants of the royal dahabeah on finding themselves convoyed to the Catacombs by a motley flotilla, manned and womaned by a Cook's company!³⁶

³⁴ Sidney Low, *Egypt in Transition* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1914), 155.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 159.

³⁶ *Morning Post*, quoted in W. R. H. Trowbridge, *Queen Alexandra* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1921), 240; by the following decade dozens of similar juxtapositions of venerable monuments with society tourists can be found, particularly at the pyramids: A. J. M. Bentley's guide for convalescents *Wintering in Egypt* places typical emphases: 'The whole number of the hotel waiters had mounted to the summit at midnight to welcome in the New Year. To see the darkness lit up with Bengal lights, and to hear from the top of that monument of antiquity the well-known sounds of

Over the following decades 1869 was widely identified as the moment when Egypt ‘began to yield to the vandalizing influence of the West’; as John Bright’s resignation suggests, 1882 amplified this influence onto a wholly new scale.³⁷ Despite the protestations ascribed to tourists ‘that Egypt would be a very pleasant country if it were not for the antiquities’ many Egyptological discoveries of the last quarter of the century were made by visitors ‘drawn to the banks of the Nile for health or amusement, or driven thither by the imperious command of Fashion’.³⁸ Flinders Petrie’s excavation sites were frequented by a flow of well-to-do Britons and some, Amarna for instance, became stops for Cook’s steamers while excavators were still at work.

In some circles biblical prophecy shaped interpretation of this situation: a Christian compunction to herald foreign rule in Egypt as inevitable and wonderful still operated. Ezekiel chapter 30 prophesied that ‘there shall be no more a prince in Egypt: the sceptre of Egypt shall pass away’. In keeping with this, British travellers noted, centuries of ‘effort to create a native Egyptian prince’ had ‘proved abortive’: Rome, Persia, Arabia, Turkey, and now England all had their divinely sanctioned day instead.³⁹ ‘Is not this truly marvellous’, asked the *Sunday at Home* (‘a family magazine for Sabbath reading’ published by Petrie’s patrons the Religious Tract Society): ‘the word of God cannot be bound, the fulfilment of its prophecies cannot be hindered’.⁴⁰

Religion and history also played key roles in determining the much-discussed responsibilities of England to Egypt. The nurturing of the Coptic Church was much debated and even written into the priorities of Egyptological organizations. The Copts were given an extraordinary number of different roles in narratives of Egyptian history. Sheldon Amos (Professor of Jurisprudence at Cambridge and evangelical anti-prostitution campaigner) insisted that ‘the Coptic language is undoubtedly, the language of pre-Christian or ancient Egypt’.⁴¹ Egyptologists were regularly approached by broad-church campaigners who sought ‘to revive the Coptic Church in

“God save the Queen” was an experience weird in the extreme’. See also p.119; Tim Larsen, ‘Spiritual Exploration’ in *Contested Christianity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004).

³⁷ Trowbridge, *Queen Alexandra*, 236.

³⁸ ‘Recent Lights on Ancient Egypt’, *Quarterly Review* (1904), 48.

³⁹ ‘The Land of the Pharaohs’, *Sunday at Home* (1884), 265.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Sheldon Amos, ‘Copts as a Political Factor’, *Academy* (November 1883), 644–59.

Egypt' and to translate 'our Church liturgy' into Coptic and Arabic. The campaign ran into constant difficulties, however; especially when stricter churchmen took a hard line, 'refusing all tolerance to the soul-destroying heresy of the Copts'.⁴² Opinion remained divided on whether the Copts were a living legacy of the pristine early Church or a dissolute perversion of its principles.

A much more vigorously pursued objective was the establishment of modern governance through the expansion of Muhammad Ali's hard-won industrial infrastructure. The imposition of political force after 1882 saw railways (often military supply routes) penetrate regions as distant from Mediterranean trade routes as the Sudan. Assisted by the spread of locomotive technologies the 'ranks of the corps of the interpreters of the Past' were soon engaged in their own descent on the country. Roads, telegraphs, railways and police stations allowed excavators and travellers to follow on the heels of militia and administrators. This was a particularly concrete embodiment of a relationship that played out around the Eastern Mediterranean.⁴³

Similar archaeological productivity was stimulated by the railway line between Assiout and the Fayoum that was built in the 1880s to develop Egypt's 'material resources' (which at this point meant cotton). It was no coincidence that it was in the year the railway was built that this region, 'forgotten till yesterday' in the words of J. P. Mahaffy, suddenly 'excited the interest of Egyptian scholars'.⁴⁴ Among the 'material resources' conveyed in the inaugural years of the Assiout-Fayoum railway were famous Ptolemaic mummy cases (now displayed in gallery 62 of the British Museum) and hundreds of significant Greek papyri. These papyri contained fragments of lost Euripidean tragedies, manuscripts of major classical texts predating previously known versions by several centuries, and correspondence between Egyptian and Greek administrators in the third century BC which showed that 'the red-tape of office was as rife then as it now is

⁴² [illegible] Jones to Dr Birch 2 February 1883: BM ANE, 1883/209; B. J. A. Evetts to Dr Birch, 11 February 1883: BM ANE, 1883/151.

⁴³ In 1865, for instance, a railway was opened between Smyrna and Aidan. The architect of its station buildings, John Turtle Wood, had, in 1863, abandoned his commission in order to conduct the first major excavations at Ephesus. Over the following years he and the railway company nervously poached and counter-poached each other's local workforces. The forthcoming work of Michael Ledger-Lomas explores Wood's explorations at Ephesus.

⁴⁴ J. P. Mahaffy, 'The Petrie Papyri', *New Review* (1892), 549.

in the Departments of Whitehall'.⁴⁵ (Ever peevisish, Andrew Lang prayed that instead of limitless early copies of Homer and Euripides the Fayoum would cough up autograph manuscripts of Nero's lost poems.⁴⁶) The first applications of rails and steam to archaeological sites followed but were initially less fruitful: to the surprise of excavators at Bubastis in 1885 the technological panacea of steam embarrassingly proved incapable of outdoing donkeys and fellaheen in the movement of monumental architecture.

Stanley Lane-Poole's works of the early 1880s provide keen demonstration of this intertwining of Egyptology and political infrastructure. From his perch in the British Museum Lane-Poole penned a *Social History of Egypt* alongside an edited life of F. R. Chesney (general, explorer of the Euphrates valley and compiler of an early report pressing the construction of a Suez Canal). In Lane-Poole's prose, orientalist, archaeological, geographical, military and economic priorities are consistently elided. His multi-exposure image of Egypt is never complete without the accretion of ancient and modern, spiritual and practical strata. Describing the Delta in 1883, Lane-Poole recounts excavations around which hastily constructed rails pass, through a landscape littered with military-issue rations and equipage. Unutterable desolation is punctuated by a

succession of abandoned preserved-meat tins, exploded shells, fragments of clothes and other debris, and by the legs of horses, and sometimes of men, protruding from the ground where their shroud of sand has been blown away.⁴⁷

Much like the press coverage of the Prince of Wales's visit to Karnak, Lane-Poole's observations demonstrate how topical the motivations of European tourists could be: as a result of military operations, visitors had arrived 'curious to see the spreading earthworks of Tell-el-Kebir', and even 'to acquire for the sum of one pound sterling a shell which may or may not have been originally picked up on the battlefield'.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Andrew Lang, 'At the Sign of the Ship', *Longman's Magazine* (September 1888), 558.

⁴⁷ Stanley Lane-Poole, 'The Discovery of Pithom-Succoth', *British Quarterly Review* (July 1883), 108.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

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Lane-Poole plays on these mixed motivations and suggests that modern military operations do not just run alongside archaeology: he valorizes the present by showing modern events *becoming* archaeological. Freshly manufactured (or severed) objects are transmuted into artefacts by the playing-out of new historic events and the intervention of a stratum of desert sand. ‘Messres Thomas Cook’, he informs his readers, have now provisioned two *dahabiyehs* in the region. The largest is fitted out for those ‘on the trail of the army of ’82’, the smaller ‘is devoted to no sordid gain or vulgar curiosity: it is freely lent to a scholar to be used for the purposes of science’.⁴⁹

This science, the real subject of the article, involves the recovery of events that, although in Lane-Poole’s eyes comparable to those of 1882, had been sanctified by the passing of millennia. In following General Wolseley’s trail, Lane-Poole mused, he was tracing the biblical Exodus. Archaeological science in the decade after Schliemann and Smith did not consider recovering evidence of Moses from the desert sands to be any more problematic than tracing the trail of last month’s British troops: ‘I have not only walked within the very rooms which the Israelites built, but I have slept a night where the Israelites slept a night when Moses led them out of the land of Egypt’.⁵⁰

Dozens of servicemen posted in Egypt during the 1880s devoted their leisure to Egyptology. For some this meant establishing private collections. Lieutenant (later Major) William Myers is now immortalized as the founder of the Eton-Myers Museum. His collection was born out of frustration at barracks life in Egypt. In search of a pastime he attempted sketching and writing, eventually giving up an apparent last-ditch effort—the clarinet (it was ‘harder than I thought’).⁵¹ To his evident pleasure, early forays into collecting facilitated introductions into Cairene high society, first to Egyptologists including Heinrich Brugsch and Percy Newberry, but then also to Turkish royals. His collecting was shaped by aesthetic priorities: he ranked Ottoman fabrics and pharaonic faience particularly high. His diaries of military life are punctuated with disputes (occasionally violent, often unpleasant) with local antiquities dealers. This was an example of the continuation of the kind of acquisition so familiar from Belzoni: collecting that sought to ‘advertise, hone, or shape . . . social

⁴⁹ Ibid. ⁵⁰ Ibid. 113.

⁵¹ Diaries of William Myers, Myers Museum, Eton, Vol. III, 7 August 1883.

personae'.⁵² H. G. Lyons, the geologist and engineer whose surveys and reports on *The Islands and Temples of Philae* would be crucial to the project of dam construction at Aswan, developed his interest in Egyptology through a posting at Cairo in 1890; like several other officers and administrators, he eventually became an honorary secretary of the Egypt Exploration Fund.

For some servicemen a posting in Egypt inspired aspiration towards employment in the British Museum. Several soldiers wrote to curators seeking commissions; others wanted materials with which to record monuments (usually squeeze paper); most demanded both. Some were prepared to devote considerable effort to a cause that hovered somewhere between scholarship and the pursuit, Belzoni-style, of personal and national glory. When I. P. Byrne of the Second Manchester Regiment heard of discoveries of 'inscribed stones' arousing interest among collectors his appeal to the museum was made in well-worn terms:

I am in a good position for collecting cheaper than any – either Austrian or French or German – can, as I know Arabic tolerably and through private information I have a very good idea where and how to get the best. I only took an interest in these old inscriptions a few months ago and now that I have a sufficient private collection I think it is a pity to see so many going to other countries. Of course it would take some money – but not very much as I know of a collection which could be purchased at about six days' journey from here.⁵³

Antiquities laws (gradually taking shape from 1835 onwards) were flouted as a matter of course by soldiers and Egyptologists alike in these first two decades of occupation. Although among the most flagrant, Wallis Budge was far from the only Briton who found ingenious ways of packing crates so that potential museum pieces would be missed by all but the most officious customs officials.⁵⁴

Amidst these military entanglements, it comes as a surprise that Lane-Poole's direct allusions to contemporary politics are not extensively echoed by other Egyptologists and popularizers of Egyptology. His contemporaries are consistently more reticent. Petrie began his

⁵² Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire* (London: Vintage, 2006), 260–1, 307–21.

⁵³ I. P. Byrne to Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities, 11 August 1898: BM ANE, 1898/21.

⁵⁴ Ludwig Borchardt's acquisition of the famous bust of Nefertiti in the Berlin Museum is almost certainly an example of this wilful evasion of antiquities legislation.

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inaugural address as Britain's first Professor of Egyptology by insisting that politics had done nothing for Egyptology and that private enterprise had been hindered, not helped, by the delicate diplomacy accompanying occupation.⁵⁵ Two decades later, Egyptology was still—staggeringly—said to exemplify a science 'remote from politics'.⁵⁶ This reticence was present from the beginning of the occupation, but increased as the neuroses of administrators were magnified by unsettling events. Culminating in the debacle of Khartoum, these events gave Britain's Egyptian affairs a humiliating air. British officials had soon sanctioned the resumption of slaving in the Sudan; a military force under General Hicks had been embarrassingly annihilated; and General Gordon, Protestant pseudo-saint, had been 'martyred'. Cartoons of Gladstone appeared in the press as 'the camel of indecision', Dürer's Melancholia seated herself by the ruins of Khartoum, and Britannia swooned in mourning for her beloved General. Despite the thousand miles that lay between Cairo and Khartoum, images of the Gordon affair were littered with the iconography of Giza: the sphinx looked on as a goggle-eyed Gladstone navigated the boat of 'Egyptian policy' past the pyramids and into a sandy impasse. The debilitating crises of Gladstone's Liberal Party might be said to have begun with Bright's resignation; they continued with Joseph Chamberlain's defection to the Tories: painting Egyptian events in a catastrophic light became a favourite pastime of Gladstone's many opponents. Triumphalism over Egypt certainly existed in some quarters of British opinion but its grip was patchy and, by 1886, so self-conscious as to appear forced.

Despite dismissing its significance, Egyptologists did ride a wave of political interest in Egypt. They discovered to their pleasure that previously unresponsive newspapers and periodicals had opened their pages to everything Egyptian. They also recruited several figures with enormous political power: Sir John Fowler, civil engineer to the Egyptian government, and Sir Francis Grenfell, Kitchener's superior as Inspector General of the British garrison in Egypt, were soon on the Committee of Britain's leading Egyptological organization. But Egyptologists' rhetorical efforts always underplayed this association and aimed to maintain a careful distance between archaeology and

⁵⁵ This lecture is reprinted as Appendix A in Rosalind M. Janssen, *Egyptology at University College London, 1892–1992* (London: UCL, 1992), 98.

⁵⁶ 'Ancient Egyptian Art', *Athenaeum* (1915), 267.

occupation. Reading the works of some Egyptologists or popularizers among Lane-Poole's contemporaries would give little indication that an occupation had taken place at all.

This 'demilitarized' rhetoric was not quite so wilful as it might sound. While the occupation undoubtedly made excavation easier, it did not hand the British control over Egyptian antiquities; they failed to wrest this from the French authorities. Personal relationships between directors of the French-run antiquities service and British Egyptologists in the years running up to occupation were also important in making British excavation possible. In 1881, Mariette, 'whose jealousy . . . of Englishmen' was spoken of as 'a monomania', died; he was succeeded by the more liberal figure of Gaston Maspero who had proved himself anglophile long before the occupation.⁵⁷ Over the following three decades, with Maspero moving in and out of power, British excavation was always smoothest when he was at the helm. Despite the substantial military presence, Egypt remained a complex political environment in which British administrators aimed to assert imperial-style control amidst deeply ingrained French, Ottoman and Egyptian power. Competing interest groups were not displaced to the extent they would have been in a colonial or imperial setting proper (which Egypt only became in 1914) so British Egyptologists remained firmly reliant on French and Egyptian goodwill; they were prevented from digging at the richest sites and always had their choice of excavators controlled by an Antiquities Service in which they only gradually secured a share. Jittery British administrators, including the proconsul himself, were determined to avoid the Anglo-French clashes over antiquities that associated the names of Salt, Drovetti, Layard and Botta with diplomatic fiasco. At the same time, bitter opponents of Empire were just as likely to devour Egyptological texts as the most ardent imperialists. Some Egyptological writers celebrated the Westernization of Egypt; just as many deplored it in the strongest terms.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ 'Archaeological Notes from the Mediterranean', *Academy* (1881), 285.

⁵⁸ Egyptology was always entangled with various forms of political and imperial power, but most current research, including several recent theses, assumes these relationships to be much simpler and more crass than they actually were; the post-Saidian ideas of scholars like Timothy Mitchell that have revolutionized the way we interpret western views of modern Egypt have not translated well to historical settings. The situation bears comparison to that described in the opening paragraphs of

When the Egypt Exploration Fund, founded in 1882, began its first excavations, British Egyptologists were junior partners in the endeavour to elucidate the pre-Islamic heritage of Egypt: they were made to feel their newcomer status keenly; yet in British public culture Egyptologists finally gained the prominence and prestige their predecessors sought in vain.

THE EGYPT EXPLORATION FUND

The best-known engineers of Egyptology's newfound eminence were Amelia Edwards, Reginald Stuart Poole, and Flinders Petrie, each of whom developed a distinct niche in the popularization of ancient Egypt and gathered a committed readership to their cause. The nexus around which they operated in the 1880s was the Egypt Exploration Fund, founded by Edwards and Poole and soon granted a room at the British Archaeological Institute in Oxford Mansion, a mile from the British Museum. These figures did not hold a monopoly over public interest in Egypt. Archibald Henry Sayce (Oxford professor; first holder of the chair in Assyriology from 1891) commanded large audiences whenever he turned his roving pen to Egypt; he spent many of his winters afloat on the Nile. George Rawlinson, another Oxford professor, embodied older Egyptological traditions (as Edwards and Petrie were often eager to remind him) but his translation of Herodotus, which would remain authoritative into the twentieth century, conferred public prominence on all his pronouncements on Egypt. Other enclaves of Egyptological interest—the British Museum, the Society for the Preservation of the Monuments of Ancient Egypt, the Society for Biblical Archaeology, and sundry anthropological and philological movements—also embodied rival approaches to those of the EEF. It was, however, the EEF's energetic activity, popularizing fluency and rapid archaeological discovery that defined the parameters of the debate to which all these figures contributed. Even sceptical British Museum curators could not resist the intense new relationships between archaeologists and their readers.

Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture', *Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973), 3–30.

The EEF adopted a unique approach to fundraising and publicity. When, in the 1860s George Grove had sought publicity for the Palestine Exploration Fund, he made his plea to the British government and to major scientific establishments including the British Association and the Institute of British Architects.⁵⁹ Founder of the Royal College of Music and editor of the monumental music dictionaries that bear his name, Grove was very much at home in this rarefied world. The mastermind of the EEF's publicity, Amelia Edwards, appealed to the most rarified circles. Edwards, a novelist who commanded great public affection, had garnered both popular approval and the attention of European Egyptologists with her 1876 travel narrative *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* which 'far from being a mere book of travel' brought 'the cunning of the skilled novelist' to the 'domestic occupations of dead-and-gone Egyptian worthies'.⁶⁰ It was differentiated from the mass of existing Egyptian travelogues (claimed the classicist, poet, sexual reformer and 'cosmic enthusiast' John Addington Symonds) by its infectious 'enthusiasm for Old Egypt, running, powerful and deep, throughout'.⁶¹ It was characterized as much by the impassioned eloquence of its pleas for preservation of ancient monuments as by Edwards' naive condescension of modern Egyptians who swarm through her pages 'like mad monkeys let loose'.⁶²

The EEF's publicity was directed at readers of the popular press who, as devotees of Edwards' novels and travel books, were seen as a constituency she could approach with guaranteed success.⁶³ She aimed to galvanize a large audience in an earnest 'mission' run through with the rhetoric of church and chapel. Subscriptions were pitched low and 'friends' were encouraged to 'club together and send in a subscription of £1 under a single name, in order that no-one should lose the opportunity' of contributing to the great new mission of discovery.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Michael Musgrave, *George Grove, Music and Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); J. J. Moscrop, *Measuring Jerusalem: the Palestine Exploration Fund and British Interest in the Holy Land* (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 2000).

⁶⁰ J. A. Symonds, 'A Thousand Miles up the Nile', *Academy* (1877), 65.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ For Edwards' literary career see Joan Rees, *Amelia Edwards: traveller, novelist and Egyptologist* (Edmonton: Rubicon, 1998), 70–89.

⁶⁴ 'Report of the first general meeting and balance sheet': EES, box XXI, 1. 'Memoir' denotes the annual report on excavations issued by the EEF to each of its

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Edwards, Poole and the Fund's honorary secretaries addressed local audiences at vicarages, church halls, schools and colleges around England with lectures that gained national audiences through summaries in the press. They appealed to national pride, listing Egyptian discoveries and reminding listeners and readers that 'England has taken no part in this history of great discoveries. The time might soon come when this disgrace shall be wiped out'.⁶⁵ They presented the social system of the ancient Egyptians as familiar, intimate and inviting: 'more nearly resembling our own than any other ancient society, especially in respect to the high position of women'.⁶⁶ And they dangled before their Bible-reading audiences the same prospect coveted by the Syro-Egyptian Society a generation earlier: 'happening upon the mummy of a Hebrew patriarch'.⁶⁷

Since their construction in 1853, the Egyptian galleries at the British Museum had been considered a favourite of 'holiday crowds', neglected by those who claimed 'superior taste'. Acknowledgement of this class prejudice ran throughout the EEF's 1880s publicity. Neglect of ancient Egypt, Poole argued, was the fault of the decorous educated class who mistakenly regarded Egyptian civilization as barbaric and distasteful and the excavation of heathendom as un-Christian. 'It may be difficult', he wrote, 'to raise funds for work in Greece and Turkey, but there is no excuse for the polite indifference of the educated class to a subject which deeply interests the half-educated population, even to the children of the village schools'.⁶⁸

Mechanics' Institutes earlier in the century had interspersed lectures on the ethical possibilities of steam power with exposition of discoveries in Egypt. Now their successors in the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon movement (through which Congregationalists developed adult education in Britain's urban centres) clamoured for lectures by EEF officials on 'The Civilization of the Ancient Egyptians' and 'The Building of the Great Pyramid'. The prize books these organizations distributed, alongside their hundreds of gilt-edged Bibles, ranged from the collected lectures of Amelia Edwards (*Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers*) to fictional works like *Nefert the Egyptian: a tale of*

members, the first being Édouard Naville, *The Store City of Pithom and the Route of the Exodus* (London: EEF, 1882).

⁶⁵ R. S. Poole, 'Exploration in the Delta of the Nile: a lecture delivered at St Mary Abbott's vicarage, Kensington', *Academy*, 21 (1882), 346.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

the time of Moses. This romance set out to show readers how the EEF's reconstruction of ancient social life would help them 'appreciate the sacrifice of the Law-Giver Prophet'. When the Fund's first president, Erasmus Wilson, the businessman responsible for transporting Cleopatra's Needle to the Thames Embankment in the previous decade, lectured on the discovery of the mummy of Ramesses II it was to groups such as the Young Men's Christian Association in Margate.

The EEF distributed publicity through a wide range of media, but the positioning of its most substantial articles reflected their demotic ambitions. The longest-running series appeared in the popular science weekly *Knowledge*. This periodical had been founded in 1881 by the astronomer Richard Proctor in protest against the retreat of scientific endeavour into academic specialization. Edwards' series for the successful new journal was entitled 'Was Ramases II the pharaoh of the Exodus?' It took pride of place in weekly issues across three whole months. Ramesses II was known through his multitude of sculptures, but in 1881 his fame and that of other nineteenth-dynasty monarchs had been magnified by the discovery of a cache of Theban mummies. The image of these withered but characterful faces seemed to befit the unyielding kings of the Old Testament: 'the pharaoh of the Exodus has a strange intensity of expression about the face; it is handsome but unpleasing, powerful and unscrupulous'.⁶⁹

Edwards' topic was strategically chosen to generate interest in the EEF's inaugural excavation; but the choice of their site had not been made with a free hand. Liberal and pressurized as he was, Maspero still dictated the range of activities undertaken by any excavator or organization in Egypt. The 'noble ruins' of Upper Egypt—prestige temples 'open to the cloudless sky'—were retained as the privilege of established French and German excavators. Maspero confined the EEF to the Delta and its undulating mounds, where sites lay buried and obscured from easy identification: the majority of these mounds lay untouched because few archaeologists had the patience to engage in the intensive task of excavating them. Maspero's strictures had far-reaching consequences. The geographical link with the achievements of Belzoni and Gardner Wilkinson was severed. Indeed, when a British presence was finally restored to Thebes, the event was potent

⁶⁹ Margaret Benson, 'The Plain of Thebes', *Edinburgh Review* (October 1897), 454.

enough to inspire the most prestigious painting ever to depict an Egyptologist at work: Henry Wallis's *Flinders Petrie Excavating at the Ramesseum* (1895).

Excluded from the great displays of indigenous Egyptian power in the temples and tombs of Thebes, the EEF were nonetheless cast into a literary wonderland. The Delta was the focal point of Greek and biblical engagement with Egypt. It was the cosmopolitan frontier through which visitors entered and Pharaoh's conquering armies left. This was the setting of Herodotus' labyrinths and fibbing priests, his kings and courtesans. It was the stage for Joseph's regency and his progeny's saga of captivity, plague and liberation. The large mounds of this region contained Greek and biblical towns and cities whose monuments had been hidden and preserved for millennia, unlike the familiar cities of Upper Egypt whose 'noble ruins [were] open to the cloudless sky'.⁷⁰ This was very much, in the title of A. H. Sayce's bestselling book, *The Egypt of the Hebrews and Herodotos* (1895). In the agreement made between Edwards and Maspero the unusual prominence of biblical concerns in British Egyptology was formalized.

The EEF presented biblical archaeology and the history of the Hebrews in Egypt through a vocabulary that combined urgent responsibility with unprecedented opportunity. Lecturers insisted that the EEF was not engaged in Egyptian archaeology at all, but in Hebrew archaeology—'the cultivators of the Eastern Delta were the Israelites; for three-hundred years the pastures of Goshen had been as much a fatherland to the descendants of Jacob as Normandy was to Rolf'—and the formal advertisement of the organization's foundation pushed this agenda home:

A society has been formed for the purpose of excavating the ancient sites of the Egyptian Delta . . . It is proposed to raise a fund for the purpose of conducting excavations in the Delta, which up to this time has been rarely visited by travellers, and where but one site (Zoan-Tanis) has been explored by archaeologists. Yet here must undoubtedly lie concealed the documents of a lost period of Bible history – documents which we may confidently hope will furnish the key to a whole series of perplexing problems. The position of the Land of Goshen is now ascertained. The site of its capital, Goshen, is indicated only by a lofty mound; but under

⁷⁰ Amelia Edwards, *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892). 40.

this mound, if anywhere, are to be found the missing records of those four centuries of the Hebrew sojourn in Egypt which are passed over in a few verses of the Bible, so that the history of the Israelites during that age is almost blank.⁷¹

The Fund took the text of Exodus chapters 1–15 and made it as much a handbook to excavation as the *Iliad* had been to Schliemann. Their initial ambitions were to establish fixed points in the disputed question of the Exodus route; to locate written evidence of the Israelite presence in Lower Egypt; and to achieve the unprecedented transformation of a muddy Delta mound into a named, mapped and reimagined city of the Bible.⁷²

It was therefore the modest mound of Tel el Maskutah at which the first excavations took place; and the obscure ancient settlements of Pithom and Ramses—Hebrew-built ‘treasure cities’ of Exodus—through which British Egyptology was catapulted into the limelight. These settlements represented a key moment in biblical history. To late nineteenth-century Bible-readers they evoked the moment when the influence of the pastoral Semitic population on Egyptian society (evinced by Hebrew names creeping into use amongst Egyptians, as well as by the biblical text) was finally and dramatically rejected by Ramesses II. This notorious pharaoh was seen to have guarded jealously the urbane civilization of Egypt against pastoral Hebrew culture, and placed two dramatic statements of his ‘nationalist’ intent on the plains shepherded by the Israelites. These symbols of the new despotic Egypt were fortified towns—Ramses and Pithom—built to dominate the region, rising ‘to a magnificence’ the free cities such as ‘Zoan had never known’.⁷³ They came to embody the conflict between authority and freedom, between heathenism and monotheism, between ordered city-dwellers and idyllic wandering communities. Their construction was established as the starting point of Israelite history: while the Hebrews pursued the happy pastoral life ‘they had no history’; only when they were forced to build Pithom ‘did their history as a nation begin’.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Appeared as ‘Egyptian antiquities’, *The Times*, 30 March 1882, 8; Poole to Naville, 28 April 1882: EES, box XIX, c.2–3 describes the drafting of the memorandum and includes a list of the periodicals that ran it.

⁷² Amelia Edwards, *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892), 40.

⁷³ Poole, *Cities of Egypt*, 78.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 41.

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In a manner familiar to nineteenth-century readers of Egyptian history Pithom was a city with two names: ‘Pithom’ described the sacred site with its temple to the divinity Tum—‘god of the setting sun’—while ‘Succoth’ described the secular city that enclosed it. This city recurs under both names throughout the first fifteen chapters of Exodus. In chapter one Pharaoh realizes the potential power of the increasingly numerous Israelites and sets taskmasters over them ‘to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Ramses’. Later—chapter five—Pharaoh responds to Moses and Aaron’s demands for Israel’s deliverance by intensifying their oppression. The taskmasters carry this message to the builders of Pithom: ‘Ye shall no more give the people straw to make their brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves. And the tale of the bricks which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them . . . So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw’. The plagues ensue, until in chapter twelve ‘the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they may send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We *be* all dead *men* . . . And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth about six hundred thousand on foot that were men beside children’. In chapter 13 ‘God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea . . . And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham in the edge of the wilderness’. Then, in one of the most familiar Old Testament passages, the Israelites, led by pillars of fire and cloud, reach the Red Sea. The miraculous crossing ensues: Pharaoh’s hosts are drowned, and the chosen people are delivered from bondage. In these chapters, Pithom has been both the site of enslavement and the gateway to freedom: it begins and ends the period of harshest oppression.

Since the 1830s the locality of Pithom–Succoth had been a source of regular speculation. Prevailing opinion used linguistic evidence to suggest that On, Heliopolis, and Pithom were one and the same site, while Ramses and Zoan might also be identical.⁷⁵ The Exodus had been considered crucial to defining Egyptian chronology: this and the Trojan war were named as the two events capable of placing Egyptian history in international context.⁷⁶ As the century

⁷⁵ Sharpe, *Early History of Egypt*, 13; the latter identification remained in circulation in the 1870s thanks to its use by the French Egyptologist Emanuel De Rouge from 1867 onwards.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* v & 158–66.

progressed, French and German scholars such as De Rouge and Lepsius showed increasing interest in defining the precise route of the Exodus and so began to think more seriously about other possible locations for Pithom and Ramses. Thanks to the wealth of Egyptian sites available to the excavator, however, the mounds of the Wadi Tumilat—between the presumed starting point of the Exodus and the Red Sea—remained largely untouched when Edwards and Poole began to plan their excavating organization.

By this date the major cities of ancient Egypt had begun to generate their own distinct identities. Memphis was a resonant symbol of desolation: a cipher for biblical enmity. The chief associations of Thebes were political: it stood for royal grandeur and military might. Bubastis was barbaric: shorthand for the superstitious ‘lower elements’ of Egyptian cult. But the store cities of Ramses and Pithom were dramatically different in meaning from all other cities. They had been constructed not by Egyptians but by Israelites. Their very walls were the handiwork of the chosen people and they were not just a backdrop to the biblical narrative: their conception was a biblical event, engineered to awe the cowed Israelite population with brute strength and military splendour. Bricks from these sites might have been fashioned by companions of Moses, and the name of the Hebrew law-giver might be found inscribed among the ruins. Few sites anywhere could compete with such intense evocation of biblical history. But more than this, these settlements offered an unrivalled opportunity to establish the relationship between biblical and Egyptian chronologies once and for all. The identity of the Pharaoh of the Exodus could finally be proven, and the Bible’s historicity demonstrated.

Edwards’ efforts to prepare her audience for the discoveries she hoped the EEF would make on their Exodus route aimed to shape public views on the meaning and importance of these twin cities. By this point, the authority of Lepsius and Ebers gave her confidence that the site of Tel el Maskutah would house the remains of the city of Ramses. In her popular articles she combined romantic depictions of the modern landscape of the Wadi Tumilat with evocations of the biblical treasures lying in their midst. She asserted that the name of the city of Goshen survived in the Arabic Fa-Koos, ‘a miserable mud village close to the Aboo Kebeer station on the line between Zagazig and Salabeeyah’ that

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nestles at the foot of some ancient rubbish mounds, beyond which lie undulating hillocks, covered in spring with waving corn crops. These mounds and hillocks mark the site of the city of Goshen to which Joseph (being in attendance upon the Pharaoh of Zoan) hastened in his chariot ‘to meet Israel his father’.⁷⁷

At this point, in the hopeful early days of occupation, she even paralleled Lane-Poole in evoking contemporary military events: two of the Tels where Pithom and Ramses might be found, she noted, were the bases of operations for Sir Garnet Wolseley in the battles that secured the 1882 occupation.

Once the biblical scene and its modern setting were well and truly set, Edwards presented *Knowledge*’s purported twenty thousand readers with ancient descriptions of the ‘twin cities’ of Ramses and Pithom culled from texts such as the Anastasi papyri. Each city is presented as a ‘beautiful outpost’, as ‘stable as Memphis . . . all men hasten from their own cities that they may live within its boundaries’.⁷⁸ The scribe Amen-em-apt announces the arrival of Menephtah, the son of Ramesses II, at the store-cities with lists of assets which clearly betray both wealth and military purpose: ‘the tower adorned with lapis and turquoise; the exercise ground of the cavalry; the parade ground of the archers’.⁷⁹ Versified descriptions count the cities ‘peerless, like the foundation of Thebes where to live is happiness’.⁸⁰

Edwards describes the discovery of the mummy of Ramesses II in the previous year as having raised more public excitement than any earlier archaeological event, rivalled only by the decipherment of the Deluge Tablets. This is typical of 1880s and 1890s opinion: George St Clair’s 1897 survey of nineteenth-century Near Eastern archaeology calls the recovery of this mummy ‘the most important archaeological discovery of modern times’ implying that, for a while at least, it could appear to overshadow the ruins of Pompeii, Nineveh, and even the Rosetta stone.⁸¹ Edwards raises her audience’s curiosity by assuring them that only by exploring these cities will they find a conclusive

⁷⁷ Amelia Edwards, ‘Was Ramases II the Pharaoh of the Exodus?’, *Knowledge*, 2 (1882), 260.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 292.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 293.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 324.

⁸¹ George St Clair, *Buried Cities and Bible Countries* (London: Kegan Paul, 1892), 19.

answer to the question, ‘was this man that you see before you the Bible Pharaoh or not?’ Never mind the potent issues of biblical chronology; here was a tangible object with ready-made celebrity to which public interest could be attached. Widespread reports of the commencement of excavation soon appeared in stark juxtaposition with reports of the rising of a mystical leader in the south and General Gordon’s ill-fated deployment to confront him at Khartoum.

The Egypt Exploration Fund soon garnered the support of a host of churchmen, politicians, and popular figures; these ranged from Gladstone and Ruskin to Edward White Benson. Benson was the Archbishop of Canterbury who named the family cat Ra and stood a statue of Horus on his desk in combined homage to the biblical potency of Egyptology and England’s imperial mission.⁸²

Given this expansive publicity, many were already aware of Naville’s excavations when the notices of imminent endeavour turned into descriptions of antiquities discovered. The press recounted buildings excavated and a long submerged city re-emerging brick by Israelite brick. One of the first reports was of an object that seemed decisive in the Exodus debate. ‘The Pithom Stele’, as it became known, recorded the foundation of the city by Ramesses II and suggested that where the EEF had looked for Ramses, they had found its twin. This object was celebrated in the most ebullient terms. To Poole it was ‘a document of the class of the Rosetta stone’ since it ‘revolutionizes all recent theories of the place of the passage of the Red Sea by the Israelites’.⁸³ For Edwards,

to discover the site of Pithom-Succoth is actually a matter of far greater importance than to discover Ramses. To have adopted a certain hypothesis; to have backed that hypothesis by a mass of evidence laboriously accumulated, sifted and compared; to be presently proved entirely mistaken, and yet to be, therefore, more rejoiced than if shown to be absolutely right, is, I venture to think, an entirely unique position.⁸⁴

Other press statements asserted that this was ‘final proof’ that Ramesses II was the great oppressor, that it was ‘a new proof of the accuracy of the book of Exodus’; that it was ‘the capital fact of modern

⁸² His response to the establishment of the Anglo-Prussian bishopric at Jerusalem had, much earlier, been to fantasize that ‘all the East will soon be English’.

⁸³ R. S. Poole, ‘The Progress of Discovery in Egypt’, *Academy*, 23 (1883), 193.

⁸⁴ Edwards, *Academy*, 23 (1883), 140.

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Biblical discovery; and that these discoveries would “make an epoch” in biblical criticism, for the Egyptian and biblical history can now be synchronized.⁸⁵ Strangely, evidence that while Ramesses had been the oppressor, it was his son Menepthah who was the calamitous Pharaoh of the Exodus was welcomed by some as a partial exoneration of a monarch who seems to have developed something of a personality cult. The African-Canadian artist Edward Bannister wrote to Edwards in an attempt to persuade her to dissociate Ramesses from these events more fully. The real identity of the Pharaoh of the Exodus, he claimed, had been obvious to him all along: ‘it has always appeared to me that [Ramesses the Great] was too sensible a monarch to use excessive measures towards the Israelites and it is far more likely that this course was followed by his son’.⁸⁶

By April 1884 Naville had excavated a central enclosure containing a temple and several two-storey buildings. This he described as the sacred area, Pithom, as opposed to its surrounding civic site Succoth. Despite its modest size this enclosure was surrounded by walls twenty-two feet thick, while the partitions of the buildings inside had breadths of ten feet or more. These were heralded as imposing structures that matched the military purpose of biblical Pithom. Naville described the lower levels of the two-storey buildings he excavated as ‘storage cellars’ inaccessible except via the rooms above, and clearly intended to hold goods such as grain: the identity of this site as a ‘store city’ seemed confirmed. To make the picture still more vivid, three types of brick were evident in the structures. Those making up the highest layers of construction were held together neither by mortar nor straw. There soon ensued a series of attempts to re-imagine Hebrew slaves at work on these structures, with Pharaoh’s harsh decree falling two thirds of the way through the building process. Edwards’ lecture ‘The Buried Cities of Egypt’ contained a typical example:

⁸⁵ Amelia Edwards, *Academy*, 23 (1883), 176; EES, box XIX contains related press clippings running from 1883 to 1888. Debate on the veracity of Pithom continued for some time in Britain and Germany: Lepsius contested the identification in ‘Über die Lage von Pithom und Raëmsis’ *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Alterthums-kunde* (1883); before August Dillmann sprang to Naville’s defence with *Über Pithom, Hero, Klysmä nach Naville* (Berlin: Königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1885).

⁸⁶ Edward M. Bannister to Amelia Edwards, 20 May 1887: EES, box XVI, e.4.

So here we have the whole pathetic Bible narrative surviving in solid evidence to the present time. We go down to the bottom of one of these cellars. We see the good bricks for which the straw was provided. Some few feet higher we see those for which the wretched Hebrews had to seek reeds, or stubble. We hear them cry aloud ‘Can we make bricks without straw?’ Lastly, we see the bricks which they had to make, and did make, without straw, while their hands were bleeding and their hearts were breaking. Shakespeare, in one of his most familiar passages, tells us of ‘sermons in stones;’ but here we have a sermon in *bricks*, and not only a sermon, but a practical historical commentary of the highest importance and interest.⁸⁷

Where mid-century literary treatments of Exodus, such as Edwin Atherstone’s *Israel in Egypt*, had neglected Pithom and Ramses completely, later literature gave them extensive treatment:

Sunrise on the uncompleted city tipped the raw lines of her half-built walls with broken fire and gilded the gear of gigantic hoisting cranes. Scaffolding, clinging to bald facades, seemed frail and cobwebby at great height, and slabs of stone, drawn and held by cables near the summit of chutes, looked like dice on the giddy slide. Below in the still shadowy passages and interiors, speckled with fallen mortar, lay chains, rubble of brick and chipped stone; splinters, flinders and odd ends of timber; scraps of metal, broken implements and the what-not that litters the path of construction. . . . Roadways, beaten in the dust by a multitude of bare feet, led in a hundred directions, all merging in one great track toward the camp of the labouring Israelites.⁸⁸

Much like John Martin’s paintings half a century earlier, Elizabeth Miller’s description of Pithom is inspired by a heady conflation of modern industrial construction and biblical history. It echoes the most famous painting of ‘Ramses and Pithom’: Edward Poynter’s *Israel in Egypt*.

Unfortunately the excavated site of ‘Pithom’ wasn’t as picturesque as Edwards’ emotive word-painting, or as grand as Miller’s and Poynter’s construction sites. Walls were buried deep in rubble rather

⁸⁷ Edwards, *Pharaohs, Fellahs, and Explorers*, 50; in this intense focus on the experience of constructing Egyptian cities, biblical archaeology long prefigured the vernacular historical perspective sought by Brecht’s literate worker of 1936: ‘Who built the seven gates of Thebes?/The books are filled with names of kings./Was it kings who hauled the craggy blocks?’

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Miller, *The Yoke: A Romance of the Days when the Lord Redeemed the Children of Israel from the Bondage of Egypt* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1904), 2.

than standing proud against the horizon, so were hardly an inspiration for new, Poynter-like, grand and theatrical reconstructions. But less prestigious images were produced in large numbers, including photographs for the stereoscope as well as miniature watercolours and engravings. None of these were very revealing of the site, but all that was needed to feed public demand was depiction of the famous bricks. Both Poole and Edwards jumped at the chance to reward their subscribers with genuine biblical relics and each independently demanded that Naville dismantle his site and ship the bricks to Britain to be dispersed among interested parties. Poole requested 500 such items while Edwards appealed for 1,000. However evocative the excavator's reports had been, they seemed not to have conveyed the actual size of these objects. Just a decade earlier the EEF's wealthy backer, Erasmus Wilson, had paid £10,000 for the transport of Cleopatra's Needle to the Thames embankment. The transport of several hundred bricks from Pithom would have been a logistical challenge on a similar scale. Most historians of Egyptology have sought to characterize Edwards as driven by a forward-thinking impulse to preserve ancient sites, more or less aloof to biblical concerns. Her response to the discovery of Pithom demonstrates that enthusiasm for the Old Testament easily over-rode her fellow feeling with the incipient heritage movement.

When Naville prepared his excavation report on Pithom he favoured incipient conventions that minimized biblical interpretation and presented description of process and results that could be adapted for popular and theological purposes by others. Many EEF subscribers regarded this as a terrible miscalculation: this excavation report was the one document subscribers received in return for their investment, and to force them to look elsewhere for biblical interpretation seemed perverse. Letters of complaint soon began to arrive at periodicals and at the offices of the EEF themselves. These were revealing of the meanings attached to Pithom and the new Egyptology:

The bricks of Pithom were a discovery of thrilling interest to many people to whom the Bondage in Egypt and the Exodus represent typically the greatest events in their own spiritual lives. I have found that believers in the Bible tend to care more about that detail than for the discovery of the place itself! Moreover the verification in this particular of a Bible story is valued as showing that such narratives

cannot lightly be put aside as mere legends. The Bondage and the deliverance from it are cardinal facts in their history, and in their, and our, religion. The Sabbath (Deut v.15) and, by inference, the Passover commemorate them; and they are frequently referred to not merely in the Pentateuch, but in other parts of the Old Testament . . . The bricks show conclusively that these references are not to a legend, but to a fact. Further, the Oppression being now by the aid of the bricks an established fact, so also is the liberation – and that without a successful revolt, or the books would have mentioned it. That an enslaved oppressed nation should have been allowed freedom to commence their journey is a marvel to be accounted for somehow. Spontaneous emancipation of their slaves by the Egyptians would have been a moral wonder, comparable to the physical one of water running up hill, or to any of the miracles of Moses. Thus the bricks are evidential in various ways. In these views I am not alone: I express them in order to show that there is a class of people represented among the subscribers to the Fund, which highly appreciates the discovery of the bricks. To such the absence of all mention of them in the Quarto is a felt loss, reducing the value of the book.⁸⁹

There was, however, no shortage of popularizers and preachers prepared to take up the task of interpretation. M. L. Herbert McClure was a serial translator of French and German Egyptology and an Honorary Secretary of the EEF who lectured widely on their behalf. He wove great rhetorical turns around discoveries at Pithom:

You will go with me so far, when I affirm that all written history is debatable unless it be confirmed by monuments or documents contemporary with the period of which it treats . . . Had you asked, seven years ago, what contemporary confirmation there was for the statement in the first chapter of Exodus that the Israelites built military store cities, Pithom and Ramses, for Pharaoh, your query would have been met with silence:

It is my privilege tonight to break that silence.⁹⁰

McClure asked his audience, ‘How does this city practically affect our individual thought or action at the present day?’, and answered: ‘these historical discoveries are of the most vital importance in establishing beyond the power of question the truth and authenticity of the

⁸⁹ J. O. Corrie to Amelia Edwards, 17 May 1887: EES, box XVI, e.23.

⁹⁰ M. L. Herbert McClure, ‘Recent excavations in Egypt’, 17 July 1888: EES, box XVIII, 75.

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statements of Holy Scripture, and at a time like the present, contemporary confirmation is doubly valuable'.⁹¹ Those who believed Moses to have been an accurate chronicler of ancient events could now thank the EEF (in pecuniary form perhaps) for the historical evidence that allowed them to hold their own against 'the repeated derision of ribald sceptics'.⁹²

Over the following decade, a host of small items brought from Egypt were given Exodus-related pedigree by their owners, who frequently wrote to Egyptologists for confirmation of biblical authenticity. 'Some years ago', began one example from 1889,

a friend of mine sent me a small scrap of mummy cloth said to have been unwound from the body of 'Pharaoh's Daughter' (probably the one that found Moses in the Nile) when being placed in the British Museum. I have shown it in good faith to my friends as such but as some doubts have arisen in my mind as to its authenticity and as I have lost all trace of my friend I have taken the liberty of writing to you to see if you can put me right. The subject has been partly revived through a very interesting lecture I had the pleasure of listening to (this past winter) by Miss Amelia Edwards on 'The Buried Cities of Ancient Egypt'.⁹³

Others wrote to the museum to acquire 'antiquities for illustrating scripture' which might interest a 'men's Bible class', for instance.⁹⁴

Soon after 1882, travellers, including the many nonconformist churchmen who paid their way with Thomas Cook, had begun to add Pithom to their itineraries. In reporting to congregations at home they were still more sensitive than their predecessors to biblical local colour. Fishermen on nearby Lake Timsah were described in the words of Matthew 4:18–22; the sight of buffaloes induced reference to Genesis 41:19; the desert sands recalled Psalm 63:1; and the customs of local people evoked verses from Judges, 1 Kings, Hosea, Acts and Ezekiel.⁹⁵ A museum was soon founded at Ismailia to cater for these new tourists. The first features noted by almost all those who

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Charles Robinson, *The Pharaohs of the Bondage and the Exodus* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1887), 17.

⁹³ James Smith to Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities, 22 April 1889: BM ANE, 1889/184.

⁹⁴ Edward Evans to Renouf, 24 August 1887: BM ANE, 1887/97.

⁹⁵ For instance, Joseph Pollard, *The Land of the Monuments: Notes of Egyptian Travel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1896), 15–33.

recorded their visit to the site were ‘those bricks made and laid in their present position by the Children of Israel during their oppression’.⁹⁶ These travellers echoed the sentiments of Dickens when they found in Egypt a landscape already inscribed on their Christian souls; the peasantry were ‘straight out of an Illustrated Family Bible’ and seemed ‘as if composed for the canvas of one of the old masters’. This was Egypt well and truly ‘enframed’.⁹⁷

The excavations at Pithom proved successful enough for the EEF to double their scale of operations in the following season: an excavator was quickly found who shared their biblical concerns. This was William Matthew Flinders Petrie, son of a Plymouth Brethren preacher whose most famous sermon had been a celebration of Piazzi Smyth’s pyramids theories. Over the following years Naville and Petrie excavated extensively around the Delta, focusing much of their attention on ‘the Land of Goshen’ and sites such as Zoan, Tahpanhes (the place to which Jeremiah fled with Zedekiah’s daughters when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judea) and Tel el Yahoudeh, ‘Egypt’s Jerusalem’, built on its own artificial mound in imitation of the Holy City by the exiled Jewish priest Onias.⁹⁸ At Tahpanhes, Petrie hoped to rival the excitement caused by the discovery of the bricks of Pithom by finding stones placed by Jeremiah in the foundations of ‘Pharaoh’s house’. However, ‘unhappily, the great denudation which has gone on has swept away most of this platform, and we could not expect to find the stones whose hiding is described by Jeremiah’.⁹⁹ Petrie explained the choice of Tel el Yahoudeh by insisting that ‘if any considerable remains of the temple can be found, they may assist... the understanding of the descriptions which have come down to us of the more important structure on Mount Moriah’.¹⁰⁰ This was, of course, the structure said to be a microcosm of the whole universe, a preternatural characteristic that

⁹⁶ Ibid. 25.

⁹⁷ Dickens’ earlier variations on this theme were reprinted widely: e.g. ‘the sense of familiarity with many of these strange and beautiful scenes, which I had while looking on them for the first time, would not probably be peculiar to me. I had thought that I knew as little as possible about Egypt, and yet the first view of Cairo and the Pyramids seemed as familiar to me as possible. An idea of it all had been imbibed, without knowing it, from books and pictures’. *All the Year Round* (1882), 157.

⁹⁸ Herbert [McClure], ‘Recent Excavations in Egypt’, 11.

⁹⁹ Petrie, *Tanis II*, 50–51.

¹⁰⁰ Pollard, *Land of the Monuments*, 71.

Petrie and his father had earlier ascribed to the Great Pyramid. At Tanis the head of a black granite statue was discovered which was briefly celebrated as ‘a portrait of the Hyksos Pharaoh who raised Joseph to the highest position in the land’ before it was identified as Orsokon I of the twenty-second dynasty.¹⁰¹ The young Francis Llewellyn Griffith, assisting Petrie at the site, wrote that ‘in all probability Tanis was the royal city in the field of Zoan where, according to Exodus and Psalm lviii.v.43, Moses performed the miracle before Pharaoh’.¹⁰² In keeping with this insistent Hebrew focus, the title ‘Joseph’s pharaoh’ would soon be attached to another statue found at Bubastis, then to Amenophis III. These biblical identifications were persistent until after the turn of the century. Each excavation by the EEF, according to McClure, provided ‘a fresh nail’ in the coffin of higher criticism.¹⁰³

This biblical archaeology did embody many of the practices seen as characteristic of the new ‘scientific’ archaeology. Elliot Colla writes, for instance, that Petrie’s revolution in scientific thinking meant that ‘the Egyptological artifact was no longer regarded as a single creation but rather as a taxonomical piece that revealed the historical period of its origin’.¹⁰⁴ While the ‘single creation’ model had shaped some aesthetic responses to Egypt earlier in the century, biblical agendas throughout had demanded detailed, taxonomic, cultural reconstruction. The elevated importance of biblical associations after 1880 meant that artefacts were valuable insofar as they permitted the reconstitution of Old Testament cultures. Their singularity and ‘art value’ remained uncertain; but their potential to illuminate, in painstaking detail, the world from which scripture originated was taken for granted.

Amidst these heady biblical agendas effort also began to be directed towards Greek settlements in Lower Egypt. This was grudging and half-hearted at first. Until the Graeco-Roman Branch was established at the turn of the century the Fund’s committee treated classical finds as a distracting nuisance. As Poole insisted in 1885, subscriptions were given ‘principally for the exploration of Biblical sites; the society

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 30.

¹⁰² F. L. Griffith, *Tanis 4* (London: Trübner, 1888), 34.

¹⁰³ Herbert [McClure], ‘Recent Excavations in Egypt’, 11.

¹⁰⁴ Elliot Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 179.

¹⁰⁵ R. S. Poole, ‘Egypt Exploration Fund’ *Academy* (1885), 86.

cannot therefore undertake any large excavation on a Greek site'.¹⁰⁵ This protest was issued in the immediate aftermath of the EEF's most significant classical discovery of the 1880s: Naucratis.

Renowned for the beauty of its courtesans, Naucratis was described by Herodotus as a gift from Pharaoh Amasis to win the favour of Greek merchants who had previously sided with his enemies. Strabo recorded it as a Milesian colony that was once 'the only emporium in Egypt'. Its location was described by Ptolemy and inscribed on the Peutinger Table (the only surviving ancient attempt to produce a visual map of the world). More recently, its trade in metals had led it to be christened 'a sort of Hellenic Sheffield'.¹⁰⁶

This city had been sought by European travellers for decades. The prolific cartographer, James Rennell, had constructed a *Geographical System of Herodotus* (1800) in which he identified Naucratis with a site twelve miles north of Hermopolis (explored, but not named, by Niebuhr). A lesson should be learnt, Rennell exclaimed, from the sensuous city of the celebrated courtesan Rhodopis, fellow of Aesop, which now lay in such ruin that even a traveller with the raw curiosity of Niebuhr could find nothing to interest him there. Forty-five years later, the very first meeting of the Syro-Egyptian society had included a report on a tour of Rennell's site from the founder of the short-lived periodical *The Sphynx* (1827–9), James Silk Buckingham. He observed that the race of Naucratis beauties had sadly degenerated (he had seen only two women who were not 'deficient in personal charms'; he subjected each of them to detailed description).¹⁰⁷ The site favoured by Rennell and Buckingham did not quite fit the classical geographies. Until 1885, therefore, 'most modern authorities' stated briefly that 'the site of Naucratis is unknown'.¹⁰⁸

Petrie's rediscovery of this ancient centre of transnational commerce was celebrated as a feat of ingenuity to rival the standard Egyptological yarn of Mariette's discovery of the Serapeum in

¹⁰⁵ R. S. Poole, 'Egypt Exploration Fund' *Academy* (1885), 86.

¹⁰⁶ J. H. Middleton, 'Naukratis', *Academy* (1886), 193; the idea that if the ancient world was Britain then Egypt would be Yorkshire (large and productive but always stubbornly, eccentrically, independent?) is persistent in this period; see chapter 5, p. 41, note 110 below.

¹⁰⁷ James Silk Buckingham, 'A visit to the Ruins of the Ancient City of Naucratis . . . from an unpublished manuscript of J. S. Buckingham' in *Original Papers Read Before the Syro-Egyptian Society of London*, 1 (London: Madden and Malcolm, 1845), 71.

¹⁰⁸ 'Naucratis', *Saturday Review* (29 August 1885), 288.

1851.¹⁰⁹ Petrie's parallel tale held that on being shown an alabaster figurine 'of Egyptian form but Greek feeling' in Cairo, he recalled the city of Rhodopis and, sleuth-like, set about tracing the artefact to its source.¹¹⁰ He was led to Tell Nebireh on the Canopic branch of the Nile and was soon marvelling over the profusion of 'archaic pottery, Athenian coins and Greek inscriptions' that even a perfunctory survey revealed. Able to muster forty workers on day work and another hundred on piece work, Petrie was soon uncovering temples described by Herodotus and piecing together networks of mutual influence between the great powers of the Eastern Mediterranean in the sixth century BC.

Just like Pithom this site was easy to adapt for popular consumption. It had no luminaries with quite the emotive weight of Moses, Aaron or a biblical pharaoh; but Herodotus attached Naucratis to some of his most sensational tales of betrayal and conquest (not to mention the enslavement and liberation of beautiful Greek women). Rhodopis, Pharaohs Psammitichus, Amasis and Hophra, the traitor Phanes and the Persian conqueror Cambyses made up an extraordinary cast list for an ancient city 'lost till yesterday'.¹¹¹ Phoenician sailors were evoked as the agency through which all the artifices of the known world had been gathered at this prodigious trading post. Rhodes, Cyprus, Ephesus, Palestine, Assyria, the Red Sea and even the Indian Ocean were evoked as points of origin for the cosmopolitan wares that now flowed from Petrie's trenches into temporary displays in the Bronze Room of the British Museum, the EEF's newly secured room at the Royal Archaeological Institute, and the 'Gallery of Lady Artists at the Egyptian Hall'.¹¹² Despite this, the press coverage the EEF was able to secure for a classical find was narrow when compared with the extraordinary presence of biblical Pithom. A handful of highbrow periodicals, in particular the *Academy* and *Athenaeum*, dominate the site's reception. When compared with the dozens of fascinated journals for biblical discoveries this serves as a reminder

¹⁰⁹ This was a detective story sparked by a limestone sphinx in an Alexandrine garden.

¹¹⁰ 'Naucratis', *Saturday Review* (29 August 1885), 288.

¹¹¹ Rhodopis in particular had a modern literary pedigree, most notably through William Morris' *Earthly Paradise* (London: F. S. Ellis, 1868): 'Argument: there was in a poor land a certain maid, lowly but exceeding beautiful, who, by a strange hap, was drawn from her low estate, and became a queen and the world's wonder' (277).

¹¹² 'Tanis', *Saturday Review* (1888), 590.

that much of the 1880s periodical press remained dominated by religious agendas and defined by religious identity.

However, Naukratis, like Pithom, did provide further opportunities to crow over the archaeological noose tightening around the neck of textual criticism. Percy Gardner, in *The Quarterly Review*, declared that his tendency to take the side of Herodotus against modern critics was now proved justified. His rhetoric was less celebratory of the ancients than that which accompanied Pithom, however. Critics (amongst whose ranks he even included Sayce) ‘err through supposing that people in ancient days always acted reasonably, and valued motives according to the scale of Bentham’.¹¹³ Gardner conjured the awe that abashed Greeks must have felt beneath the wonders of ‘vast size and venerable antiquity’ created by Egyptian masons. He rehearsed the put-downs that Egyptian ‘masters’ gave to precocious Greek ‘children’: even Solon, Plato’s ‘wisest of the Greeks’, was chided for his naivety by an ‘aged Egyptian priest’.¹¹⁴ It was no wonder that Herodotus was cowed into believing that his own culture had copied everything from the pharaohs. It was not so clear then as it is to ‘we moderns’ that the future belonged to Greece and that Egypt ruled only the past.¹¹⁵ The old disdain for Egypt resurfaced when Gardner drew his observations into a hierarchy of races: ‘a Greek in Memphis or Thebes as much represented a higher race and a nobler order of ideas, as . . . an Englishman in Canton’.¹¹⁶

Press opinion on Petrie, the dashing new EEF archaeologist, was split. The classicists of the *Athenaeum* were horrified: they labelled Petrie’s Greek inadequate and his interest in supposed ephemera like weights and measures ‘wearisome’; they chided the EEF for wasting the time of their only member ‘who does any work’ in unpacking cases of antiquities when he should be acquiring the education that would make his publications passable; and they claimed that Cecil Smith’s studies of pottery were the only scholarly chapters in Petrie’s excavation report.¹¹⁷ German commentators on Tanis and Naukratis were similarly underwhelmed by Petrie’s schooling: Ebers (a learned philological Egyptologist), noted that ‘he is not to be regarded as a learned philological Egyptologist’.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Percy Gardner, ‘Naukratis and the Greeks in Egypt’, *Quarterly Review*, 164 (January 1887), 67.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* (Timaeus).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 68.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* ¹¹⁷ ‘Naukratis’, *Athenaeum* (1886), 471.

¹¹⁸ Georg Ebers, ‘Tanis’, *Academy* (6 March 1886), 172.

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Those in Britain of a more archaeological bent were dazzled, however. As the great art-historian John Henry Middleton put it ‘the same excavations might have been carried on by an ordinary explorer without one tithe of Mr Petrie’s valuable results being gained’.¹¹⁹ Thanks to Petrie’s ‘microscopic methods of observation’ the results were ‘utterly out of proportion to the sum which has been expended on the work’.¹²⁰ Even Ebers noted that ‘he has the gift . . . the *avoir le nez*’ of the true archaeologist.¹²¹ This was an auspicious signal: however much the bricks of Pithom had been celebrated, personal praise for Naville had not been effusive. Petrie’s pride in his discovery permeates his prose and behaviour in 1885. Demonstrating unprecedented diligence he endeavoured to attend his exhibition at the Royal Archaeological Institute every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday throughout the summer.

This discovery was always, however, celebrated as a boon to ‘Hellenic students’ more than to those interested in ancient Egypt (just as ‘biblical scholars’ were noted as the beneficiaries of excavations at Pithom, San, Tahpahnés and Goshén). Hissarlik was evoked again and again in notices of discoveries ‘made mostly by Englishmen, which are of not less interest to lovers of Greek history and literature’ than Schliemann’s.¹²² While the EEF initially paid Petrie’s expenses (at this stage he still refused other remuneration) they complained in the pages of *The Academy* that the organization was devoted to ‘excavation in the Biblical land of the East’ and was not at all equipped for the exploration of ‘a Hellenic site of the West’.¹²³ C. T. Newton, on the verge of retirement from the British Museum, soon secured funding from the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies to ensure that the dig continued. Later seasons were run and published by Ernest Gardner, the bright young classical scholar who would be appointed Director of the British School at Athens in the following year.¹²⁴ In the glare of the Hebraism of Pithom and the Hellenism of Naucratis, Egypt itself was still difficult to discern. Even in 1885, amidst the effusive praise for ancient Egyptian culture penned by

¹¹⁹ J. H. Middleton, ‘Naukratis’, *Academy* (1886), 193.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Ebers, ‘Tanis’, *Academy*, 172.

¹²² Gardner, ‘Naukratis’, *Quarterly Review* (1887), 66.

¹²³ R. S. Poole, ‘Egypt Exploration Fund’, *Academy* (31 January 1885), 86.

¹²⁴ E. A. Gardner was Percy’s brother, and would soon be appointed UCL Professor alongside Petrie.

Poole and Petrie, active interest in the pharaohs rested more on their associations than intrinsic appeal.

THE ORGANIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Besides the years that immediately followed the discovery of Tutan-khamun's tomb, no period has ever seen such extensive coverage of ancient Egypt throughout every region of the press. Despite this ubiquity it is fair to say that the most consistent and committed supporter of Egyptology amongst the journals of the 1880s was *The Academy*. This journal had been founded in 1869 by a fellow of St John's College, Oxford, Charles Appleton, who died in Egypt a decade later. To the grave concern of its publisher, John Murray, it had set out as an unremittingly highbrow science journal intended to bring Germanic 'thirst for knowledge' to a nation that Appleton openly accused of intellectual vacuity. From Huxley and Lubbock to Matthew Arnold *The Academy's* initial contributors were prestigious and rumbustuous writers capable of reviewing works written in a wide range of languages and straddling the 'scientific' spectrum. During the 1870s (and especially after Appleton's death) the journal had become more inclusive, a little less elitist, and much less culturally radical. As a result it developed a wider circulation and gradually became a mainstay of the most intellectual reaches of Britain's vast periodical spectrum.

By the early 1880s the *Academy* had settled under the editorship of James Sutherland Cotton, a Madras-born, Oxford-educated lawyer and collector who joined the EEF on its inception and was an Honorary Secretary by the mid 1890s. Under his leadership the journal was divided into sections on Science, the Fine Arts and Literature. Articles and reviews featuring ancient Egypt suffused all three of these to the extent that their distribution seems indiscriminate. This apparent lack of system, and the complex logic that does inform it, is revealing of the place Egypt had come to occupy within public culture. It demonstrates the status and identity of Egyptology as well as the intellectual context in which discoveries and theories were debated.

Volume 19 of *The Academy* covered January to June 1881. As usual, it featured Egypt in a large proportion of its articles. Several narratives of travel in Egypt and Palestine were reviewed under the heading 'Literature'. This heading subsumed an extended review of

the English translation of Max Duncker's magisterial *History of Antiquity* (6 volumes, 1880) alongside further reviews of prose (Lane-Poole's *Egypt*, Gerald Massey's controversial evolutionary study of Egypt, *A Book of the Beginnings*) and of poetry (Richard Monckton Milnes' *Philae* and J. B. McCaul's *The Last Plague of Egypt*); a range of 'archaeological jottings' included discussion of the comparative influence of Assyria and Egypt on Phoenician art. A report of an injury to Archibald Henry Sayce (kicked by a mule) followed, before the 'Science section' of the journal reviewed Tylor's anthropology alongside studies of the rise of Epic poetry, Arabian poetry for English readers, biblical commentaries, Leroux's *Revue Egyptologique* and the annual Hibbert Lectures on the origin and growth of religion. Finally, the Fine Arts section included de Rougé on Edfu, Mariette on Abydos, Amelia Edwards on the progress of excavation in Egypt, and an obituary of Mariette with notice of Maspero's appointment as his successor. Yet more articles in all three sections incorporated Egypt as part of the archaeology of the Mediterranean, the history of religion, or as a philological source.

This was fairly typical of the diverse appearances of ancient Egypt throughout 1880s volumes of this extraordinary weekly; no periodical from any previous decade had featured Egypt with anything like the same persistence or range. While we expect disciplinary boundaries in 1881 to be different from our own, we do not usually anticipate quite the degree of difference on display here. It seems disorienting to encounter biblical commentaries placed confidently under the heading of 'Science', or obituaries of Egyptologists under the heading 'Fine Arts', or evolutionary studies of Egyptian origins under the heading 'Literature'. Although ostensibly haphazard, the editorial decisions that resulted in these quirks were governed by careful definitions. The most striking of these is the agenda established for the 'Science' section, which embraced 'Natural Philosophy, Theology, and the Science of Language, especially the English Language and Dialects, and the very important and interesting study of Comparative Philology, in connection with the Mythology, Folklore, Manners, Customs, and Institutions of the various races of mankind'.¹²⁵ This has been described by Gillian Beer as a 'wonderfully inclusive ideal of

¹²⁵ Gillian Beer, 'The Academy: Europe in England' in G. N. Cantor & S. Shuttleworth (eds), *Science Serialized: representations of the sciences in nineteenth-century periodicals* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 182.

free intellectual movement between disciplinary forms'.¹²⁶ It is also difficult to think of a categorization that could be more conducive to early Egyptology's aspirations to scientific status. The policies of *The Academy* suggest that we need not be hesitant in placing ancient Egypt in the inner sanctum of nineteenth-century scientific life. But the blurring of these boundaries between 'science' and 'literature' has wider repercussions: it reveals an equally unfamiliar interpretation of what constituted moral and what empirical knowledge. If the presence of theology under the heading of science seems to attest to its continuing empirical salience, then the substantive treatment of Egyptology as 'literature' hints at the moral element expected of it. Reluctance to separate these categories of science/literature and empirical/moral was not negated until the twentieth century. In the case of Egypt this sweeping ability to occupy all categories of knowledge simultaneously was derived from the civilization's entanglement with both the Hebrews and Greeks who were written so deep into the moral discourse of the generation that followed Matthew Arnold.

These trans-epistemological tendencies are reinforced in the pages of other scientifically oriented periodicals of the 1880s. In journals such as *Nature* and *Knowledge*, Egypt takes an active role in conceptions of both a science of religion and a religion of science. These journals add a theme that is much less marked in *The Academy*: an intense focus on the relationship between astronomy (that 'oldest and sedatest of the sciences') and religious belief.¹²⁷ Founded in the same year as *The Academy* by John Murray's rival, Alexander Macmillan, *Nature* was aimed towards a professionalizing scientific community. It lobbied for scientific funding and an increased role for the sciences in public policy; its coverage embraced technology, geology, astronomy and the natural sciences. Superficially at least, its conception of science provides us with significantly less culture shock than that of *The Academy*.

Nature was among Petrie's favourite journals. At the age of twenty-two, five years before his first visit to Egypt, he contributed mathematical and metrological views to its correspondence pages. He soon used these pages to debate chemistry with established chemists, and to pronounce on the relative authority of geology and astronomy in determining the age of the earth. By 1880 he was writing in protest at

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ 'The Old Astronomy', *Saturday Review* (1895), 20.

the lack of training received by British Museum attendants ('why should they not . . . be competent to give simple and informal description-lectures'?¹²⁸ The snuff-taking they indulged in to keep awake was a precaution that proved insufficient for 'the stouter ones' and would be unnecessary if they were treated as 'rational beings'). Even in later years when he worked in Egypt, his correspondence to *Nature* related to chemistry or astronomy as frequently as 'Early Egyptian Civilization' or 'The Earliest Racial Portraits'.

This range of interests was shared by *Nature's* editor, J. Norman Lockyer. A War Office employee, Lockyer had made his name with pioneering astronomical work on the solar atmosphere and sunspots. In the 1860s he had discovered and named helium (although his discovery would not be confirmed in the laboratory for another thirty years). Although combative and controversial, Lockyer was a society figure, friend of Huxley and a well-known face in Christian-Socialist circles. His first wife died in 1879 and when he eventually remarried it was into a prominent Unitarian clan.¹²⁹

Like many astronomers Lockyer was enthralled by Egypt. His travels in the Eastern Mediterranean led him to surmise that temples throughout the ancient world were sited and constructed according to astronomical principles. Drawing on Petrie's early work at Stonehenge and the Great Pyramid he constructed a theory that drew English churches and cathedrals into a tradition of cosmological draftsmanship that stretched back via the Parthenon to Karnak and beyond. In *The Dawn of Astronomy: a Study of the Temple-Worship and Mythology of the Ancient Egyptians* (1894) Lockyer set out his agenda. 'In England', he reminded readers, 'the eastern windows of churches face generally . . . to the place of sunrising on the festival of the patron saint', hence the term 'orientation' which had since been adapted to apply also to things south-, west- and north-facing.¹³⁰ This was evidently 'a survival from ancient times' and Lockyer's goal was to determine the 'celestial bodies to which the ancient temples were directed'.¹³¹ Egyptian astronomers were known as 'the mystery

¹²⁸ W. M. F. Petrie, 'British Museum Attendants', *Nature*, 22 (12 August 1880), 338.

¹²⁹ The father of his second wife, Thomazine Browne, was the surgeon who travelled to Rome with Clough, watched Garibaldi take the city, and mused over the interface of pagan and Christian past and present.

¹³⁰ J. Norman Lockyer, *The Dawn of Astronomy* (London: Cassell, 1894), viii.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

teachers of Heaven', he proclaimed as he set about his demonstration that their influence stretched through Athens to Christendom.¹³² He drew on Napoleon's savants, Lepsius, and correspondence with the British Museum, Petrie, Edwards and Brugsch, as well as his own surveys of temple sites. He collated these to construct a grand scheme whereby art, architecture, myth and religion were mere secondary phenomena driven and defined by the pattern-science of astronomy. His argument takes for granted that the first priority of a 'race emerging into civilization' would be to find its bearing according to the stars. All religious, agricultural, mercantile and cultural schemes would be later emanations from discoveries made in that first glimmer of celestial consciousness. Lockyer's constant activism for the priority of scientific authority was hereby granted unrivalled pedigree.

The agendas adopted by Lockyer and *Nature* come into focus most clearly in comparison with *Nature's* noisy rival: Richard Proctor's *Knowledge*. The rivalry between Proctor and Lockyer—two leading popularizers of astronomy—was fought out primarily through their conflicting visions of the future of the sciences. Their enmity had become evident in the early 1870s when Lockyer staunchly opposed Proctor's campaigns to reform the Royal Astronomical Society. But their battle was also fought out in conflicting interpretations of ancient Egypt and in very different attitudes to religion.

Bernard Lightman has provided detailed analysis of the professional dimension to this argument: the name of *Knowledge*, its motto and even the layout of its front page, were direct challenges to what Proctor saw as *Nature's* elitist and discriminatory practices which threatened to make science a realm of specialist knowledge inaccessible to all but the most highly educated.¹³³ Indeed, Proctor pursued a demotic endeavour in the name of science that bears comparison with the EEF's mission in the name of exploration. As Lightman notes,

Some readers suggested in 1882 that the price could be increased to increase circulation among the 'higher and superior educated branches of society.' Proctor replied that this would put the weekly 'beyond the reach of many to whom [he wished] to be of use.' He continued 'our plan was to make *Knowledge* as low-priced as possible, and to give as

¹³² Ibid. 2.

¹³³ Bernard Lightman, '*Knowledge* confronts *Nature*: Richard Proctor and Popular Science Periodicals', in Louise Henson *et al.* (eds), *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Media* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 199–221.

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much as we possibly could for the money. To that plan we must adhere.¹³⁴

The mission met with success amongst critics and public alike. The *Westminster Review* wrote (in terms that once again suggest continuity of science and the humanities) that

Mr Proctor, of all writers of our time, best conforms to Matthew Arnold's conception of a man of culture, in that he strives to humanize knowledge, to divest it of whatever is harsh, crude, and technical, and to make it a source of happiness and brightness for all.¹³⁵

Sales (according to Proctor) were soon increasing from an initial circulation of 20,000. When *The Times* looked back over his life, their obituarist opined that Proctor had 'probably done more than any other man during the present century to promote an interest among the ordinary public in scientific subjects'.¹³⁶

Much more than *Nature*, editions of *Knowledge* were threaded through with discussion of religion and theology. Between 1881 and 1883, this discussion often took place through conflicting articles and correspondence on ancient Egypt. Conceiving *Knowledge* as a forum for public debate, Proctor gave space to biblical Egyptology and to pyramid metrology as well as to outspoken criticism of both.

Trained as a theologian at King's College London and St John's College, Cambridge, Proctor had married an Irish Catholic, Mary Mills, in 1860 and turned to Rome. In 1875, however, he abandoned faith altogether, declaring it unscientific. Over the following decade he experimented with various attempts to formulate a religion of science. His first resort was to a fusion of Kant and Huxley, but in the early 1880s he became increasingly enamoured of the metaphysics of Herbert Spencer. Part one of Spencer's *First Principles* (1862), entitled 'The Unknowable', began from the premise that the human mind could comprehend only the natural, phenomenal, world and that anything beyond that—anything divine—evaded human faculties. 'Divinity' was defined as that which lay without the reach of science and therefore of knowledge; theology was dismissed as a tangled mass of fruitless and contradictory dogma. This was a metaphysic in which worship of an Absolute that transcended human

¹³⁴ Ibid. 201.

¹³⁵ 'Opinions of the press', *Knowledge*, 1:13 (1882), front matter.

¹³⁶ See Lightman, 'Knowledge Confronts Nature', 199.

conception should persist, but in which all anthropomorphism, Christology, and Church or Bible teaching must be thrown to the winds.

Proctor produced a series of Spencer-influenced works of popular astronomy including *The Mysteries of Time and Space* (much more digestible to most readers than the famously abstruse *First Principles*). But Proctor also produced Spencerian renderings of the familiar astronomical fascination with the ancients. *The Great Pyramid: Observatory, Tomb and Temple* attempted to demystify and scientize Egyptian culture by cutting away the foundations of theories such as Piazzi Smyth's. It also endeavoured to demystify modern religious practices by revealing their ancient Egyptian origins. In chapters on 'Saturn and the Sabbath of the Jews' and 'The History of Sunday', Proctor presented Cheops and his successors as a dynasty of astronomers and astrologers whose cosmic inventions would persist in religious festivals and observances throughout Christendom. He quoted long passages from Spencer that depict a visitor from another world asking why the people of modern Britain reject the teachings of the New Testament and follow instead the habits of the Egyptian New Kingdom. Although Proctor rejected the divine origin and authority of the Old Testament he gave it a historical authority that recalls Paul Veyne's investigation of the status of belief in Greek myth: Proctor tied the pyramid builders into dynastic relation with the biblical Abraham.¹³⁷

Proctor's editorial in the first edition of *Knowledge*—'Science and Religion'—gave an intimation of what was to come. Thinly veiled though it was his criticism of religion was widely misinterpreted (his religious identity only gradually became common knowledge). Proctor insisted that the scientist and the clergyman would remain in harmony so long as science were permitted to dissolve 'superstitions which pass as religion' in the minds of the public.¹³⁸ This proposal was made vaguely enough (and in terms similar enough to contemporary liberal theology) for a clergyman who wrote in support of Proctor's venture to miss the implication that biblical religion should be placed wholesale within the category of 'superstition'.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Richard Proctor, *The Great Pyramid: Observatory, Tomb and Temple* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1883), 10–11.

¹³⁸ Richard Proctor, 'Science and religion', *Knowledge*, 1 (1881), 3–4.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 3.

Proctor's ambition was to produce a journal that was wholly representative of public interest in science, not of his own strongly held views. But even at this early stage he took extreme editorial liberties with the material he printed, adding caustic asides in square brackets to any articles that didn't meet his scientific standards. When Joseph Baxendell penned a piece in support of Piazzzi Smyth, Proctor borrowed a parody of pyramid metrology from the *New York Tribune* to print in association with it.¹⁴⁰ This claimed to find the same divine communications in the *New York Tribune* building that metrologists deciphered from the Pyramid. Proctor added that Baxendell's arguments 'illustrate well the whole theory of pyramid coincidences, but these coincidences disprove, in our opinion, what Mr Baxendell considers they prove'.¹⁴¹ It was in this period that Proctor gained the reputation voiced by J. R. Sutton in his *Time* obituary: 'no man hated quackery more than Proctor hated it; and no man lashed it more severely'.¹⁴²

The gloriously diffuse correspondence pages of *Knowledge* demonstrate that its constituency was not that of *Nature*. Debates covered questions such as how the sun can be a hot body if mountains are cooler than valleys, and whether it might be possible to communicate with inhabitants of the moon.¹⁴³ Proctor maintained a paternal presence. He first offered clues for the solution of problems; then, if confusion persisted, gave his own solutions. The first volume is run through with letters debating the antiquity of Egyptian civilization. Leonard Horner had earlier used geological evidence to date burnt brick near Memphis to 14,000 BC. 'Are his findings reliable?', asked 'Clio'; 'No', replied R. S. Couch: Samuel Birch's Egyptological evidence demonstrated them to date from 1,300 BC.¹⁴⁴ When Baxendell weighed in, Proctor followed it up with his corrective (in square brackets):

ANTIQUITY OF THE PYRAMIDS – Notwithstanding Sir John Lubbock's statement, there is no trustworthy evidence that the Pyramids

¹⁴⁰ 'The Tribune riddle', *Knowledge*, 1 (1881), 18.

¹⁴¹ A. C. Ranyard, 'The Pyramid and Paradoxers', *Knowledge*, 1 (1881), 111; Proctor, *Knowledge*, 1 (1881), 112.

¹⁴² J. R. Sutton, 'Richard Anthony Proctor', *Time* (1889), 316–27.

¹⁴³ Anti-Guebre, 'Is the sun hot?', *Knowledge*, 1 (1881), 15–16; *Knowledge*, 1 (1881), 35; *Knowledge*, 1 (1881), 56–7; *Knowledge*, 1 (1881), 74–7.

¹⁴⁴ R. S. Couch, 'Ancient Man', *Knowledge* (16 December 1881), 40, 146.

‘are at least 6,000 years old’. The Great Pyramid of Geezeh is generally admitted to be . . . the oldest, and astronomical considerations based upon the position of its entrance passage – which constitute evidence of a much more reliable character than that of ancient Egyptian traditions – indicate that its age does not exceed 4,051 years.

[Mr Baxendell fails to notice that the direction of the entrance-passage fulfilled the condition of pointing towards Alpha Draconis at its sub-polar passage, at two epochs during the last 25,000 years – one that which he mentions, the other some 6,000 years ago. Moreover, what no one seems to have noticed yet, the ascending passage, which 4,051 years ago would have been directed towards no important star would have been directed towards the most interesting orb in the whole star-sphere – namely, Alpha Centauri – at its southern culmination, at the earlier epoch . . . ED]¹⁴⁵

In these early editions Proctor welcomed biblical Egyptology and pyramid metrology as points of entry for casual readers of *Knowledge*. He had been confident that if he presented the public with a range of conflicting viewpoints, a little gentle guidance would suffice for them to recognize and embrace his ‘enlightened’ perspective. Within a year this confidence had begun to waver. The prevailing tenor of the correspondence he received refused to take his hints and he soon reneged on his promise to open the pages of *Knowledge* to all comers. His principled opposition to dogmatic editorial policy evaporated and his own strong opinions were soon asserted more frequently.

Proctor’s messages were now mixed, to say the least: he was caught between two conflicting roles. Each of these sought to elevate the social status of the scientist and to displace theologians as authorities on the origin and nature of the universe; but each posited different methods for achieving this. He saw himself as editorial adjudicator of a periodical whose masses of readers would respond predictably and ‘rationally’ to scientific information; this role required patience and self-effacement but, so long as the right information was publicized, its triumph was preordained. This was incompatible with the forceful, Huxleyan persona of scientific visionary that Proctor increasingly coveted. As fierce prophet of science to a hostile unscientific world, Proctor desired beyond all else to transcend the role of popularizer and take on the mantle of Herschel as a theorist of galaxy formation

¹⁴⁵ Joseph Baxendell & Richard Proctor, ‘Antiquity of the Pyramids’, *Knowledge* (23 December 1881), 168; see also 72, 122, 166, 207.

and shining fluid. As his mildly indulgent obituaries make clear, for all his success as a popularizer, his ideas were never taken entirely seriously.¹⁴⁶ Proctor's tone in *Knowledge* swung between condescending indulgence and angry frustration.

Proctor's more balanced editorial voice was on display when he argued in 1885 that the relationship between religion and science was an essential topic since his most sincere ambition was to

show all men that they can enter fearlessly on the study of science, assured that they can never lose thereby what is essential to their happiness and peace; and to show those who do not come to enter on scientific studies that their fellow men who in ever increasing numbers follow science are not therefore devoid of religious inspirations, of religious hopes, or of religious responsibilities.¹⁴⁷

Yet he was engaged at the same time in an expansive rendering of ancient science and religion which was combatively deconstructive. This was a series of articles entitled 'The Unknowable, or the Religion of Science', which carried the narrative of the evolution of religion set forth in *The Great Pyramid* into radical and outspoken territory.

Proctor set up an evolutionary historical scheme in which human progress was confined to a handful of intense moments of 'mental struggle' and philosophical enlightenment. These punctuated huge tracts of history in which dogma and philosophical conservatism prevented 'the encroachment of more advanced ideas'. The Copernican revolution was one moment of sudden scientific illumination; the pyramid age in Egypt was another.¹⁴⁸

Proctor insisted that the status of the nineteenth century as the third scientific revolution hung in the balance. Its success was threatened by superstition and was predicated on the public embrace

¹⁴⁶ Sutton, 'Proctor', *Time*; some thinkers did take Proctor seriously; one strange instance is Robert Frost's insistence that his theory of knowledge was derived from Proctor, William James and Henri Bergson; see Michael Karounos, 'Science', in John Zubizarreta & N. L. Tuten (eds), *Robert Frost Encyclopedia* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 318.

¹⁴⁷ Proctor, 'Science and religion', *Knowledge*, 3.

¹⁴⁸ cf. Huxley's insistence that on 'the plains of Mesopotamia or of Egypt' man had developed a little physical comfort and a 'more or less workable theory of life', then over millennia of bloodshed and misery the human struggle had been to maintain that limited advance; people had been killed or deified indiscriminately, and the best men of any epoch had simply been those who had made the fewest blunders; T. H. Huxley, 'Agnosticism', *Nineteenth Century*, 25 (February 1889), 169–94.

of science and rejection of clerical authority. His statement of this case did not sit easily with his assurances that science was entirely unthreatening to the metaphysics of Christian readers:

civilised man cannot gain in intellect and develop while he worships an unreasoning Deity of ill-developed moral character (the invention of less advanced races) as the Supreme Being; in the recognition that all anthropomorphic attributes must be rejected from our consciousness of deity, lies our sure hope for the advancement of humanity to all of which humanity is capable.¹⁴⁹

Proctor offered his readers profound moral lessons drawn from ancient Egypt. The Egyptians before the pyramids had worshipped the sun because they feared each day that it might not rise on the next. As they acquired the astronomical knowledge to plot the uniform motion of sun and moon they began to worship planets and elemental forces whose tendencies were more difficult to explain and predict. Each step in the development of astronomical knowledge added a layer of philosophical finesse to Egyptian theology until

Here verily was the most impressive nature-worship the human race has yet known. [In the skies the Egyptians] recognised the visible symbols of the unseen majesty of their deities... The movements which they traced, and in that sense, knew, spoke to them of the unknown – nay, of what they deemed, and what therefore was for them, Unknowable.¹⁵⁰

However, just as Spencer and Darwin were resisted by conservative elements in society, Egyptian astronomers were challenged by weak-minded peers who failed to recognize that theology had always been, and must always be, derived from the best current science.

¹⁴⁹ Proctor, 'The Unknowable or the religion of science', *Knowledge*, 9 (1886), 37; this series caused enough soul-searching for Egyptologists to receive several demands for clarification or rebuttals. One of the most intriguing reads: 'These articles have for some time been occupying my earnest attention; and I have spent a long time in trying to verify Mr Proctor's statements by referring to the books in the South Kensington Museum. I unfortunately have not access to the library of the British Museum, which greatly limits my opportunities of collecting information on the subject, I being only 18 years of age. The libraries at South Kensington do not contain the works I most want, such as, for example, Higgins' *Anaclypsis*': Herbert Campion to P. Renouf, 16 November 1887: BM ANE, 1887/47; see also Herbert Campion to Dr S. Birch, 14 November 1887: BM ANE, 1887/46

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 266.

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As fossil-minded folk in our day proclaim that science is setting on one side the Almighty in the name of universal evolution, so would the ignorant of those old sun-worshipping days have lamented that their gods were being set aside in the name of uniform motion. We have only to consider the horror with which the Copernican theory and afterwards the theory of gravitation were received, to perceive what a shock there must have been here for the worshippers of the sun and moon in the idea that those bodies have, each of them, their appointed paths.¹⁵¹

By this stage each edition of *Knowledge* contained substantial treatment of biblical themes. Articles including ‘How the Bible came to us’ argued that the reality of biblical miracles must be assessed by those trained in ‘medical psychology’, not by clergymen; and they mocked the non-scientific character of Christ’s actions (if clay and saliva have no medicinal value why did Christ need to rub them on the eyes of John’s ‘man born blind?’). Where Proctor had printed extensive articles by Amelia Edwards just four years earlier, he now insisted the mission of the EEF to be entirely misconceived because Egyptologists lacked the scientific skills to comprehend the Egyptians ‘unless they happen also to be astronomers’.¹⁵²

These statements reignited old questions concerning the disciplinary identity of the Egyptologist. Proctor demanded that Egyptologists must be astronomers in the same decade that classicists expressed bewilderment that Egyptologists seemed not to consider Greek and Latin essential equipment in their disciplinary armoury. Others insisted that Egyptologists should, first and foremost, be engineers. Edward Poynter protested against Petrie’s cavalier attitude to the preservation of ancient structures: he claimed that Egyptologists would continue to destroy, more than elucidate, the material culture of the ancients until they received thorough engineering training. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s the range of constituencies with an investment in the public image of Egypt remained so wide that it was profoundly unclear what direction the identity of the Egyptologist would take. By the mid 1890s the discipline was changing so rapidly that works of ‘the seventies’ were now seen to be ‘worse than useless’.¹⁵³ Events of the decade between 1894 and 1904 would go some way to establishing the relative significance of philology, theology, engineering, astronomy, anthropology, *et cetera* in Egyptology.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 201. ¹⁵² Ibid. 265.

¹⁵³ ‘The Egyptian Book of the Dead’, *Saturday Review* (1895), 20.

Before the mid 1890s this balance was entirely undecided: looking back beyond this moment demands that we avoid temptations to read consensus into confusion or to assume that there was anything predetermined in the way the discipline developed. Egyptology swaggered across such a huge epistemological range in *The Academy* of the 1880s that its editors and readers could scarcely have predicted, or believed, the discipline's relative marginality in the intellectual life of the twenty-first century.

EGYPTIAN POLYTHEISM

Richard Proctor dug deep into the astronomical foundations of Egyptian religion in order to reveal the limits of modern religious knowledge. A host of other figures, from biblical Egyptologists to J. G. Frazer and Sigmund Freud, also employed pharaonic ritual as a diagnostic tool for modernity. These Egypts cannot be isolated from the rapid expansion of anthropological thought in the second half of the nineteenth century. As the century progressed, missionaries, colonial administrators and merchants developed ever-closer contact with an unprecedented array of religious systems based on premises fundamentally different from their own. For many anthropological thinkers this amounted to severe disruption of an established world order; pluralism proved both astoundingly disorienting and exceptionally productive. Sustained, extensive travel was formative of many of the most fertile ideas of this intellectually feracious moment; at the same time, it set in relief the prejudices and neuroses of the period's burgeoning insecurities. For centuries European traders had rounded the coasts of Africa, infiltrated the Far East and then the Americas with a stern focus on mercantilism but surprisingly stuttering interest in the accretion of ethnological knowledge. By the mid nineteenth century, the sheer scale of interaction with different traditions—past and present—meant that for all those travellers whose focus remained economic others dug deep into alien cultures and cosmologies and in doing so altered their perspective on their own. Comparative mythology was born of the questions they asked, as was the incipient anthropological discipline. The well-known ideologies and practices that emerged—explored by John Burrow, George Stocking and

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Robert Young amongst many others—illustrate the best and worst of European reactions to profound culture shock.¹⁵⁴

In the last two decades, anthropological theorists such as Marshall Sahlins have engaged in searching studies of the potential of nineteenth-century anthropology to unpick ingrained cosmological assumptions. They demonstrate that it was paradoxically the most familiar ideas that proved most disconcerting. Where travellers in China and Brazil found the worldviews they observed intriguing in their alterity, travellers in Africa were shocked by what they interpreted as contorted echoes of Eden and Babel. They found societies that seemed to ask the same metaphysical questions as Christianity but produced distinctly un-Christian answers. These cultures sought explanations for human suffering in similar ways to Christian theodicy but were less reluctant to ask whether the divine creative power might be malevolent; they asked whether, in transcending categories like good and evil altogether, the gods might transcend all concern for humanity. In confronting these ideas, and in improvising frameworks that could facilitate mutual comprehension between societies, new vocabularies were introduced to British culture: to the old idea of idolatry was added the concept of fetishism; to animal-worship was added totemism.

The lexicons of the ancient historian and the anthropologist were not distinct: circulating in the same learned societies and contributing to the same debates, students of the ancient world echoed colonial encounter. Egyptian mythology was profoundly alien to those who read it in the 1880s and 1890s and required interpretative steps similar to those employed by anthropologists (discoveries were no less disorienting than the imaginary revelations of ‘Tlön, Uqbar and Orbis Tertius’ in Borges’ short-story of that name).¹⁵⁵ The encounter with ancient Egyptian cosmology was not shaped by the exigency of creating and maintaining functional trade relations or securing mass conversions; but, like interaction with living cultures, new knowledge of Egyptian religion shaped the extent to which British thinkers were able to develop reflexive approaches to their own cosmology.

¹⁵⁴ See for instance, John Burrow, *Evolution and Society: a Study in Victorian Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), esp. Ch. 7.

¹⁵⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’, *Labyrinths* (trans. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby. New York: New Directions, 1962).

The first stage in this interpretation of the Book of the Dead was to map it in a geography of ancient literature dominated by the mountain range of scripture and the outlying peaks of Hesiod and Homer. Readers attempted to identify elements that could be harmonized with familiar Christian homilies or Bible verses. They emphasized Egyptian religion's 'great antiquity . . . supposed inspiration . . . [and] faith in the persistence of the human personality after death' as well as trials of faith, apocalyptic beasts, the judgement-seat of God and triumphant reception of the dead in Paradise, all of which made Egypt 'eternally modern'.¹⁵⁶ They found in the Book of the Dead a litany of 'hymns and prayers and confessions', although Anglican readers were cautioned that there was no 'Authorised Version'. Its most profound elements were an 'esoteric monotheism', 'almost Athanasian' in the mystical relationship of father and son (Ra and Osiris).¹⁵⁷ Dramatic renderings borrowed the language of Milton while more sober versions adapted familiar King James English. This biblical harmonizing was not just rhetorical: it was essential to drawing readers into Egyptian texts and it defined how they read them. In this way, the positive revaluation of Egypt amongst orthodox writers actually began to alter orthodox categories.

The great point of contention in the reception of the Book of the Dead was 'abstraction'. The Egyptians had once been assumed to be either stubbornly resistant to abstraction or entirely incapable of it. They were literal-minded children who appeared entirely alien to British readers; they occupied an unrecognizable, incoherent metaphysic and were incapable of producing ideas with any modern relevance. In order to make the Egyptians familiar and to treat them as a blueprint for later developments in thought (as Edwards, Poole and Petrie all did) their ritual had to be reinterpreted as highly abstract, constructed of metaphor and analogy, even with its own Christological typology. Conventions had to be established for identifying the 'higher forms' behind the 'surface appearances' of Egyptian cult.

By the early 1890s the bases of such a system were in place and, consequently, Egyptian mythology began to sell on a substantial scale. After minimal attention for decades, The Book of the Dead was

¹⁵⁶ Margaret Benson, 'The Plain of Thebes', *Edinburgh Review*, 186 (October 1897), 454–82.

¹⁵⁷ Grant Allen, 'The Gods of Egypt', *Universal Review* (1890), 51.

available in four composite English versions by 1895 and the first translation of the recension contained in the Papyrus of Ani (1890) had run into multiple editions. Translation into English of existing French translations was also underway. Praise for the contents of the newly popularized ritual ('a mine of golden thought and soul help') was effusive.¹⁵⁸ Grant Allen insisted that Egyptian religion expressed 'the very highest planes of mysticism and philosophic theology' since to its devotees death was a 'great beginning' not a crude annihilation.¹⁵⁹ Budge spoke of 'the wonderful doctrine of the resurrection of the spiritual body and its everlasting existence'.¹⁶⁰ Few writers managed to avoid self-consciously Christological language when they wrote of the Egyptian pantheon: a staple biblical referent was found in 'the altruistic—we had almost written vicarious—sufferings of Osiris'.¹⁶¹ 'Hieroglyphics', claimed one review, 'are now studied by a wide and ever widening circle' of 'men, women, and children of all ranks'.¹⁶² According to the Principal Librarian of the British Museum, Edward Maunde Thompson, no 'branch of learning' had 'received more attention . . . or has more quickly developed in recent years' than the literature and mythology of ancient Egypt.¹⁶³ This scholarship revealed to him that the Egyptians were not rough-hewn pagans but worshippers of 'one Almighty and Unknowable God'.¹⁶⁴

Numerous scholars set out to demonstrate more precise parallels between the Book of the Dead and the Old Testament; in fact articles on the Book of the Dead which did not draw these parallels were few and far between. J. Hunt Cooke penned a long essay on 'The Book of the Dead and a Passage in the Psalms' for the *Contemporary Review* in 1896. He suggested that even in existing translations 'which . . . are, for the greatest portion, destitute of intelligence', the reader was aware that amidst the 'gloomy morass of words' lay a kernel 'of sublime thought and illustration' with its own 'subtle system of

¹⁵⁸ J. Hunt Cooke, 'The Book of the Dead and a Passage in the Psalms', *Contemporary Review* (August 1896), 285.

¹⁵⁹ Allen, 'Gods of Egypt', *Universal*, 51.

¹⁶⁰ E. A. T. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Book of the Dead* (London: Kegan Paul, d), v (part of a dedication to Edward Maunde Thompson).

¹⁶¹ Hunt Cooke, 'Book of the Dead', *Contemporary*, 285.

¹⁶² 'The Egyptian Book of the Dead', *Saturday Review* (5 January 1895), 20.

¹⁶³ E. M. Thompson, 'The Egyptian Book of the Dead', *Sunday at Home* (1897), 34.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

metaphysics'.¹⁶⁵ Cooke presented readers with his own translations of short passages in rhyme so as to 'catch the thought and the imagination rather than the expression'. He gave a catalogue of reasons why the Book of the Dead was 'like our Bible' and identified 'between twenty and thirty passages . . . which, to say the least, have much similarity to some passages in the Old Testament'.¹⁶⁶ He alluded to the 'distinctly Egyptian note' of Job and to similarities between the Levitical dispensation and inscriptions in the temples of the Nile: 'assuredly there are grounds for believing that in the hoary religion of ancient Egypt there was a purer knowledge of God and man's relation to Him than is generally supposed'.¹⁶⁷ The Egyptian division of the self, Cooke argued, had been misread as merely poetical. A true reading would show that 'it was not simply imagination, but philosophy; not poetry, but ontology'.¹⁶⁸ Cooke makes extensive effort to engage with Egyptian conceptions of subjectivity in terms that will be understood by Britons who are versed in psychology and have read their Bible (Psalm 16 in particular). Cooke breaks down his reading of the Egyptian self (ka, ab, khu, ba, khaib, Sah, Khat) into ego, heart, glory, soul, shade, spiritual body and natural body. Familiar illustration is sought for each pairing: is the Khaib equivalent to 'the glory about the heads of saints of olden days?', he asks, before insisting that the Sah parallels the spiritual body referred to by 'St Paul in the Epistle to the Corinthians'.¹⁶⁹

The negative confessions of the Book of the Dead drew particular attention; these had become known as the 'Declaration of Innocence' (the title Budge gave them in his translation of the papyrus of Ani). F. C. H. Wendel published an 1889 article evangelizing 'The Value of Egyptological Study' in which he described (critically) the prevailing conception that 'all of the ten commandments . . . may be found in the negative confession of the 125th chapter of the Book of the Dead'.¹⁷⁰ From 1882 until after the turn of the century, a public appetite for more—and more literal—statements of these connexions can be observed. F. H. Crozier's letter to the British Museum was one of several:

¹⁶⁵ Hunt Cooke, 'Book of the Dead', *Contemporary*, 277.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 277. ¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 278.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* ¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 283.

¹⁷⁰ F. C. H. Wendel, 'The Value of Egyptological Study', *Old and New Testament* (1889), 281.

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would you permit me to state one or two facts I met with in Egypt, not I think sufficiently and generally known, in support and proof of Holy Writ: namely the belief in the Trinity, the Resurrection of the body, and a future state, as exemplified on the walls of their Temples and Tombs . . . this ancient people must have had knowledge of the Inspired Word which so many now reject.¹⁷¹

The excitement surrounding Egyptian religion was such that the Society of Antiquaries took the unprecedented step of devoting 216 pages of the fifty-second volume of *Archaeologia* (1890) to Budge's exposition of the hieratic papyrus of Nesi-Amsu. This Ptolemaic-Theban text contained festival songs of Isis and Nephthys (the 'service book' of the 'Passion' of Osiris) as well as instructions for defeating Apepi, the demonic 'Enemy of Ra'.¹⁷² These instructions fused the various strands of the oldest Egyptian cosmologies and told of a conflict between a serpentine bringer of darkness who lurked below the horizon and a sun god, the life-giving agent of Ma-at (truth). The practice of creating a wax image of Apepi to trample and pierce was consistently compared with magic in medieval Christendom; readers were referred to parallels such as the Ingoldsby legend of the Leech of Folkestone. Other newly translated texts seemed to illuminate the very beginning of Egyptian history. The Westcar Papyrus revealed tales of priestly miracles at the court of Khufu, while Petrie's *Egyptian Tales* (1891), illustrated by Tristram Ellis, put the 'oldest literature and fiction of the world' in appealing 'English dress' for the first time.¹⁷³

Several dedicated metropolitan lecture series now introduced students and the public to this mythology. Petrie lectured at Gower Street (UCL) and opened the Edwards Library and Collection to visitors three times a week. Wallis Budge's strange Egyptology classes admitted women but expected them to sew 'tableaux' of Egyptian temples.¹⁷⁴ And William St Chad Boscawen's lectures at the British

¹⁷¹ F. H. Crozier to Birch, 10 November 1884: BM ANE, 1884/90; Crozier thought it imperative to bring back 'several proofs of Isis and Horus' as popular evidences of the ancient Egyptian knowledge of Christianity.

¹⁷² 'Books Reviews', *Athenaeum* (1911), 246.

¹⁷³ W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Egyptian Tales: first series* (London: Methuen, 1891); see also, preface to *Egyptian Tales: second series* (London: Methuen, 1895).

¹⁷⁴ See for instance Miss Amherst to Dr Budge, 8 April 1892: BM ANE, 1892/8, concerning earnest desire to avoid anachronism in a tableau 'in connection with needlework'.

Museum garnered special praise for conveying knowledge of this ‘vast and ever spreading’ field to a ‘wide and ever widening’ metropolitan audience.¹⁷⁵ Of Boscawen’s published lecture courses ‘Under the Dust of Ages’ and ‘The Bible and the Monuments’ ran into several editions. He presented Egyptian ritual as ‘highly figurative’: behind its animal ciphers were echoes of the Pentateuch, Psalms, Gospels and Revelation.

The emphasis on Christian conceptions of eternal life and bodily resurrection was overwhelming. Even the evasions of *The Athenaeum* were revealing: ‘Our good friend the general reader . . . seems to be dissatisfied’ with anything ‘less than translations of the sacred texts whereon the Egyptians based their hopes of everlasting life. Whether this fact is in any way connected with the failure of physical science to answer all the questions which have been put to it on the subject of psychology does not concern us here’.¹⁷⁶ It also fed into contemporary debate on the material resurrection of the body which had developed a substantial bibliography, including such classics as Brooke Foss Westcott’s *Gospel of the Resurrection* (1866) and Robert Bickersteth’s *The Recognition of Friends* (1866). It was pursued in texts such as Charles Gore’s Bampton Lectures of 1891 while the idea that bodies ‘sown in corruption’ would ‘rise in incorruption’ (as Charles Bigg put it in his Bampton Lectures on Alexandrine Neoplatonism) conditioned British Protestants to take notice of the meticulously ‘incorrupt’ deceased of Egypt and ask not so much ‘how’ but ‘why’.¹⁷⁷

At the same time, weighty French and German tomes on Egyptian ritual were adapted into something sensational enough for popular consumption, the Egyptian gothic managing to puncture, just occasionally, the utterly dominant theological fascination. *The Graphic’s* review of Maspero’s *Dawn of Civilisation* was particularly pungent (and, typically, bore little relation to the character of Maspero’s text):

¹⁷⁵ ‘The Egyptian Book of the Dead’, *Saturday Review* (5 January 1895), 20.

¹⁷⁶ ‘The Egyptian Book of the Dead’, *Athenaeum* (1896), 348.

¹⁷⁷ On debate over the future state see Michael Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 119–120; for mummies and the afterlife see Anna Wiczorkiewicz, ‘Unwrapping Mummies and Telling their Stories: Egyptian Mummies in Museum Rhetoric’ in Mary Bouquet & Nuno Porto (eds), *Science, Magic & Religion: The Ritual Processes of Museum Magic* (New York: Berghahn, 2006), 51–71.

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[The Dawn of Civilisation] is certainly likely to make Egyptologists and Assyriologists of many persons who have hitherto looked upon hieroglyphics and cuneiform inscriptions, and bull-headed or dog-headed monsters – by the way anybody who wants a really first-class monster may be recommended to the Chaldean notion of the south-West wind, given on page 633 – as so many rather repulsive mysteries. Certainly they will not be relieved of the idea that life in Ancient Egypt must have been exceedingly like a modern nightmare. What with the incomprehensible chaos of gods and goddesses . . . their malign as well as benignant influences, and their generally outrageous behaviour to each other and their worshippers, it is not strange that a chief occupation of a subject of the Pharaohs was to study ‘The Book of the Dead’ so as to get the route of the only other country which he recognised – that in which there were no pharaohs. Yet even there things were almost as bad. After he left his mummy in the tomb and crossed a desert he reached a certain sycamore, and beyond the sycamore were lands of terror, infested by serpents and ferocious beasts, furrowed by torrents of boiling water, intersected by ponds and marshes where gigantic monkeys cast their nets. Ignorant souls – that is to say those who had not mastered the map beforehand – had no easy task before them when they imprudently entered upon it. Those who were not overcome by hunger and thirst at the outset, were bitten by a uraes or horned viper, hidden with evil intent in the sand, and perished in convulsions from the poison; or crocodiles seized as many as they could lay hold of at the fords of rivers; or cynocephali netted and devoured them indiscriminately along with the fish into which the partisans of Typhon were transformed.¹⁷⁸

It was the potential to combine this grotesque sensation with Christianized moralizing that made ancient Egypt a perfect vehicle for 1890s romance. This was a genre pioneered by H. Rider Haggard and Marie Corelli which heaped mythic themes high with sentiment. Much like Hunt Cooke these authors always unpicked Christian ideas from the superficially barbarous mythology of Egypt; they minimized cultural difference and demonstrated emotional continuity across

¹⁷⁸ ‘The Dawn of Civilisation’, *The Graphic*, 50 (1894), 654; this grotesque Egypt returned with a vengeance after 1900, in a flurry of occult fictions such as those by Algernon Blackwood: ‘The Nemesis of Fire’ (1908), ‘The Sand’ (1912), ‘Descent into Egypt’ (1914), ‘The Wings of Horus’ (1917); and by Sax Rohmer, ‘Sebek Ra’ (1910), ‘The Cat’ (1914), ‘The Death of Sneferu’ (1919), ‘The Green Eyes of Bast’ (1920), ‘The Headless Mummies’ (1920), ‘The Case of the Potsherd of Anubis’ (1920), and ‘The Case of the Veil of Isis’ (1920); see also C. W. Leadbeater, ‘The Perfume of Egypt’ (1911), Guy Boothby, *Pharos the Egyptian* (London: Ward Lock, 1898) and, slightly earlier, Richard Marsh, *The Beetle* (London: Skeffington, 1894).

millennia by allowing their own religion to infiltrate the earliest Egyptian beliefs.

The Egyptianized elements of Haggard's best-sellers, *She* and *King Solomon's Mines*, are well-known but these only scratch the surface of his engagement with Egypt. Haggard considered himself a friend of Petrie, Sayce and Wallis Budge; he travelled the Nile, collected antiquities and claimed expertise on the Egyptian afterlife. He put this knowledge to use in more than a dozen romances, including *Morning Star* (1910), *Moon of Israel* (1918), and *The Ancient Allan* (1920). His most sustained engagement with Egyptian ideas, however, came in the romance that Haggard considered his masterpiece: *Cleopatra: an Account of the Fall and Vengeance of Harmachis, the Royal Egyptian, as Set Forth by his Own Hand* (1889). This story's tragic hero, Harmachis, is a priest of the Memphite religion who dreams of the destruction of Alexandria and its Macedonian Queen. The plot explores the battle fought out between the mystical Egyptian religion and the treacherous, worldly Greeks and Romans. Using Graeco-Roman Alexandria and Egyptian Memphis and Abouthis as his settings, Haggard played on the reader's knowledge of the desolation of Memphis, generating powerful irony around the commitment of the Egyptians to their 'eternal' cities. When the crux of the tale comes, Harmachis sets out to murder Cleopatra but, beguiled by the superficial sensuality of Alexandria, he finds his commitment to the spirituality of ancient Egypt faltering. In his momentary lapse of faith Harmachis realizes that for the love of 'a city of the infernal gods—a sink of corruption . . . a home of false faith springing from false hearts' he has caused the degradation of Egypt's temples: 'the day comes when the desert sands shall fill thy secret places . . . new faiths shall make a mock of all thy Holies . . . Centurion shall call upon Centurion across thy fortress walls'.¹⁷⁹ The reader is encouraged to mourn the wind sweeping the wrecks of Abouthis and Memphis while Alexandria still stands. Elsewhere, Harmachis' dream sequences explore parallels between Egyptian religion and Old Testament Christianity, emphasizing Edenic origins, fall, and regeneration.

Haggard's intention in recreating ancient Egypt at the moment of civilizational collapse is not frivolous; his narrative is swathed in

¹⁷⁹ H. Rider Haggard, *Cleopatra: Being an Account of the Fall and Vengeance of Harmachis, the Royal Egyptian, as Set Forth by his Own Hand* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1889), 35.

archaeological detail, so that ‘the long dead past be made to live again before the reader’s eyes with all its accessories of faded pomp and forgotten mystery’.¹⁸⁰ Most dramatically *Cleopatra’s* preface instructs ‘such students as seek a story only, and are not interested in the faith, ceremonies, or customs of the Mother of Religion and Civilisation, ancient Egypt’, to skip the first of the three books which is not intended as a narrative.¹⁸¹ Haggard’s obsession with gaining intimate historical knowledge led him to question a medium known to engage in ‘spiritual wanderings’: ‘I suppose there isn’t any method for getting oneself back to old Egypt. How do you do it?’¹⁸² That source failing him, Haggard sought hallucinogenic substances to achieve his goals.¹⁸³

Marie Corelli’s Egyptian romance, *Ziska: the Problem of a Wicked Soul* (1897), explores similar themes with a stronger emphasis on Christian sentiment.¹⁸⁴ The ‘wicked soul’ is that of a modern artist, Armand Gervase, whose transgression in his present incarnation rests in no crime beyond atheism (and perhaps, Corelli not altogether jokingly suggests, his French birth).¹⁸⁵ This soul’s previous incarnation, a pharaonic warrior, had slain his own lover, the princess Ziska. Her spirit’s vengeance in high-society Cairo is a simple act of retributive justice. It is carried out despite Gervase’s understandable appeals that he has no knowledge of his former incarnation and therefore no responsibility over its actions (this very ignorance Corelli implies, stems from his narrow worldliness).¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. ix. ¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² H. Rider Haggard to W. T. Horton, 14 December 1910: Norfolk Record Office, MC 31/12.

¹⁸³ Haggard’s letters to *The Times* enquiring after a South American hallucinogen are held in the Norfolk Record Office; the desired effects of this drug are fictionalized in *The Ancient Allan*.

¹⁸⁴ Specifically biblical Egyptian tales appeared on both sides of the Atlantic: Edwin Hodder’s *Ephraim and Helah: a Tale of the Exodus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1878) was in its eleventh edition by 1890; F. M. Colby’s *Daughter of Pharaoh: a Tale of the Exodus* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1886) pursued a very well trodden theme; see also the Birmingham Rabbi, Henry Pereira Mendes’ ‘In Old Egypt: a story about the Bible but not in the Bible’ (1903).

¹⁸⁵ Corelli later wrote another (still stranger) Egyptian text, *The Secret Power* (London: Arrowsmith, 1921) in which Morgana Royal finds a hidden city peopled by immortals in the Egyptian desert. She recounts how Scottish tradition makes Highlanders descendants of the Egyptians: ‘they made love to the Highland women and had children by them,—then when they went away back to Egypt they left many traces of Eastern customs and habits which remain to this day’; Corelli, *Secret Power*, 172.

¹⁸⁶ Marie Corelli, *Ziska, or the Problem of a Wicked Soul*, (London: Arrowsmith, 1897), 177–84.

Egyptian religion, in this rendering, led its votaries to expect the coming of Christ (this explained why Christianity had been embraced so early in Alexandria). As Ziska prepares to enact her terrible vengeance, she explains how those who have ‘never taken the sacred name of Christ to their hearts, as a talisman of comfort and support, are left . . . in the vortex of uncertainties . . . and haunted forever by the phantoms of their own evil deeds’. For the ‘hardened reprobate’ who rejected Christ, ‘the old laws’ sufficed: ‘What old laws?’ he asked. ‘Stern justice without mercy!’ she answered.¹⁸⁷ The ancient Egyptian here evangelizes Christianity to materialist modernity.¹⁸⁸ Naturally, this being an 1890s romance, Gervase’s immolation in Egyptian fire turns out to be a gift as he acknowledges the power of the divine and is redeemed by Ziska’s all-conquering love. This trope of beautiful women whose sheer antiquity allowed them to transcend morality was another widespread theme, considered ‘genuinely poetic’ by *The Graphic’s* reviewer of Maspero.¹⁸⁹

The only really sympathetic character in *Ziska* is a British intellectual and spiritualist, Dr Dean, whose chastisement of Gervase’s atheism concludes with an earnest statement of those concerns that *The Athenaeum* read into interest in the Book of the Dead:

In our days we do our best to supply the place of a reluctant Eros by the gilded, grinning Mammon-figure which we try to consider as superior to any silver-pinioned god that ever descended in his rainbow car to

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 81; for analysis of *femmes fatales* in art and literature see Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

¹⁸⁸ Gervase is mocked throughout for materialism; Dr Dean begins the assault: ‘That is your opinion? Yes, I thought so! Science and philosophy, to put it comprehensively, have beaten poor God on His own ground! Ha! Ha! Ha! Very good—very good! And humorous as well! Ha! Ha!’ Corelli, *Ziska*, 26; cf. Norma Lorimer, *There was a King in Egypt*, (New York: Brentano’s, 1918) 145.

¹⁸⁹ ‘The spirit of the Southern Pyramid never appears abroad except in the form of a naked woman, who is very beautiful, but whose manner of acting is such that when she desires to make people fall in love with her and lose their wits, she smiles upon them, and immediately they draw near to her, and she attracts them towards her, and makes them infatuated with love; so that they at once lose their wits and wonder aimlessly about the country . . . It is NIKRATIS still haunting the monument of her shame and magnificence’. ‘*The Dawn of Civilisation*’, *The Graphic*, 50 (1894), 654; NIKRATIS/NICROTIS, was an evocative name in the 1880s and 90s; Ruskin’s notes to the 1883 edition of *The Ethics of the Dust*, 235, describe her as ‘the Cinderella, and the “greatest heroine and beauty of Egyptian story”’, claiming that Chaucer’s Cleopatra (‘The legend of good women’) is based on her. She was considered to have been the builder of the pyramid of Menkaure.

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sing heavenly songs to mortals; but it is an unlovely substitute – a hideous idol at best; and grasp its golden knees and worship it as we will, it gives us little or no comfort in the hours of strong temptation or trouble. We have made a mistake – we, in our progressive generation – we have banished the old sweetness, triumphs and delights of life, and we have got in exchange steam and electricity. But the heart of the age clamours on unsatisfied – none of our ‘new’ ideas content it – nothing pacifies its restless yearning; it feels – this great heart of human life – that it is losing more than it gains, hence the incessant, restless aching of the time, and the perpetual longing for something Science cannot teach – something vague, beautiful, indefinable, yet satisfying to every pulse of the soul.¹⁹⁰

Ziska’s theme of Christian enchantment underlying Egyptian religion reappears in large numbers of romances and short stories of the 1890s. The most frequently reprinted rendering for children, G. A. Henty’s *Cat of Bubastes* (1889), recounts the adventures of Amuba, a ‘lad’ taken to Egypt as a slave after his ‘Rebu’ tribe is conquered by the pharaoh who holds the Israelites captive. Amuba and his mentor Jethro are placed in the service of a high-ranking priest, whose career has been compromised by his democratic proclivities. He wishes to reveal to the animal-worshipping Egyptian people the ‘secret’ of their priesthood. This secret is that each animal god is merely a symbol for a characteristic of the One God: the elect, predestined, priesthood practice a puritan, almost Calvinist Christianity in which they view the entire populace as unworthy of redemption.

In this huge new range of works, across multiple genres, Egyptian religion (deliberately excluded from Wilkinson’s *Manners and Customs*) was finally reaching a wide audience. The flurry of translations, aided by a new policy of the British Museum Trustees to publish plush editions of their most important papyri and coffin texts, led to some unexpected revelations. In particular, Wilkinson’s assumptions concerning the absolutely unchanging nature of Egyptian civilization began to seem unsatisfactory: ‘unchangeable Egypt, as we used to think her, altered her religious ideas from time to time’. Many late Victorians, concerned by their own culture’s religious instability, were fascinated by the question of how a society that appeared so admirably resistant to radical innovation coped with

¹⁹⁰ Corelli, *Ziska*, 130.

religious change. They picked up on the German Egyptologist, Alfred Wiedemann's, characterizations of Egyptian religion:

Progress was made and new views were attained to, either as the outcome of reflection or in consequence of foreign influence; but, although the Egyptians could not hold aloof from change, their acceptance of it involved no casting off of old and cherished ideas, which were retained and allowed to subsist on equal footing with the new modes of thought.¹⁹¹

Elements of religious continuity, amidst sweeping social and political change, were now interpreted not as conservative failings, but as some of the Egyptians' most admirable qualities. Sayce recalled both Horace's treatment of conquered Greece's power over Rome, and Freeman's famous interpretation of life after the Norman Conquest, when he wrote of successive invasions of Egypt, that 'the higher culture of the conquered people overcame the conquerors'.¹⁹²

EVOLUTIONARY EGYPT

The tendency to entwine Egyptian religion with the Christian present was almost always used in support of biblical Christianity: whether orthodox or heterodox, writers were largely united by their biblical devotion. However, the tendency was also embraced by a handful of more radical Egyptophiles: Egypt's radical associations were sidelined but never entirely eradicated. The pedigree of Christology in pre-Christian Egypt had been a well-worn theme of 1830s deists like Robert Taylor and the idea that the Gospels were adapted from much older Egyptian saviour myths returned amongst radical evolutionists in the 1880s. George Eliot's colleague at the *Westminster Review*, Gerald Massey, was prominent among them. A Christian Socialist, former Chartist and 'poet of the people', Massey was widely lauded for his verse (he could count Ruskin and Tennyson among his

¹⁹¹ Alfred Wiedemann, *Religion of the ancient Egyptians* (London: H. Grevel, 1897), 1.

¹⁹² E. A. Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1870–6), 1:2; A. H. Sayce, *The Egypt of the Hebrews and Herodotos* (London: Rivington, Percival & Co., 1895), 14.

admirers).¹⁹³ A respected Shakespeare scholar and devotee of the ‘advanced party’ of science, he also embraced spiritualism and composed his last Shakespeare study through the automatic writing of his wife, Rosina.

Massey’s ancient Egypt was initially a two-dimensional construct intended to demonstrate that humanity ‘developed from the animal kingdom, and is gradually approximating the divine image’: ‘man’, he wished to show, was not ‘a being struck off perfect from the mint of creation, stamped with the image of God’.¹⁹⁴ But Egypt soon became the core element of a radical ‘anti-orthodox Christianity’. In works with titles like *Ancient Egypt the Light of the World* and ‘Man in search of his soul during fifty-thousand years and how he found it’ Massey argued that early inhabitants of the Nile valley had discovered an innate metaphysical potential that had been hidden to their savage ancestors. Like Richard Proctor he saw late-Victorian Britain as a similar evolutionary watershed. Where Proctor foresaw *intellectual* regeneration, Massey’s imminent enlightenment was primarily *spiritual*. Orthodox Christianity would be discarded along with the nineteenth century; a new age would follow in which human power over nature would be enlarged beyond measure.

In the early 1880s Massey turned away from poetry to devote his energies to six volumes of angry polemic on the lessons that the present must learn from the religion of ancient Egypt. He fused an anti-biblical rant with a repertoire of themes drawn from socialism, spiritualism and Darwinism as well as Afrocentric anthropology. These were works intended to contribute

to the new order of thought that has been inaugurated in our own era by the writings of Darwin and Wallace, Spencer and Huxley, Morgan and McLennan, Tylor and Lubbock. It was written by an Evolutionist for Evolutionists, and is intended to trace the Natural Origins and teach the doctrine of development . . . the battle for Evolution has here been continued amongst the difficult defiles and mountain fastness of the enemy.¹⁹⁵

Reviewed widely, frequently dismissively, Massey’s theories were nonetheless heralded in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* as a

¹⁹³ David Shaw, *Gerald Massey: Radical Poet, Chartist and Freethinker* (London: Regency, 1996).

¹⁹⁴ Gerald Massey, ‘Concerning a spirit world’, *Gerald Massey’s Lectures*.

¹⁹⁵ Gerald Massey, *The Natural Genesis* (London, 1883), 2:vii.

‘valuable—almost necessary—companion to Darwin’s *Descent of Man*’.¹⁹⁶

Massey claimed not to ‘see the past as superior to the present’, yet his Egypt was pure utopia.¹⁹⁷ Egyptian priests, unfulfilled by fetishism, had developed religion into a science that could guide the lives of thinking people. This was a revolution that took place tens of millennia before the Israelite tribe coalesced; Darwin’s discoveries demonstrated to Massey that the extraordinary chronological claims made by Herodotus’ priests had been wrongly discounted. After millennia of glorious metaphysical creativity, Egyptian religion had been compromised by outside influence. Decaying memory of priestly wisdom was conveyed through the Gnostic tradition (of which St Paul was part) and eradicated only by the emergence of Christian orthodoxy in Constantine’s vulgar state religion. The official conversion of Egypt in AD 324 saw the imposition of an aristocratic and clerical autocracy that (in an incongruous echo of Ezekiel) permanently eradicated Massey’s ancient socialist and spiritualist idyll.

Massey contributed to the vogueish assertions of Egyptian philosophical abstraction: the lost Egyptian religion had been so highly allegorical that it exceeded even Plato’s comprehension. The ‘Kamite doctrine of metaphysics’ which contained knowledge of the continuance of the human soul after death was ‘perverted and turned into foolishness in India and in Greece’.¹⁹⁸ Massey insisted that

An ignorant explanation of the Egyptian sign-language was begun by the Greeks, who could not read the hieroglyphics. It was repeated by the Romans, and has been perpetuated by ‘Classical Scholars’ ever since . . . this kind of scholastic knowledge is entirely obsolete: Animals are signs for the worship of other things. It is an almost universally made error to assume the animals are objects of worship.¹⁹⁹

He agreed with those scholars and novelists who found biblical imagery in the Book of the Dead, but inverted their interpretation. Decipherment, to him, was the one standout achievement of the nineteenth-century sciences: the truths it revealed required a wholesale reframing of European culture. Christian history was shown to be fraudulent by texts that revealed events and ideas of the Gospels, ‘pre-

¹⁹⁶ ‘The Natural Genesis’, *Quarterly Journal of Science*, 5 (July 1883), 415.

¹⁹⁷ Massey, ‘The Seven Souls of Man’, 245.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 44. ¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 4.

extant as Egyptian mythology'.²⁰⁰ The figure of Christ was a conflation of the historical Jehoshua ben Pandira with set pieces of Egyptian mythology. Pandira, a holy man of the first or second century BC, was 'the only Jesus known to the Jews of the first and second centuries', and was deified when early Christians, influenced by Mithraism and Roman Isis-worship, discovered the ideas of virgin birth, resurrection, adoration of infants, and three magi in Egyptian ritual.²⁰¹ Scenes that were purely allegorical to the metaphysical Egyptians were 'copied or reproduced as historical' by the dull-witted gospel writers. These gospel scenes 'stand like four corner-stones to the Historic Structure [of the New Testament], and prove that the foundations are mythical'.²⁰²

Massey's sources were diverse. Throughout the 1880s he eagerly consumed new translations of Egyptian texts in French and English. The circles he moved in were literary rather than scientific and his overarching Darwinian and Spencerian themes were built on idiosyncratic renderings of contemporary science and philosophy. But by far his most persistent influences were the great Egyptological deists of the 1830s: Robert Taylor and Godfrey Higgins. Massey's works effectively impose a new 1880s vocabulary—Egyptological, evolutionary and anthropological—onto their venerable ideas. Massey's hieroglyphic knowledge was minimal. One of the strangest things about his early texts is that hieroglyphic authority was provided by Samuel Birch, with whom he was in regular correspondence, and who proof-read his texts. Birch's religious identity is one of the great riddles of nineteenth-century Egyptology, packed with contradictions. He was described by Budge as among the 'godless good', yet he was founder and chair of the Society of Biblical Archaeology; he was a champion of Bunsen in the 1850s and the most stringent opponent ('a portcullis to block a pyramid' in Poole's words) of the EEF's biblical excavations of the 1880s. To find him engaged in protecting Massey against criticism from the Egyptological community is an enigma to unwrap the riddle. It is tempting to see the acerbic, heterodox spirit of 1840s Egyptology cutting into the woolly conservatism of the 1880s.

Massey's claims caused a flurry of agitation amongst devotees of orthodox Egyptology. Several correspondents appealed to the British Museum for disproof of his arguments. One popular lecturer, Martin

²⁰⁰ Massey, 'The Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ', 1.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.* 3. ²⁰² *Ibid.* 5.

Simpson, begged the curators for ‘scientific vindication . . . of the miracles ascribed to Christ in the New Testament’.²⁰³ Having read in Massey ‘a statement that all of them almost had been found set forth in some papyri . . . the date of which could not have been many centuries older than Christ’s time usually computed’, Simpson sought confirmation that the miracles were not ‘falsely attributed to Christ’. His first step had been to write to the Dean of Canterbury.²⁰⁴ The Dean had recommended the Keeper of the Department of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum as ‘the highest authority on the subject’.²⁰⁵ Simpson’s correspondence with Renouf concludes by recounting the dangers to ‘the minds of young men and women’ of such irresponsible controversialists as Mr Massey.²⁰⁶

The issue came to a head when an American Egyptological enthusiast, Emmette Coleman (a San Francisco Quarter Master), took up the cause of disproving Massey’s claims. After correspondence with both Sayce and Renouf, Coleman published a series of disavowals of the ‘unjust criticisms and malevolent attacks of a semi lunatic’.²⁰⁷ In 1888 he released a pamphlet entitled ‘Opinions of eminent Egyptologists regarding Mr Massey’s alleged Egypto-Christian parallels’, which Sayce extolled as a ‘thorough demolition of Mr Massey’s crudities’: errors ‘exposed impartially and mercilessly’.²⁰⁸ Peter le Page Renouf, Birch and Budge’s colleague as curator of Egyptian antiquities at the British Museum, responded to Coleman in a private letter:

You are right in your opinion of Mr Massey. Some people think him dishonest; and that he is quite conscious of the ridiculous blunders which he publishes. I do not think so after having examined his large book. It is a work which I should have thought could only have been written in Bedlam. No lunatic could possibly write more wild rubbish, without the least consciousness of the incredible ignorance displayed throughout. The man is AT ONCE an ignoramus of the worst, kind, viz., not in the least being aware of his ignorance, and he has the pretension of explaining things which cannot be understood (except

²⁰³ Martin Simpson to P. le Page Renouf, 24 May 1889: BM ANE, 1889/180.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Martin Simpson to P. le Page Renouf, 29 May 1889: BM ANE, 1889/181.

²⁰⁷ W. Williams to Renouf, 10 April 1891: BM ANE, 1891/286.

²⁰⁸ Quoted by Massey: ‘A retort’, 249.

by trusting other persons) without a considerable knowledge of different languages, which he does not possess.²⁰⁹

To Renouf's horror Coleman, unsanctioned, published this response and a fiery Egyptological fracas ensued. In 'A Retort', Massey addressed Renouf and his Egyptological fellow 'bibliolators' as lunatics ripe for the asylum: the worshippers of 'the ancient Bedlam' should be restrained in the new Bethlehem.²¹⁰

By 1890 Renouf found himself attacked on multiple fronts. His Hibbert Lectures of 1878 on *The Origin and Growth of Religion* had made him a prominent exponent of a narrative of Egyptian decline. He argued that 'the sublimer portions' of Egyptian belief were not the result 'of development or elimination from the grosser'; they were its oldest aspects and gave clues to the nature of the pure primal religion that had suffused the early world.²¹¹ This idea maintained strong support in the 1890s; many others would argue that 'the original faith of the old Egyptians was pure and simple'; that 'the worship of one deity gradually degenerated into a species of polytheism', and that 'a polytheistic belief gradually arose'.²¹² These ideas drew on Egyptian myths which presented a primeval rule of gods on earth, a Hesiod-like ideal for later ages to emulate. This narrative was surprisingly influential in Egyptological circles—encouraged by the sheer scale of ambition and ability displayed in the pyramid-tombs of the Old Kingdom—but it was increasingly mocked by an expanding anthropological contingent. Grant Allen, in an article on 'The Gods of Egypt' (1890), insisted that Renouf's publications must have been delayed half a century at the press: his work read as through 'the doctrine of evolution had never been promulgated, and every page contains glaring contradictions of the most elementary principles of human development'.²¹³ To Allen the 'philosophizing priesthood' of

²⁰⁹ Ibid. ²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Peter le Page Renouf, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1879), 90; Renouf's views on the trajectory of Egyptian religion were mocked by British evolutionists, German philologists and Norway's leading Egyptologist, Jens Leiblein, whose *Gammelægyptisk Religion, populært fremstillet* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1885) presented Egyptian religion as inconstant, passing back and forward between monotheistic, polytheistic and pantheistic phases, shaped by external influences.

²¹² John Ward, *The Sacred Beetle* (London: Murray, 1902), 6.

²¹³ Grant Allen, 'The Gods of Egypt', *Universal Review* (1890), 51.

the New Kingdom (with its ‘triads and trinities’) had taken millennia to reach its intricate and mystical pinnacle.

This confrontation between the Egyptologist Renouf and the cultural critic Allen reinforces the impression that Egyptology had switched allegiance in the negotiations between radical and conservative thought. Only a few decades earlier Egyptology had been considered rationalistic and pursued primarily by dissenters or even thoroughgoing sceptics; Piazzzi Smyth had contrasted Egyptological iconoclasm with the religiosity of mathematicians who observed divine order everywhere; Bunsen had made Egyptology a Germanic tool for unpicking the delicate fabric of biblical chronology. Yet by 1890, scholars Egyptological and reverent found themselves at odds with ‘advanced thinkers’ in anthropology, evolutionary thought and comparative mythology; they now *occupied* the territory they had once *threatened*. They were criticized for credulity instead of irreverence, accused of being ‘half a century behind the times’, not wild pioneers in the most disconcertingly ‘advanced party’ of science.

EGYPTIAN MONOTHEISM

By the 1890s, primeval Egyptian monotheism was a standard trope of the huge genre of Christian apologetics. The earliest Egyptians, argued George Rawlinson, were monotheists who thought in abstractions until, in their decadence, the metaphors they attached to divinity were mistaken for blunt truths. In the early period,

no educated Egyptian priest certainly, probably no educated layman, conceived of the popular gods as really separate and distinct beings. All knew there was but one God, and understood that, when worship was offered to Khem, or Kneph, or Ptah, or Mut, or Thoth, or Ammon, the One God was worshiped under some one of His forms, or in some one of His aspects.²¹⁴

In 1886, J. H. A. Ebrard’s *Apologetik* (1875) was published in translation by William Stuart and John MacPherson as *Apologetics; or the scientific vindication of Christianity* and ran quickly into several editions. This text exhorted theologians and clergymen who wished

²¹⁴ George Rawlinson, *History of Ancient Egypt* (London: Longmans, 1881), 1:315.

to 'lead the combat against the antichristian current of the age' to study the natural sciences.²¹⁵ Ebrard had triumphantly assured his readers in the second German edition (used by Stuart and MacPherson) that 'Darwinism had found its refutation in the province of the natural-scientific department of literature by Semper'.²¹⁶ *Apologetics* made a pure and simple monotheism the 'natural' condition from which all else was deviation:

we have found among all the peoples of the heathen world a most decided tendency to sink from an earlier and relatively purer knowledge of God. The least trace of any forward and upward movement from Fetichism to Polytheism and from that again to a gradually advancing knowledge of the one true God, cannot be discovered.²¹⁷

This idea was also a staple of Egypt's treatment in art history. The architect Sidney Herbert delivered a series entitled 'Egyptian Art and its Influence' at Cheltenham Ladies' College in 1894. He argued that only when the Great Sphinx at Giza, a representation of Noah, was built did the Egyptians begin to worship rather than merely honour a hero: once Noah had been deified at Giza the process of hero worship's development into polytheism, so eloquently described by Thomas Carlyle, began.²¹⁸

In the 1880s, the existence of pyramids and sphinx at the very origin of Egyptian history could seem evidence enough to settle debate and negate the claims of evolutionary archaeologists and ethnologists. Gradually, from 1887 onwards, this apologetic stance received extraordinary new Egyptological ammunition when something still more intriguing than Egypt's polytheistic mythology began to take form: a religious reformation in the New Kingdom which seemed to demonstrate the currency of the monotheistic idea in pharaonic Egypt and was quickly interpreted as a memory of monotheistic origins.

²¹⁵ J. H. A. Ebrard, *Apologetics, or the Scientific Vindication of Christianity* (trans. Stuart & Macpherson, 2nd edn 1886), xi.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* vii.

²¹⁷ John Macpherson, *Apologetics; or the scientific vindication of Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888), III:82.

²¹⁸ Sidney Herbert, *Egyptian Art and its Influence* (Cheltenham: Cheltenham Fine Art Society, 1884); Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: Henry Frowde 1841).

The ruined city at Tel el Amarna in Middle Egypt had been a puzzle for decades. The remains were extensive: ‘imagine setting about the ruins of Brighton’ was how Petrie conveyed their scale in a letter of 1891.²¹⁹ And they were uncompromised by substantial later building. Mapped by Napoleon’s savants and coveted as a site for exploration by Robert Hay (who, drawing on Pliny, named it ‘Alabastron’) a description of this weird site had featured in Wilkinson’s edition of Murray’s *Guide to Egypt*. Wilkinson commented on the erasure of royal names and the absence of this city’s rulers from the historical record. In a passage entitled ‘Stranger Kings’ he speculated that the monarchs displayed on the unique bas-reliefs of Amarna were intruding ‘foreign princes’.²²⁰ The exclusive worship of one aspect of the sun took root here because ‘Amin-re’ was the only Egyptian deity who resembled these intruders’ native gods. This un-Egyptian race could not be the original Hyksos invaders, Wilkinson argued, but Manetho referred to the later ‘return of the shepherds’: these bas-reliefs might still therefore illustrate Genesis 40:34 which described those shepherds abominable to Egyptians.

Wilkinson’s shepherd incursion was soon standard material for writers on New Kingdom history. James Fergusson’s monumental *History of Architecture* (1865) used the Amarna king, given the name ‘Amoum Gori’, as evidence for early high civilization in Meroe: this sophisticated ‘race of sun-worshippers’ he wrote, ‘broke in upon the continuous succession of the kings of the 18th dynasty’.²²¹ Although the details of this historical interlude remained unknown, several scholars returned to the religious ructions of the eighteenth dynasty over the following decades. In 1869 Joseph Bonomi treated the Syro-Egyptian Society to one of the longest titles in their history: ‘On the defacement of the name and figure of the God Amon on all Egyptian Temples, Obelisks, and Statues during the Reign of the Successor of Amunothpht the Third and the subsequent restoration of both during the reign of Rameses the Second’. He noted the scale of ‘skilled labour and expenses of scaffolding’ required to execute these changes, which

²¹⁹ Quoted in Margaret Drower, *Flinders Petrie* (London: Gollancz, 1985), 189.

²²⁰ John Gardner Wilkinson, *Handbook for Travellers in Egypt* (London: Murray, 1858), 381 (First published 1847).

²²¹ James Fergusson, *History of Architecture in all Countries from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Murray, 1865), 1:127.

must have been of great importance from ‘a religious point of view’.²²²

By the early 1880s, a little more was known, including the name ‘Khunaten’ as heteronym for Amenhotep IV.²²³ Yet, as interest and knowledge increased, so did the tendency to write this revolutionary moment into the Old Testament. On 6 June 1882, Samuel Birch presided over a meeting of the Society of Biblical Archaeology addressed by Lawrence Lund on ‘The Epoch of Joseph: Amenhotep IV as the Pharaoh of the Famine’. Lund began from the pages of the Old Testament (Genesis 47) and the church fathers (Eusebius’ *Praeparatio Evangelica*). He made the events of the former into a social revolution in which, under instruction from Joseph, the monarch sequestered the power of his magnates so that he might impose centralized control over granaries. Identifying this ‘revolution of government’ in secular Egyptian history would settle the date and place of Joseph’s regency and reconcile the dynastic and biblical chronology once and for all. Lund drew on Lepsius’ description of Amarna tombs to show that in the reign of Amenhotep III functionaries such as Khamat Meh, high official for granaries, were wealthy and well treated. He argued that in contrast, the reign of Amenhotep III’s successor ‘Khunaten’ saw all eyes turned towards the monolithic power of the throne. Tomb paintings of Amarna royalty bestowing goods from their balcony showed the rationing of grain in time of famine. One ‘high dignitary’ was identified as Joseph himself.

Lund’s views did not meet universal approval. Henry Villiers Stuart, who would be appointed to oversee ‘reconstruction’ of the Egyptian economy in the following year, spoke out against him. But it is telling that all the arguments used against Lund also originated in the pages of the Bible; most concerned the rate of increase of the Israelites in Egypt. Lund soon circulated his theory in the form of articles, insisting that Khunaten had personally ‘established the art of portraiture’ and that portraits of Joseph were plentiful at Amarna.²²⁴ During the early 1880s new layers of interest were added to knowledge of Amarna, but its biblical nature remained unquestioned.

²²² Ibid. 127–9.

²²³ ‘Khunaten’ or ‘Khuenaten’ were preferred spellings until the mid-1890s when ‘Akhnaton’, ‘Akhenaten’ and other variants were popularized.

²²⁴ L. Lund, ‘Joseph, Khunaten and Amenhotep IV’, *Academy*, 22 (1882), 34; cf. A. Weigall, *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1910), 71.

Only with the discovery of extensive diplomatic correspondence from the age of Akhenaten, inscribed on the tablets that became known as the Amarna letters, did this situation begin to change. Throughout the nineteenth century, from Bryant through Talbot to Sayce, extensive communication between ancient empires was assumed; it was, after all, attested to throughout the Old Testament. This transnational correspondence was challenged by some advocates of the higher criticism, but the widespread construal of ancient civilizations as isolated from one another (which recent scholars such as David Wengrow have assumed to originate in the nineteenth century) was a twentieth-century error. The Amarna letters were the first substantive proof of the scale of this intercourse and they revealed, for the first time, its content. Their discovery, made 'by a peasant woman of Middle Egypt', was celebrated as one of the greatest achievements of a period that would forever be remembered for its unprecedented expansion of historical knowledge.²²⁵ These letters demonstrated that Amarna might be the prize British Egyptology had sought since its inception. Here was proof that in the second millennium BC 'the art of reading and writing was as familiar as it is in our own days'.²²⁶ According to Harold Shepstone, this was 'the most valuable historical record ever found in connexion with the Bible, for [these tablets] fully confirm the historical statements in the Book of Joshua and prove the antiquity of civilization in Syria and Palestine'.²²⁷ Modern readers could imagine Moses and Israelite scribes poring over mountains of historical documents, carefully constructing the history of civilization that was validated by the combination of their long memories with archives that were thorough in coverage and international in scope. Here was proof of a divinely ordered worldwide civilization whose decline had been brought to an end by its destruction in the biblical flood.²²⁸

²²⁵ 'Der Thontafelfund von el Amarana', *Edinburgh Review* (1893), 1.

²²⁶ A. H. Sayce, *Higher Criticism and the Verdict of the Monuments* (London: SPCK, 1894), 47–8.

²²⁷ Harold J. Shepstone, 'Finding a Pharaoh', *Quiver* (March 1923), 489.

²²⁸ This argument was not just present in Egyptological works such as Weigall, *Life and Times of Akhnaton*, and Ward, *The Sacred Beetle*, but in literary works including F. T. Palgrave, 'Amenophis, or, the Search after God' (Amenophis IV is Akhenaten's given name, used before his revolution); Mallard Herbertson, *Taia a shadow of the Nile* (London; Eden Co. 1890); Hardwicke Drummond Rawsley, 'The dream city of Khuenaten' in *Idylls and lyrics of the Nile* (London: D. Nutt, 1894), 93–4;

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Because this correspondence was conducted in cuneiform script these letters encouraged Assyriologists like Sayce to focus their gaze on Egypt. A highly civilized Egypt and Assyria, in Sayce's view, betokened a civilized Israel and restored biblical cultures to a higher status than criticism could admit. He therefore heralded the gradual exposition of Amarna culture in the decade following 1887 as the completion of the "archaeological revolt" against the fantasies of subjective criticism' that Schliemann had begun at Hissarlik.²²⁹ For decades labelled a 'wishful thinker' by classical scholars such as Jebb, Sayce revelled in turning the rhetoric of his detractors against them:

The critic had closed his eyes to a most important source of evidence, that of archaeology, and had preferred the conclusions he had arrived at from a narrower circle of facts to those which the wider circle opened out by Oriental discovery have forced him to adopt. It was the old story, it is disagreeable to unlearn old knowledge, and to resign or modify the beliefs for which we have fought and laboured because of the new evidence which has come to light . . . We adopt the anti-scientific attitude of those who condemned Galileo, because our old beliefs have become convictions and we do not want them to be disturbed. There are popes in the 'higher criticism' as well as in theology. The scepticism of historical criticism could hardly go any further.²³⁰

Schliemann's reputation was never higher than in the decade following the discoveries at Amarna: accumulating evidence seemed to prove the sceptics wrong. 'Amarna sermons' were preached the length and breadth of the country. Some of these took verses from Genesis and Exodus as their starting point but the majority were, paradoxically, grounded in the New Testament. In particular, they drew on Paul's claim that when infidelity is rampant stones will rise up and proclaim sacred truths. These sermons issued from many denominations, including the Church of England, although the scale of the Methodist devotional press means that denomination left particularly numerous examples. The archaeologist now had no

A. E. Grantham, *The wisdom of Akhnaton* (London: John Lane, 1920); Norma Lorimer, *A Wife out of Egypt* (New York: Brentano's, 1913) which ran to twenty editions by 1922; Norma Lorimer, *There was a King in Egypt*; this last named novel argues Akhenaten to have been 'the first Messiah', his religion containing 'the first foreshadowings of the altruism of Christianity': Norma Lorimer, *There was a King in Egypt*, v; Lorimer quotes Weigall extensively: see chapter 5, section I, below.

²²⁹ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, xiv.

²³⁰ *Ibid.* 5.

choice, Boscawen urged in his British Museum lectures: he was 'forced' to take up a position against the higher critics.²³¹ When Sayce contributed a chapter entitled 'The Archaeological Witness to the Literary Activity of the Mosaic Age' to an apologetic text, *Lex Mosaica* (1894), the work was welcomed as a great aid 'in this time of unrest' and the best effort yet 'to stem the advancing tide of Old Testament criticism' as well as the 'most important contribution to biblical literature' for 'many years'.²³²

It was not just Amarna's inscribed letters that inspired these sermons: thanks to Petrie's excavations, Akhenaten's capital burst into British culture in all its glory in the early 1890s. In a phenomenon that foreshadowed the divisive events of 1922, Petrie found his work at Amarna in 1891 constantly interrupted due to a flood of visitors (whether the Egyptian Finance Secretary or the Gaskells), and the site was soon added to the itinerary of Cook's steamers. By 1894, when Petrie published his excavations, Amarna art was popularized as an achievement to match Athenian sculpture. The early 1890s saw the coining of phrases that have persisted ever since: this, for instance, is when Akhenaten's citadel became a 'dream city'.²³³ Rarely had the British press celebrated any preclassical art so effusively; rarely had the idea of barbarity been so emphatically banished from interpretation of the ancient Near East.

No educated person who looked on Petrie's plates of Khuenaten's art for the first time, *The Academy* insisted, could possibly avoid bewilderment:

Nowhere can he remember having seen the gorgeous *cloissoné* decoration of the ancient Egyptian palm-leaf capital shown on pl. vi. Five of the coloured plates seem to represent fragments of Aegean pottery. What medieval sculptor of Northern Italy carved the climbing plants as drawn on pl. viii? Why is the conventional Egyptian lotus painted

²³¹ 'Boscawen lectures', *Academy*, (1895), 392.

²³² R. V. French (ed.), *Lex Mosaica; or, the Law of Moses and the Higher Criticism* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1894); extensive press praise is included in a 26-page pamphlet, 'Her Majesty's Printers': Special Publications', 4–6, issued with W. St Chad Boscawen, *The Bible and the Monuments* (2nd edn, London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1895).

²³³ Press reports, including 'Tell el Amarna', *Academy* (7 July 1894), 16, take up Petrie's phrase 'the dream-city of Khuenaten'.

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among the bounding calves, the waving and growing grasses, reeds and flowers of pls iii and iv?²³⁴

This art was interpreted in distinctly contemporary terms, consistently praised for its naturalism. Channelling the spirit of Ruskin, Egyptologists and columnists alike made direct leaps from artistic style to moral character: ‘naturalism’ in art was assumed to demonstrate commitment to ‘truth’ in philosophy, religion and governance. This artwork contained so much novelty that it was treated at length in reaches of the press that Egyptology rarely reached. The *Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist* (devoted as a rule to the archaeology of ‘pagan and early Christian Britain’) granted Petrie space to report on the painted pavements of Amarna which he celebrated as a phenomenon unique to the barefoot ascetic, ‘King Akhenaten’, whose artists were the first to capture rapid movement: to ‘seize instantaneous action and render it from memory’.²³⁵ Petrie insisted elsewhere that these murals of birds, reeds and mammals ‘are unparalleled even in classical frescoes. Not until modern times can such studies from nature be found’.²³⁶

Petrie’s enthusiasm for the art, religion and science of Amarna was intense. Its appearance in his publications, including his excavation report, was frequent and unguarded. This enthusiasm was soon shared by an array of British and American Egyptologists and argued to convey the contested ‘proofs’ claimed for Pithom into the realm of undisputed historical fact. The centrepiece of this celebration was monotheism. Akhenaten’s religious revolution briefly displaced familiar Egyptian polytheism, providing what was interpreted as the first known example of state monotheism. In the eyes of Akhenaten aficionados this confirmed the belief that Egyptian civilization maintained some memory of an antediluvian monotheism that had gradually become corrupted. Akhenaten’s reign was glorified as a brief period of Christian virtue in its most bourgeois Victorian form, and his religion characterized as ‘an astonishingly enlightened doctrine of truth and love’.²³⁷ Petrie wrote (in his official excavation report) that:

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Petrie, ‘Painted Pavements at Tell el Amarna’, *Illustrated Archaeologist* (1893), 204.

²³⁶ W. M. F. Petrie, *History of Egypt*, (London: Methuen, 1894), 3:214.

²³⁷ Arthur Weigall, ‘The Significance of the Excavations at Tel el Amarna’: EES, box XVIII, 71.

No other king ever dedicated himself to an ethical idea as Akhenaten did . . . he lives in truth. The attainment and spread of truth was the object of his life . . . he is determined not to suppress anything, but openly kisses the queen as they ride in a chariot, and he dances her on his knee with the babies as he sits on his throne. His domestic affection is the truth, and as the truth he proclaims it. Here is a revolution in ideas! No king of Egypt, nor of any other part of the world, has ever carried out his honesty of expression so openly. His domestic life was his ideal of the truth of life, and as part of his living in truth he proclaims it as the true life to his subjects.²³⁸

‘Living in Truth’ became Petrie’s personal motto, emblazoned on the frontispiece to his autobiographical work *Seventy Years in Archaeology*; he saw himself, as he saw Akhenaten, as among ‘the great idealists of the world’.²³⁹ The Victorian society that Petrie conjured at Amarna was elevated above every other ancient culture, even classical Greece, for its scientific approach to religion:

If this were a new religion invented to satisfy our modern scientific conceptions, we could not find a flaw in the correctness of this view of the energy of the solar system . . . a position which we cannot logically improve upon at the present day.²⁴⁰

Akhenaten’s first English-language biographer, James Henry Breasted, similarly considered the king a scientifically enlightened and ‘God intoxicated man’.²⁴¹ In 1952, the German Egyptologist Rudolf Anthes revealed just how influential and resilient this view had been, echoing the late nineteenth-century intertwining of biblical language and myth-busting science:

Thirty years ago, perhaps all of us saw [Amarna religion] under the influence of J. H. Breasted. It was the highest and purest flowering of insight into the divine in Egypt. Akhenaten had freed himself from the mumbo-jumbo of traditional religion. He had found a direct path from the human to the divine. He rejected myths, symbols, and everything

²³⁸ W. M. F. Petrie, *Tell el Amarna*, (London: Methuen, 1894), 41.

²³⁹ Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 198.

²⁴⁰ W. M. F. Petrie, ‘The Excavations at Tel el Amarna’, *Academy*, 16 (1892), 356.

²⁴¹ Breasted also calls Akhenaten ‘the first individual in history’, commandeering a phrase previously (most famously by Oscar Wilde) applied to Christ. The interpretation of Akhenaten laid out in Breasted, *History of Egypt* (New York: Scribner, 1906) influenced Freud’s *Moses and monotheism* (Amsterdam, 1939), mediated through Karl Abraham’s ‘Amenhotep IV (Ikhnaton)’, *Imago* (1912). See Carl Schorske, ‘Freud’s Egyptian dig’, *New York Review of Books*, 27 May 1993, 35–40.

polytheistic. Since he was not accorded a revelation of God, he saw Him in the sun; but light, life and truth guided him . . . and on an unprecedented level of insight he anticipated basic concepts of the Gospel according to John. To us, Akhenaten seemed to have been the prophet of a religion for which the time was not yet ripe.²⁴²

This was, of course, not just the influence of Breasted, but the earlier authority of Petrie and Sayce.

By 1910 Arthur Weigall offered Akhenaten as evidence for the evolutionary process: his reign ‘stands as the earliest landmark in the higher development of the human brain’.²⁴³ This, however, is presented as a divine process. Akhenaten was born into a world where ‘superstition was everywhere to be seen’; from the day of his coronation he sought ‘to direct men’s eyes to the worship of the true God . . . He himself wrote religious hymns, amongst which is the undoubted original of our 104th Psalm’.²⁴⁴ Most importantly of all Egyptologists were now confident in their proofs of the spiritually elevated origins of civilization. Akhenaten seemed to prove that ancient Egypt held memories, however vague, of a godly antediluvian civilization, belief in the existence of which Renouf had unfashionably revived in 1878.

This interest in Egyptian religion—polytheistic and monotheistic—that reached its peak in the mid-1890s allowed Petrie to claim that the old order of Egyptology had been overturned:

little is done outside of what voluntary English effort is doing to explore and preserve the antiquities of the country; while hardly a single excavation by other nationalities has been recorded as fully for future study as in two or three volumes that come from the English press every year.²⁴⁵

²⁴² Rudolf Anthes, ‘Die Maat des Echnaton von Amarna’, *Supplement to the Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 14 (1952), 36.

²⁴³ Arthur Weigall, *The life and times of Akhnaton, pharaoh of Egypt* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1910), 9.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 134–6. The idea that Akhenaten prefigured the Gospel according to John and also wrote the original version of a Psalm provided a remarkable echo of certain ideas current during early nineteenth-century attempts to decipher the hieroglyphs: e.g. N. G. Palin attempted to prove in 1802 that the Psalms were Hebrew translations of Egyptian texts which could be reconstructed by translating the Hebrew into Chinese; Gerald Massey argued that ‘David’ was the Hebrew name for an Egyptian Psalmist.

²⁴⁵ W. M. F. Petrie, ‘The Harvest From Egypt’, *Leisure Hour* (1897), 698. Petrie’s desire, shared in private correspondence, to take French or German citizenship in

Of the many possible approaches to the interpretation of ancient Egypt, these religious ones dominated. Speculation on racial origins did increase, but this theme was approached with diffidence because widespread reluctance to tackle Egyptian prehistory meant that ‘of the original home, race and language . . . nothing is known. Some say their home was Asia, and some fix their birthplace in Africa; some trace their language to Semitic sources, and some Aryan; and various authorities would ally them to Libyans, Negroes, Semites and Asiatics of the Far East’.²⁴⁶ Some scholars posited extraordinary racial diversity among successive Egyptian dynasties, but nothing like consensus emerged. This was an ‘abstruse anthropology’ and many chose to avoid it altogether (as we will see, it exploded with new potency around the turn of the century).²⁴⁷ It certainly provided nothing like the scope for debate that the relationship of Egypt to the Bible generated.

This chapter has attempted to untangle some of the many threads that led associations of ancient Egypt with ancient oppression and modern irreligion to be abandoned and replaced with extraordinary attempts to write Egypt into the most highly valued traditions of the Christian West. It has shown the ‘critical’ Egypt of mid century displaced by an attempt to develop Egyptology as a science that could challenge unbiblical claims made in the name of biological, anthropological and philological scholarship. Egyptology’s purpose in these negotiations was not to discredit other disciplines such as geology or the life sciences, but to demonstrate when they had pushed their claims too far: to show, as *The Academy*’s organization of knowledge implied, that there was no necessary breach between the epistemologies of religion and science: in its encapsulation of a godly quest for knowledge, Egyptology’s supporters insisted, this discipline could combine the two.

protest against British officials’ refusals to support Egyptology substantially undercuts this public claim to national eminence.

²⁴⁶ ‘Recherches sur les Origines de l’Egypte’, *Athenaeum* (19 June 1897), 815; see also ‘The Prehistoric Levant’, *Scottish Review*, 15 (January 1890), 28–9.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 815.

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Petrie's Prehistory and the Oxyrhynchus papyri

The decade between 1894 and 1904 saw substantial changes in the range of approaches to ancient Egypt that scholars could choose to take: approaches to chronology provide a dramatic example. The Egypt that became familiar to the public of the 1890s was that of the imperious and imperial New Kingdom dynasties (eighteenth and nineteenth). As Claude Conder noted in 1897, 'before the time of the great Theban or 18th Dynasty, little that can be called history exists'.¹ Egyptologists are still forced, Conder argued, to rely on the unreliable and late evidence of Manetho if they attempt to make positive statements on earlier history. Neither the Turin papyrus nor the Abydos tablet had cleared up anything more than isolated details. The difference between the dates assigned to Menes by competing Egyptologists remained as great 'as that which separates Queen Victoria from Alfred'.² Even the eighteenth dynasty remained subject to substantial disagreement: Petrie claimed it to have lasted 259 years, while Brugsch assigned it over 300. But Conder was out of step with Egyptologists like Petrie: where this kind of uncertainty had proved debilitating to many thinkers of the mid century, by 1900 it was more or less irrelevant.

Conder's mistake was to forget that 'positive statements' can still be made even in the absence of exact chronologies. Many of the great advances of the 1880s and 1890s came not in reducing historical uncertainty but in learning to cope with it. Few thinkers in 1849

¹ Claude Conder, 'Egyptian Chronology', *Scottish Review* (January 1897), 116.

² *Ibid.*

would even have thought of making a statement like Petrie's of 1899 that 'it would matter very little if the time from Augustus to Constantine had occupied six centuries instead of three, or if Alexander had lived only two centuries before Augustus'.³ The 'main value' of dates in Egyptology by 1899 was to ascribe events a sequence; chronology need only be relative, not exact. This shift is both significant and diagnostic. It could not have occurred, or been useful, to scholars whose primary objective was to reconcile Egypt's monuments with classical and biblical chronologies. The implementation of relative dating reveals a discipline in which Egypt finally mattered more than its associations. It was no longer a lens through which Greek and Hebrew cultures could be viewed, but an object of study in its own right; the first questions asked of each discovery need no longer be 'how many years before the Trojan War?' or 'how many centuries after the Flood?'

This development might have been crucial to the emergence of a functioning discipline, but more immediately it was a public-relations disaster. It marks the opening of a chasm between Egyptologists and their adoring nineteenth-century audiences. Reviewers after Conder continued to admonish Egyptologists whenever they were uncertain as to exact dates, and readers proved wary of the leap of imagination that was required to operate in a history with no precise dates that could be learnt and wheeled out as a demonstration of authority. Egyptological reportage was increasingly confined to specialist regions of the press; there would be no widely circulated periodical after 1900 that granted Egyptology the status it had achieved in the 1880s *Academy*.

Many reporters did not recognize Petrie's approach to chronology as innovative, useful or valid. In the 1910s, when Naville continued to resist the idea of Egyptian prehistory and persisted with the techniques of 1880, he was still hailed as 'the most successful as well as the most learned of the Egyptian excavators working under the English flag' and his approach was consistently compared favourably with Petrie's.⁴ Naville was described as a pioneering scholar working to lay bare and restore great buildings while Petrie looted graves and grubbed around for small items to stock European museums. The

³ W. M. F. Petrie, 'Sequences in Prehistoric Remains', *Journal of the Anthropological* 3:4 (1899), 295.

⁴ F. L., 'In the Learned World', *Academy* (1914), 402.

Swiss scholar's current reputation (as an unconscionable traditionalist who would have employed bulldozers had they been available) only gained widespread acceptance later. For this period at least, Petrie failed to carry public opinion with him and, ironically, the most important developments brought about by the first Edwards Professor of Egyptology served to unbalance the carefully poised public Egyptology that Edwards herself had created (only gradually would Petrie grow into his role as a very different kind of public intellectual).

These shifts were entangled with other, equally significant departures, all of which emerged from profound changes in Egyptological knowledge and technique between 1894 and 1899. These involved extending the focus of Egyptological activities both backwards and forwards by centuries. In his UCL lectures of 1893 Petrie still refused to say anything definitive of Egyptians 'before the monuments': there was 'nothing to throw light upon' their history beyond fabulous legends.⁵ Their race, origins, language were unknown. He declared the first three dynasties mythical and the term 'prehistory' in his works of the early 1890s refers to 'the few hundred years' preceding the advent of the 'historic' fourth dynasty. In his correspondence to his closest friend (the Kentish archaeologist and geologist Flaxman Spurrell) Petrie still clammed up whenever it was suggested that he seek the Egyptian Palaeolithic.⁶

However Petrie was rapidly developing an interest in questions of race and the technical developments that would allow him to address them. In works like *Racial Photographs from the Ancient Egyptian Pictures and Sculptures* (1887), the product of an information-gathering mission instigated by Francis Galton and the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Petrie began to develop conceptions of race, migration and eugenics that became increasingly important to him after 1900. One of Petrie's most celebrated excavations, at Tel el Hesi in 1891, demonstrates the coexistence of his two historical frameworks: the biblical scheme that had dominated his approach, and the racial model that would do so in later decades. As Neil Asher Silberman has shown, the celebrated stratigraphic techniques Petrie employed at Tel el Hesi were developed to demonstrate

⁵ Appendix A in Rosalind M. Janssen, *Egyptology at University College London, 1892–1992* (London: UCL, 1992), 98.

⁶ See for instance B. Scott & A. Shaw, 'The Quiet Man of Kent: the Contributions of F. C. J. Spurrell to the Early Years of Palaeolithic Archaeology', *Lithics*, 30 (2009), 55.

the flow of successive racial groups (from early Amorite to later Hebrew) across the site.⁷ Petrie had gone to Palestine in search of the biblical Lachish, a city like Memphis, Babylon and Sodom that was punished for resisting God's will: 'And the Lord delivered Lachish into the hand of Israel, which took it on the second day, and smote it with the edge of the sword and all the souls that were therein'.⁸

At Tel el Hesi, Petrie proclaimed, he had discovered this city. In interpreting the site's strata he conflated biblical events and racial mechanisms of historical change: 'the invasion of the nomad horde of the Israelites on the high civilization of the Amorite kings must have seemed like a crushing blow to all culture and advance in the arts; it was much like the terrible breaking up of the Roman empire by the northern races; it swept away all good and evil'.⁹ He went to great lengths to label the Hebrew parts of the site and assign them to biblical kings: the wall of Rehoboam was identified, as were later repairs by the Kings of Judah. Even Josiah's wall of 610 BC built to hold the Egyptian army at bay, was noted with Schliemann-like confidence.¹⁰ On this trip to Palestine, inspired by the sight of two 'decided Hittites' at an orphanage school, Petrie recruited an informal network of photographers to record modern racial types in the hope of identifying the current distribution of 'Amorite, Hittite and Hyksos' influences in the region.¹¹ These identifications were made particularly significant by Petrie's insistence that among the multiple racial groups that contributed to the Egyptian dynastic 'stock', the Amorites were the 'original race'.

Three years later, in 1894, Petrie began the excavations that would eventually transform not just his knowledge of early Egypt but his entire worldview. These took place at sites some thirty miles north of Thebes known as Naqada, Nubt and Ballas. Here, a party including J. E. Quibell and Herbert Grenfell began work intended to elucidate the earliest Set cults. What they found was 'an entirely unsuspected race of immigrants, wholly distinct from the native Egyptians and

⁷ Neil Asher Silberman, 'Petrie's Head: Eugenics and Near Eastern Archaeology' in A. B. Kehoe & M. B. Emmerichs (eds), *Assembling the Past: Studies in the Professionalization of Archaeology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 69–80.

⁸ Joshua 10:32.

⁹ Petrie, *Tell el Hesi: Lachish* (London: A. P. Watt, 1891), 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

presenting most remarkable characteristics'.¹² This 'New Race from Libya' neither wrote nor used the potter's wheel; they did, however, bury their dead alongside their worldly wealth—flint knives, slate palettes and stone beads. Bones with teeth-marks suggested that they also ate their dead. In an attempt to popularize discoveries at Naqada and Deheshnae, Petrie produced 'Eaten with Honour': an exposition of the rights and wrongs of cannibalism, printed in the *Contemporary Review*. The graves showed, he insisted, that children played with 'choicely wrought toys' while their fathers plied the first Mediterranean trade; Petrie poked gentle fun at the sensitive British public who could not appreciate this sophistication because of the 'broken marrow-bones and piles of ribs and vertebrae that show how the Libyan invaders honoured their dead'.¹³ Had not their own ancestors, according to Jerome, once been cannibals too? 'Let us cry a truce to questions of taste' and consider the higher motives of cannibals based in 'honour, kindness [and the] future good'.¹⁴

The unfamiliar wares of the New Race showed that they rejected trade with Egyptian neighbours: for three centuries, Petrie argued, they occupied the Thebaid in a state that was not outright war with dynastic Egypt but 'rigid boycott'.¹⁵ Their tools—sharpened flints and red and black jars—were entirely at odds with the material culture of their age. They were tall and sturdy peace-loving mountaineers 'of the same Libyan race that founded the Amorite power'.¹⁶ 'We have revealed', Petrie crowed, an early section of the Mediterranean civilization that would generate Punic commerce and its Phoenician merchants.¹⁷ Reviewers of *Naqada and Ballas* (1895) were immediately suspicious. 'Professor Petrie's foible is theorising, and there are weak links in the chain of his argument' wrote *The Saturday Review*.¹⁸

¹² W. M. F. Petrie, *Naqada and Ballas* (London: Quaritch, 1895), 64.

¹³ W. M. F. Petrie, 'Eaten with Honour', *Contemporary Review* (June 1897), 820; this article explores both the Naqada burials and Petrie's 1896–7 work at Deheshnae, which produced similar indications of cannibalism from more developed tombs and coffins.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 821.

¹⁵ 'Koptos', *Saturday Review* (28 August 1897), 230.

¹⁶ Petrie, *Naqada and Ballas*, 64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ 'Koptos', *Saturday Review* (28 August 1897), 230.

Until this moment only those outside the Egyptological community—whether Grant Allen, Gerald Massey or Leonard Horner—had published substantial speculation on the nature of the primitive prehistoric races whose millennia of evolutionary growth would eventually result in a pyramid-building people; only they had insisted that Old Testament peoples in Egypt and the Near East were preceded by ‘original’ occupants of the region. The geological explorations of Joseph Hekekyan, supported by Horner, had failed to make their mark not just because of the Armenian Hekekyan’s origins outside the white, male community of the Geological Society, but because of prevailing views on the nature of Egyptian history. Huge numbers of prehistoric tools had been discovered, but the presence of crudely sharpened flints was easily fudged: ‘it must not be supposed that these were necessarily prehistoric. Flints were used side by side with copper tools from the fourth to the twelfth dynasty; they were still used for sickles in the eighteenth dynasty’.¹⁹

The discoveries at Naqada revealed distinctive early material on a new scale. Petrie and Quibell had soon excavated a cemetery of three thousand graves in which mummification was absent and bodies lay, foetus-like, usually facing west. The information conveyed by these remains clearly lay in their arrangement and orientation as much as their inherent qualities as objects; close attention to the characteristics of the site—more detailed than anything Petrie had applied before—was demanded. Unprecedentedly rigorous methods for overseeing a workforce and marshalling their discoveries were also required. In the following decade prehistoric sites would be the arena for George Reisner’s further consolidation of Egyptological technique. Thanks to these excavations and widespread dissatisfaction with Petrie’s explanations, new questions were now asked about the predecessors of the Egyptian state and the existence of ‘Predynastic’ peoples in the valley of the Nile. These questions brought Egyptologists into line with the evolutionary models of historical development that had dominated most areas of European thought for thirty years.

Race had become an increasingly significant category of historical analysis from 1850 onwards; it had dominated early texts that straddled the boundaries between archaeology and anthropology including Wilson’s *Prehistoric Man* (1862) and Lubbock’s *Pre-historic*

¹⁹ ‘A History of Egypt’, *Quarterly Review* (1895), 164.

Times (1865). After Naqada, and Petrie's eventual recognition of prehistory, the influence of Lubbock, Tylor and Galton substantively displaced that of William Petrie and the Plymouth Brethren in Flinders Petrie's conception of the overarching teleology of history. Petrie now more often excavated alongside anthropologists interested in the measuring of Egyptian skulls—such as David Randall MacIver—than the classicists or biblical scholars of earlier periods. Anatomists and anthropologists were now as likely as theologians and clergymen to take up the popularization of Egyptological discoveries; they attached such moral weight to racial difference, and such certainty that measurement of the 'maxial angle' would demonstrate racial identity, that the speculation they espoused had much in common with the 1820s phrenology of Combe. A flurry of craniological works was published around 1900; as reviewers noted, this new focus confused rather than clarified theories concerning Egyptian origins. As the palaeoanthropologist Arthur Keith wrote in *Man* in 1905:

From four separate studies of heads, made within the last five years, four different theories have arisen: (1) that there are at least three races mingled in the inhabitants of ancient Egypt; (2) that there are six; (3) that there is but one; (4) . . . that there were two, but that they lived side by side until early in the Christian era. Surely, then, one may say that craniology is a sphinx, when on each of four occasions she returns a different and contradictory answer. One may well ask, Will she ever speak the truth?²⁰

OXYRHYNCHUS

Just as the gaze of Egyptologists was extended into prehistory it was also turned increasingly to the centuries that followed Alexander's conquest. By far the most important Graeco-Roman find from Egypt in this period was the vast collection of classical and early Christian texts discovered at Oxyrhynchus from January 1897 onwards. This discovery was not an isolated or unexpected find that suddenly reoriented Egyptological attention; it was the product of two decades of growing interest which dramatically accelerated in

²⁰ Arthur Keith, 'Egypt: Craniology', *Man* (1905), 91–6.

the five years leading up to 1897. To make sense of the Graeco-Roman developments of the 1890s it is necessary first to cover a little of the development of the EEF in that decade.

After Greek enthusiasms were engendered by Naucratis the EEF's fortunes were mixed. Maspero had resigned from the Antiquities Service and his successor, Emile Grebaut, acted with Mariette-like disdain for the work of British excavators. Much changed in terms of membership and excavators. Petrie had acrimoniously split from the organization and founded his own Egyptian Research Account. Amelia Edwards had died, as had the Fund's first president, Erasmus Wilson. The appointment of his successor was made on pragmatic grounds: John Fowler's reputation was built as civil engineer of railways and bridges in Britain; he then became consultant to the Egyptian government under Ishmael in the late 1870s and conducted a survey of Upper Egypt and Nubia that became crucial to imperial power in the region. The EEF committee hailed him as an asset in the manoeuvres for political influence in Cairo that were a day-to-day headache for any Egyptological organization.

By the 1890s, Petrie's annual exhibitions of Egyptian antiquities were a fixture of the London calendar that had 'attained the position of an institution' according to *The Athenaeum*.²¹ His explorations at Hawara had encouraged his popular reputation as an adventurer: the excavation report recounted, in salacious detail, the death-defying work required to enter the twelfth-dynasty pyramid. Loose bricks ('twice the size of an English brick') collapsed in frequent avalanches as the archaeologist and his team made their way, over several months, down a long narrow passage.²² The sound of falling sand provided the only warning that these rockfalls were imminent. Petrie described himself attempting to squeeze through impossible gaps until 'jammed tight' with Arabic workers and hired masons pulling at his legs. Reviews focused overwhelmingly on this narrative and carried titles like 'How to get into a Pyramid'.²³ *The Saturday Review's* treatment described the forced entry at length before coming to an abrupt conclusion: 'we have no space for a detailed criticism of Mr Petrie's new book'.²⁴

²¹ 'Mr Petrie's Forthcoming Exhibition', *Athenaeum* (30 August 1890), 297.

²² W. M. F. Petrie, *Kahun, Gurob and Hawara* (London: Kegan Paul, 1890), 6–11.

²³ 'How to get into a Pyramid', *Saturday Review* (1890), 374.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

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But this Hawara excavation also aroused intense animosity amongst French, German and American commentators. Petrie's excavation methods were repeatedly assaulted privately and in the press. A particularly outspoken example of this came when, in 1888, the artist Edward Poynter established the Society for the Preservation of the Monuments of Ancient Egypt. The society's committee was initially split between those who saw Egyptologists as their natural allies and those who saw Petrie and the EEF as the destructive force against which the monuments required protecting. The American lawyer Francis Cope Whitehouse wrote to Poynter after the first meeting:

I am heartily with your words, but how about the deeds of some of your number. The appeal to protect ancient monuments scarcely comes with a good grace from those who are asking money to rob the valuable stones of Bubastis, and appealing on the grounds that their excavations have been so conducted as to threaten with destruction monuments which have survived the ages since the Exodus . . . Schweinfurth told me that Virchow had said to him that the horrors of Königgratz had not prepared him for the revolting sight of Petrie's mangled remains of Hawara.²⁵

Poynter's Society, Whitehouse feared, would become a cloak to hide Petrie's nefarious dealings: 'When the wolves propose to preserve the sheep it is the duty of anyone who knows what is under the sheep's clothing to call public attention to it': 'it is the duty of the SPMAE to take action against the EEF and Petrie'.²⁶ The *in situ* reconstruction of Pompeii, he argued, must be the model for all archaeology.²⁷ This was especially important in Egypt where he predicted that 'a spree of temples will be discovered, rising from their remains' to be carefully preserved as living architecture, not the EEF's 'revolting exhibitions' that contravene 'artistic as well as moral law'.²⁸ The slow, contested shift from Egypt plundered to satisfy British cultural longings, to

²⁵ Whitehouse to Poynter, 27.9.1888, EES VIIIa.3; see also Petrie's reply, more weary than outraged, 29.9.1888, VIIIa.4; and further correspondence between Whitehouse, Wallis and Poynter 4.10.1888, VIIIa.5; 5.10.1888, VIIIa.7; 8.10.1888, VIIIa.8; see also Whitehouse's articles in the *Fortnightly Review*.

²⁶ Whitehouse to Poynter, 8.10.1888, VIIIa.8.

²⁷ Whitehouse to Poynter, 4.10.1888, VIIIa.5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

ancient Egypt for both Egyptians and its own sake was underway; but it was resisted by Egyptologists and championed by their critics.

Initial negotiations had proposed the integration of the SPMAE and the EEF, but after Cope Whitehouse's outbursts and Poynter's extensive equivocation others began to agree that the goals of archaeology and preservation were far from cognate. As the collector and banker Sir Robert Hamilton-Lang wrote to Poynter:

I see now that that idea [of integration] is impracticable. The Egypt Exploration Fund aims at acquiring antiquities, whereas your society aims at the preservation of what is already known in the interest of historical and archaeological science. My sympathies all go with your society. Yours is not the lure of possessing, but that of preserving and knowing thoroughly the hidden wealth... which the monuments of ancient Egypt represent. It recognizes that the Egyptian fellaheen are not in a position to pay for the care which these monuments of the past deserve, for the funds of the Egyptian treasury represent simply what are extorted from a very poor people.²⁹

The EEF was engaged in some ambitious new schemes of its own. Their grandest aspiration was the Archaeological Survey, a project initiated by the Oxford scholar Francis Llewellyn Griffith to 'catalogue, measure, and copy all the monuments that exist above ground in Egypt'.³⁰ The early years of the Survey were characterized by a farcical series of personal jealousies. Petrie's journals for 1892 record tracking mysterious boot-trails at Amarna only to find M. W. Blackden and George Willoughby Fraser, two of the Survey's operatives, engaged in sabotaging the work of the their supposed leader, Percy Newberry. Under the unlikely leadership of a Congregationalist Preacher from Ashton under Lyne, Norman de Garis Davies, the Survey soon stabilized into a more harmonious, but much less ambitious entity. Davies spent isolated months at Saqqara, Amarna and elsewhere between 1898 and 1907, publishing eleven surveys of major sites.³¹

²⁹ Robert Hamilton-Lang to Poynter, undated, VIIIA.38.

³⁰ *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events* (New York: Appleton, 1892), 17:12–13.

³¹ Davies and his new wife Nina then settled in Thebes, experimenting in colour reproduction of tomb paintings. Egg tempura, carbon paper, complex systems of mirrors and diffusers and painstaking attention to the sequence in which ancient artists had applied their colours produced some of the more glorious reproductions

However, stirred by Naucratis, interest in Graeco-Roman Egypt is one of the great stories of the late 1890s. Classical scholarship could no longer (Petrie contended) wilfully shut its eyes to everything Egyptian: the appearance of his own ‘Egyptian Bases of Greek History’ in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* attested to the fact.³² His stern exchanges with Cecil Torr (especially in the *Classical Review* where Torr insisted that a man ‘so inaccurate in his reasoning’ as Petrie could not be trusted to be ‘altogether accurate in his statement of the evidence’) show that controversy persisted, but also demonstrate that the question was generating new interest.³³ At Gurob, Petrie had stumbled across dozens of mummy cases constructed from written papyri and had entrusted Sayce with the task of translation and publication. Sayce, in turn, delegated duties to J. P. Mahaffy whose diverse interests (from *Social Life in Greece* to *The Decay of Modern Preaching*) were now complemented by Ptolemaic Egypt. *The Empire of the Ptolemies* (1895) and three volumes of *The Flinders Petrie Papyri* (1891, 1893, 1905) followed.

In 1886, a French scholar in Cairo, Urbain Bouriant, discovered a manuscript of the Gospel of Peter. James Rendel Harris’s English rendering (1892) declared this to be ‘the breaking of a new seal, the opening of a fresh door’ in criticism which would prove ‘as encouraging to our faith as . . . stimulating to the understanding’.³⁴ If still greater aids to faith were not forthcoming in the immediate future, Harris insisted, it would not be because the Libyan Desert did not contain them, but because philologists and archaeologists are ‘wicked and slothful servants’.³⁵ W. R. Cassels also saw Egypt’s new theological potential: here was ‘a veritable Land of Promise’ which would yield discoveries to ‘change the current of controversy’.³⁶ His anonymous volume, *The Gospel According to Peter* (1894), sought out this new controversialism and aimed to undermine the ‘encouragement to faith’

of tomb interiors ever made (many held by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York).

³² W. M. F. Petrie, ‘The Egyptian Bases of Greek History’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 11 (1890), 271–7.

³³ Cecil Torr, ‘Illahun, Kahun and Gurob’, *Classical Review*, 6.3 (March 1892), 131; also correspondence to *The Academy*, in almost every edition May–October 1892.

³⁴ J. Rendel Harris, *Popular Account of the Newly-Recovered Gospel of Peter* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1892), v.

³⁵ *Ibid.* vi.

³⁶ [W. R. Cassels], *Gospel According to Peter* (London: Longmans, 1894), 1.

greeted by Harris. Cassels claimed that this strange new text was neither better nor worse than the Canonical gospels; the fact that it appeared so uncouth was an indicator of how the Canon of the Church would appear if centuries of reverence and docility were stripped away so that there was no ‘canonical glamour’ to conceal their shortcomings.³⁷ This was an early indication that the church and chapel crowds would not have everything their own way in early-Christian Egypt.³⁸ Scrutiny of the New Testament possessed much more intrinsic danger for orthodox Protestant interests than the Old Testament concerns of the previous decades. As Graeco-Roman paganism also generated increasingly exoticized readings and began to attract more theatrical, less pious interests, early Christian Egypt became a complex, contested historical arena.³⁹

This rising tide of interest in Graeco-Roman Egypt was evident in the opening of the Alexandria Museum in 1892; its catalogue, published in Italian the following year, showed off its extensive collection of Greek amphorae and sepulchral vases. At the same time, ‘citizens of Alexandria’ had begun a fund to enable the archaeology of the Ptolemaic city and Roman prefecture. The fund’s great success came in 1895, when Giuseppe Botti announced the discovery of one of the most famous shrines of the ancient world, the Alexandrine Serapeum destroyed by Bishop Theophilus and a Christian mob in AD 391. This site, along with the rest of the ancient city, was endangered by modern urban expansion and demanded large-scale exploration; ‘could not the Egypt Exploration Fund’, asked A. H. Sayce, ‘find some way in which to unite its forces with those of the Archaeological Society of Alexandria?’⁴⁰ This was one of numerous new pressures on the EEF’s resources; their abortive efforts in 1895 (employing the services of E. F. Benson, brother of Margaret and son of the Archbishop), ensured that Alexandrine archaeology remained an Italian specialism led by Botti, Evaristo Breccia and Achille Adriani.

Nonetheless, British interest in classical and Christian Egypt was growing. Changes in EEF personnel encouraged this. From the late

³⁷ Ibid. 132–3.

³⁸ This debate between Cassels and Harris echoes surprisingly closely that between Anthony Collins and Richard Bentley in the 1710s: a reminder that textual criticism of early-Christian texts was a field Egyptologists would struggle to make their own.

³⁹ Stefano Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁴⁰ A. H. Sayce, ‘Museum of Alexandria’, *Academy* (1893), 492.

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1880s onwards, many new recruits to excavation or surveying had classical training and interests. Of these, David Hogarth was initially most prominent. Hogarth had travelled the Eastern Mediterranean in the early 1890s conducting research for his first books, the plodding *Modern and Ancient Roads in Eastern Asia Minor* (1893, with J. A. R. Munro and A. C. Headlam) and the magisterial *Phillip and Alexander of Macedon: two essays in biography* (1897). In Egypt he visited Petrie at Koptos and then, as Petrie's spy, infiltrated Naville's haphazard EEF excavation of the Temple of Hatshepsut.

Within a few months, however, Hogarth had proved so useful that he was spoken of as 'one of the chief officers' of the Fund. His delicately phrased public apology for conspiring against them insisted that, where some had accused Naville of destroying the stratigraphy of Deir el Bahari, the archaeological record had in fact been ruined long before the EEF arrived. Hogarth himself had found 'a German newspaper of 1875' sixteen feet down.⁴¹ By 1894 Edward Maunde Thompson, Greek and Latin palaeographer, was the Fund's vice president and Arthur Evans, Keeper at the Ashmolean Museum, was a committee member (he was yet to embark on the extraordinary excavations at Knossos). Other leading contributors, in particular Cecil Smith and F. G. Kenyon, had equally imposing classical credentials. The intellectual power of the EEF's committee in 1895 was nothing short of phenomenal, but once again (especially when the Coptic studies of W. E. Crum are added to the list of pursuits) pharaonic Egypt did not take first place.

This turn to the first centuries AD was not confined to the EEF. The public were bombarded with an increasing number of artistic and scholarly recreations of early Christianity and its Roman setting. Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur: a Tale of the Christ* (1880) was at the height of its extraordinary popularity (it would remain the bestselling American novel in history until *Gone with the Wind* in 1936).⁴² Its block-busting stage show—juxtaposing spectacle and piety, chariot races and the life of Christ—opened in 1898 and reached London in 1902.

⁴¹ 'Egypt Exploration Fund', *Academy* (1894), 356.

⁴² Many imitations poured forth, particularly during the 1890s. These often interrogated relationships between science and religion, e.g. *Aleph the Chaldean; or the Messiah as seen from Alexandria* (New York: Ketcham, 1891) by the astronomer and theologian Enoch Fitch Burr.

The impresario Herbert Beerbohm Tree had launched a (less spectacular) stage rendering of Kingsley's *Hypatia*, adapted by Stuart Ogilvie with lavish, highly praised designs by Lawrence Alma Tadema. Its 'dreamy and mystical' score by Hubert Parry was successful enough to receive independent concert performances in the Philharmonic Concert series.⁴³ The play brutalized Kingsley's text, wilfully removing major characters and replacing them with seduced daughters and 'wily' acquisitive Jews ('the money element is much too modern to convince anyone' wrote *The Saturday Review*).⁴⁴ It homed in on the Alexandrine melting pot of Egyptian, Greek, Jewish and Christian elements that Sharpe and Poole had emphasized as a source of Egyptology's modern relevance. It perpetuated the lasting phenomenon of enthusiasm for *Hypatia* which meant that, until well into the twentieth century, comments like 'pace Charles Kingsley' or 'familiar to readers of Kingsley's *Hypatia*' were standard fare in reviews of any excavation report that featured Roman Egypt.⁴⁵

Fictional, dramatic and artistic productions like these saw the development of a symbolic repertoire used to express the clash of religious and intellectual systems that made the Egypt of the first four centuries AD so intriguing to 1890s audiences. Papyrus itself had been made symbolic of Christianity in paintings like Edwin Long's 'Christ or Diana'. This was an image sold in 'many of the prominent picture shops' throughout the country and which triggered considerable public interest. In 1890 a correspondent from Bolton wrote to the popular penny weekly *Bow Bells* seeking help interpreting the painting. The heroine, wrote the editor in reply, was a virgin martyr 'transfigured by the inward light of religious fervour'.⁴⁶ In her conversion to Christianity and refusal to offer incense to Diana she has not just forfeited her pagan lover but has also given up her life: she will be 'thrown to the lions in the Circus Maximus, and "butchered to make a Roman holiday"'.⁴⁷ The picture inspired several recorded

⁴³ 'Dr Hubert Parry's Hypatia Music', *Musical Times* (1893), 91; this incidental music has been released as Dutton Epoch CDLX 7237.

⁴⁴ 'Hypatia—The Theatres', *Saturday Review* (7 January 1897), 14.

⁴⁵ 'Ancient Egyptian Art', *Athenaeum* (1915), 267; 'Three Years in the Libyan Desert: Travels, discoveries and excavations of the Menas Expedition', *Athenaeum* (1913), 328.

⁴⁶ 'Answers to Correspondents', *Bow Bells*, 9 (10 January 1890), 42.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

sermons on temptation and Christian commitment, especially after its exhibition in Manchester in 1888.⁴⁸

Long drew on referents that were familiar from the early Christian milieu of Bulwer-Lytton's *Pompeii*, as Willa Cather's novel *One of Ours* (1922) recognized:

When the Sunday School gave *tableaux vivants*, Enid was chosen for Nydia, the blind girl of Pompeii, and for the martyr in 'Christ or Diana'. The pallor of her skin, the submissive inclination of her forehead, and her dark, unchanging eyes, made one think of something 'early Christian'.⁴⁹

In 1894, when *Bow Bells* printed a short-story adaptation of Long's painting, the anonymous author even named the heroine Nydia. The symbolic repertoire of paganism in this image is extensive and ranges across sensual and military associations; but Christianity is given no symbols of any kind except a single sheet of papyrus. Early Christians, unable to display crosses, are represented by devotion to these texts.

These developments are essential to interpretation of the great Egyptian finds of the decade around the turn of the century. Public interest in early Christianity was heightened and some public awareness of papyrus and even papyrology had been generated. When combined with the Graeco-Roman interests of a growing enclave within the EEF, and the involvement of textual and biblical scholars such as Harris and M. R. James (the Oxford ghost-story writer and apocrypha scholar), this created a considerable weight of expectation that the social setting and devotional texts of early Christianity might soon be revealed. The Oxyrhynchus discoveries, when they came, were not just an independent initiative of two young Oxford scholars ('the *Dioscuri* of Queens College') that burst onto an unsuspecting public; they were one product of extensive new cultural involvement with the early Church.⁵⁰ As *The Athenaeum* noted, 'Papyriology' might be a 'portentous word', but it was newly recognized as a 'most important thing'.⁵¹

After integration into the EEF, David Hogarth worked quickly to generate support for his turn towards Greece and Rome. 'The area of research for lost classics was narrowing every day', he told the EEF's

⁴⁸ 'Diana or Christ', *Quiver* (1888), 318.

⁴⁹ Willa Cather, *One of Ours* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), 126.

⁵⁰ 'Notes from Oxford', *Athenaeum* (27 June 1908), 788.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

committee. Demonstrating extraordinary foresight, he insisted that if papyri of Sappho and Menander, not to mention ‘early Gospels’ and ‘sayings of Christ’ were to be found, action must be immediate.⁵² He demanded that the EEF free itself from association with the rainy Delta to work the Fayum and the dry Upper Nile Valley. Within months Hogarth had conscripted Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt to search sites in the Fayum for papyri. Grenfell had already proved his worth with Petrie at Koptos; Hunt, two years his junior, had only just been elevated from Aubrey Moore theological scholar to Craven fellow in 1894: he had chosen Latin palaeography as his specialism, only Grenfell’s intervention in early 1895 persuaded him into Greek and papyrology.

The initial improvised digs conducted by this trio provided an affirmative answer to the question they arrived with—whether excavation would be cheaper than purchase from dealers. When Grenfell and Hunt prepared to return for a full season in 1897 it was without Hogarth, who was both newly wed and increasingly frustrated with conditions in Egypt. They tagged along with Petrie instead, taking advantage of his concession to dig at Behnesa. This was a village on the edge of the Fayum associated with a major site of early Christianity, the capital of the Oxyrhynchite nome, and a region once ‘so full of convents that monkish chants were heard in every corner’.⁵³ Tradition even suggested it as the destination of the Holy family’s flight into Egypt.

The first investigations at Behnesa’s tombs were not promising enough to hold Petrie’s interest, and he moved on to Deshasseh. It was only when Grenfell and Hunt also gave up on these tombs and moved to nearby mounds that ‘so rich a prize’ fell ‘to the zeal of [the] two young Oxford scholars’ that it is their names (far more than either of their mentors’) that are forever associated with early-Christian discovery in Egypt.⁵⁴ Starting to dig these mounds with

⁵² ‘The Egypt Exploration Fund’, *British Architect* (1895), 381.

⁵³ *Daily Chronicle* (12 July 1898), see also Dominic Montserrat, ‘News Reports’ in A. K. Bowman *et al.* (eds), *Oxyrhynchus: a City and its Texts* (London, EES, 2007), 28–39.

⁵⁴ ‘What are the New Logia?’, *Speaker* (17 July 1897), 64; ‘The Oxyrhynchus Papyri’, *Athenaeum* (9 July 1904), 38; the most substantial celebration of these achievements only appeared in 1989, in Tony Harrison’s clever fusion of Sophocles’ ‘Ichneutae’ and Grenfell and Hunt’s archaeology (complete with descent into insanity): *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*.

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seventy men and boys on 11 January, they worked at a point wrongly guessed to be an ancient temple. They soon disinterred large quantities of papyrus consisting of 'private and official documents' such as letters, contracts and accounts, but also texts in formal uncials.⁵⁵ Before long, not just scattered fragments, but thick layers of solid, compacted papyrus were discovered. This spot was initially referred to as the 'storehouse' until it became clear that it was, in fact, an extensive ancient rubbish dump.⁵⁶ The proportion of literary finds demonstrated the presence of a large, cultured Greek-speaking elite: fragments of Sappho, Homer and Thucydides were present (and idiosyncratically heralded as yet another blow against the higher criticism); but two-thirds of the literature discovered was by unknown authors. Besides these, the intensely personal nature of much of the correspondence aroused immediate interest. The world these discoveries conjured could be rendered familiar through its Christian devotion and domestic detail. It would soon be subsumed into fiction by authors including Norma Lorimer and E. F. Benson. These domestic texts were greeted as 'historical, literary and human' artefacts that brought the reader 'near touching the living heart of that far-away time' and 'joined the hands of then and now'.⁵⁷

This discovery harked back to the agendas established in 1882 by Poole and Edwards; it roused the 'church and chapel' interest to which they had addressed themselves. However, Oxyrhynchus was not Pithom. The differences between the two sites, when combined with cultural developments between 1882 and 1897, produce a very different phenomenon from the EEF's first success. Where Egyptologists had been both discoverers of Pithom and authorities over its interpretation, they proved unable to fulfil the latter role at Oxyrhynchus.

This situation became obvious through one of the first papyri to emerge from the site. 'In sorting the papyri found on the second day', Grenfell wrote, Hunt

noticed on a crumpled uncial fragment written on both sides the Greek word *KAPΦΟΣ* ('mote'), which at once suggested to him the verse in the Gospels concerning the mote and the beam. A further examination showed that the passage in the papyrus really was the conclusion of the

⁵⁵ Uncials are capitalized scripts employed for prestige literary and religious purposes.

⁵⁶ 'The Oldest Record of Jesus' Words', *Review of Reviews* (1897), 498.

⁵⁷ 'What are the New Logia?', *Speaker*, 64.

verse, ‘Thou hypocrite, cast first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother’s eye’; but that the rest of the papyrus differed considerably from the Gospels, and was, in fact a leaf of a book containing a collection of sayings of Christ, some of which, apparently, were new.⁵⁸

After taking advice from the EEF committee the excavators decided not to make this discovery public immediately. Instead, they began work on a pamphlet, intended for wide circulation, which would unveil the ‘Logia’ with as much fanfare as possible. Before this was prepared, however, ‘wild rumours were afloat’ about scriptural discoveries in Egypt: the lost Gospel of the Egyptians had been recovered; ‘great questions in Christian origins’ were about to be answered. By the time the publication was ready media interest was so high that the EEF’s intention to issue 5,000 copies required dramatic revision: ‘the preliminary demand was so great that they started with 15,000 and up to the present [November 1897] more than 30,000 copies had been printed and the sale still continued’.⁵⁹

Six complete sayings were printed, with fragments of two more. The text included two previously unknown sayings which conformed to the general tone: profoundly sabbatarian and anti-material. The most widely quoted ran

Jesus saith: I stood in the midst of the world, and in flesh was I seen of them: and I found all men drunken, and none found I athirst among them, and my soul grieveth over the sons of man, because they are blind in their heart.⁶⁰

The past tense employed here suggested that this saying dated from after the Resurrection and gave weight to the probable Gnostic identity of the document (existing Gnostic texts such as the Pistis Sophia placed particular emphasis on spiritual revelations made by the resurrected Christ). There was huge potential in this material, yet the text Grenfell and Hunt produced was strangely anaemic. The EEF had prioritized rapid publication for maximum public interest; in the eyes of reviewers, this resulted in half-baked speculation unworthy of

⁵⁸ Bernard Grenfell, ‘The Oldest Record of Christ’s Life’, *McClure’s Magazine* 9:6 (October 1897), 1022–30.

⁵⁹ Report of EEF AGM 1897: ‘Egypt Exploration Fund’, *British Architect* (19 November 1897), 374.

⁶⁰ Bernard Grenfell & Arthur Hunt, *The Sayings of Our Lord from an Early Greek Papyrus* (London: Henry Frowde, 1897), 11.

Oxford scholarship. But Grenfell and Hunt were not entirely committed to this populist agenda and allowed little sensationalism or accessible disquisition into the document. The few popularizing claims they made—that their *logia*, and the Gospel of Matthew found with them, were ‘a century older than the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament’—were enough to raise considerable intrigue but also engendered bitter opposition that illustrates the problem the EEF faced.⁶¹

Oxyrhynchus yielded New Testament finds, written in Greek. This made the new discoveries an object of analysis for a highly developed scholarly community. The interpretation of early Christian texts was, after all, one of the oldest of continuous disciplines, boasting names as elevated as Erasmus, Bentley and Schleiermacher. It was simply impossible for the EEF to satisfy popular hunger for empirical data and interpretative certainty, whilst not embarrassing themselves in the eyes of powerful members of well-established disciplines. Pithom had stepped onto contested territory—the dimensions and exact numbers of the column of Israelites quitting Egypt had been a staple question in higher criticism—but the novel nature of archaeological evidence, and the epistemological power briefly ascribed to it, allowed Egyptologists to subvert or ignore these controversies. The difference in the case of Oxyrhynchus did not just relate to the greater intensity of New Testament controversies, but to the type of evidence at stake: archaeology in 1882 was a ‘nascent science’ in the throes of youthful enthusiasm; textual criticism in 1897 was not.

Grenfell, Hunt and the EEF could not sustain interpretative control over Oxyrhynchus, nor did the formidable range of classical and biblical scholars who made up their committee feel a sense of shared identity on the momentous issues at stake. Oxyrhynchus ultimately had the same effects as Naqada. It complicated the relationship between Egyptologists and their public; it forced a wedge between excavators and the readers Edwards and Poole had once enthused. And it brought the checks and balances of scholarly theology to bear in ways that made breezy popularizing untenable. Despite tens of thousands of sales of the *Logia* and the extensive publicity they brought, the difficulties the EEF faced in attempting to capitalize on

⁶¹ Ibid.

this discovery are demonstrated in a precarious balance sheet and increasing reliance on bank loans.

Babel und Bibel

Mesopotamia, as well as Roman and Prehistoric Egypt contributed to the turn-of-the-century reorientation of the relationship between archaeology and scripture. When George Smith had announced the discovery of the Deluge Tablets in 1872, the *New York Times* had issued a sober warning amidst the celebrations:

For the present the orthodox people are in great delight, and are very much prepossessed by the corroboration which it affords to Biblical history. It is possible, however, as has been pointed out, that the Chaldean inscription, if genuine, may be regarded as a confirmation of the statement that there are various traditions of the deluge apart from the Biblical one, which is perhaps legendary like all the rest.⁶²

In the years around 1900, the attitudes predicted by *The New York Times* finally engulfed those encouraged by Smith. *The Academy* in 1904 noted ‘a reaction among experts against the impulse to have recourse to “the wand of cuneiform research” for the solution of every Old Testament enigma’.⁶³ Numerous Old Testament-themed texts, incorporating critical perspectives to widely diverging degrees, continued to appear with each fresh discovery. The first discovery of a Code of Hammurabi at Susa in 1901 sparked a particularly expansive spree, including Stanley Cook’s *The Laws of Moses and the Code of Hammurabi* (1903). The market, wrote Cook, is being ‘flooded’ with arguments about the origins of Hebrew law and the influences that shaped it.⁶⁴ The Queens’ College lecturer in Assyriology (and Rector of St Botolph’s Church), C. H. W. Johns, published a translation of the Code which went into four editions in its first year alone (particularly impressive since other versions by Boscawen and Cook were also available).

The most substantial Mesopotamian scandal of the age played out on a profoundly public stage in Berlin. This crisis, soon labelled the

⁶² ‘Noah’s Log of the Deluge’, *New York Times* 22 December 1872, 1.

⁶³ ‘Theology’, *The Academy and Literature* (1904), 33.

⁶⁴ Stanley Cook, *The Law of Moses and the Code of Hammurabi* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1903), vi.

Babel-Bibel Streit, was followed closely by the British press. The two lectures by Friedrich Delitzsch from which the scandal took its name were rapidly translated by Johns, and the Anglo-German nature of the affair was demonstrated by the unprecedented appearance of a letter from the Kaiser in *The Times*. As Johns wrote,

that lectures, even on such an interesting subject, could lead to measures of such high state policy was a guarantee that the matter had passed beyond the circles of scholarship and research and was become a matter of national concern . . . Not to speak of editions up to 40,000, replies already in a ninth edition, and a whole literature to itself, Babel and Bible is now a historic event.⁶⁵

These lectures were delivered on invitation of the Kaiser, to the Deutsch Oriental Gesellschaft; Delitzsch occupied the Chair of Assyriology at Berlin, seen by the Kaiser as a flagship position and the world's most prestigious post in Mesopotamian research.

'It is astonishing', Delitzsch declared, 'the extent to which the Old Testament is being investigated in every direction' by an 'almost inconceivable number of Christian scholars' in the 'three Bible lands': Germany, England and America. Their achievements, he insisted, were 'more important than all discoveries in the Natural Sciences' since they ushered in a new epoch in the understanding of scripture. A 'cool, quickening breeze from the East' had blown the cobwebs from the 'time-honoured Book' and shown the Israelites to be an ordinary, young and barely significant Middle Eastern tribe tossed back and forth by the power politics of the great ancient empires. Their ethics, he insisted, were more in keeping with blood-thirsty Assyrian ritual than modern Christian humanism.

There were few significant new ideas here, either for Germans or Britons (in fact there were pronounced echoes of Milman). Much of the furore caused by Delitzsch was put down to his combative tone and attacks on rivals: König was a 'ravening wolf'; nothing could be 'more perverse' than Jensen; and the dominant biblical-apologetic mode was assaulted for its 'abysmal obscurity, incompleteness, discord—to say nothing of more deplorable features'.⁶⁶ The real source of this moment's importance, however, was in its intense

⁶⁵ C. H. W. Johns (ed.), *Babel and Bible: Two Lectures* (London, Williams and Norgate, 1903), xi.

⁶⁶ 'Archaeological Notes', *Athenaeum* (27 February 1904), 280.

celebrity, its apparent sanction from the Kaiser, and the coverage it achieved in the public sphere. Ideas that clergymen and their parishioners had found relatively easy to ignore, or to explain away via the apologetics of Sayce, suddenly exploded into circulation and Sayce's extraordinary confidence in the plain evidential value of material remains was challenged.

Johns' translation was prefixed with a 'gently sarcastic' introduction in which he assured readers that despite Delitzsch's polemic they need not 'toss the Bible on the shelf as antiquated rubbish' quite yet.⁶⁷ The 'order of nature' might seem overturned, with higher critics defending the Old Testament against the irreverent attacks of archaeologists and cuneiform scholars, but 'confidence was not much shaken. Had we not in our own British Museum the greatest collection of material in the world for the elucidation of Scripture?'⁶⁸

Ultimately, *Babel und Bibel* began to endow Assyriology with something Assyriologists have continued to struggle for ever since: disciplinary independence. As Johns noted,

We seem to have a repetition of an old experience. Something is discovered which is first hailed as a remarkable confirmation of Scripture, then seen to be a serious impeachment of its accuracy, finally known to be purely independent and unconnected.⁶⁹

Readers continued to demand of every discovery, 'how does it bear on the Bible?', and Johns heralded this as indicative of the suffusive power of scripture; but he cautioned readers against making blanket judgements for or against Assyriology through individual insinuations of its biblical application.⁷⁰ This was a 'neutral' science 'not an invention of the devil', whatever controversial figures such as Delitzsch should decide to do with it.⁷¹

Yet Johns himself was far from ready to view Delitzsch's Mesopotamian evidence as 'independent and unconnected' from Hebrew religion. He argued that religious Britons must allow their theological perspectives to be shaped by criticism and archaeology (not to accept 'what they were told as babies').⁷² They should admit the influence of Mesopotamia on early Israel and, in so doing, come to understand the interplay of ancient civilizations better. The astrologers, diviners and

⁶⁷ Ibid. ⁶⁸ Johns, *Babel and Bible*, viii.

⁶⁹ Ibid. xv. ⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. xviii. ⁷² Ibid. xxviii.

warlords of ancient Mesopotamia might seem like unlikely contributors to the development of Holy Writ; yet science proved them to have shaped its formation. Johns' final flourish demonstrated just how earnest and devout his no-nonsense critical perspective remained:

Men of deep religious faith, who alone count for the progress of the race, will rejoice and take courage at a fresh proof that the Father has never left Himself without witness among men, and that even the most unlikely elements have gone to prepare the world for Him who was, and still is to come.⁷³

THE CENTURY IN RETROSPECT

It was not just Assyriologists, but Egyptologists too, who took stock at this moment. The commencement of the twentieth century led publishers and periodicals to reflect on the passing of the nineteenth. Petrie and his colleagues contributed Egyptological assessments to a slew of retrospectives of nineteenth-century scholarship. These included David Hogarth's archaeologically focused survey, *Authority and Archaeology, Sacred and Profane* and two volumes edited by Hermann Hilprecht, *Recent Research in Bible Lands* (1896) and *Explorations in Bible Lands During the 19th Century* (1903). These adopted a diverse array of perspectives on recent events including the critical archaeology of Delitzsch and the excavations at Naqada and Oxyrhynchus. Hilprecht's collections were the most divisive. In the first, Sayce worked hard to deny Egyptian prehistory:

The earliest culture and civilization of Egypt to which the monuments bear witness was in fact already perfect . . . yet Upper Egypt is a country where, as has been said, nothing perishes except by the hand of man . . . We cannot emphasize the fact too strongly that Egyptian civilization is at the very outset full grown.⁷⁴

This was undercut by a much more critical approach in J. F. McCurdy's long introductory essay which dismissed Egypt as a site of biblical research:

⁷³ Ibid. xxix.

⁷⁴ A. H. Sayce, 'Research in Egypt' in H. V. Hilprecht (ed.), *Recent Research in Bible Lands: its Progress and Results* (Philadelphia: John D. Wattles, 1896), 97.

It is apparently impossible that Egypt can ever be of primary importance in the department of biblical study. In the first place, the historical records of the country, while for long periods insufficiently copious, are very defective in precision and accuracy . . . Even the residence of the Hebrews in Egypt was not likely to leave a deep mark upon the national life or history of its people . . . Of the two exceptional episodes, the administration of Joseph and the Exodus, the former may well have been obliterated from public records, and the latter may never have been recorded at all.⁷⁵

An entirely different and particularly ambitious volume, anonymously edited and entitled *The Progress of the Century* (1901), was issued by Harper & Brothers of New York. It opened with chapters by heavy-weight scientists, Alfred Russell Wallace and William Ramsay on Evolution and Chemistry respectively, and closed with eminent thinkers on religion: Richard Gottheil on Judaism and, on Freethought, the ageing firebrand, devotee of John Bright, and author of the extraordinary *Guesses at the Riddle of Existence*, Goldwin Smith.

Chapter three in this illustrious collection was given to Petrie, to sum up (in forty pages) archaeology's first century. Over the following decade Petrie would go much further to develop a role for himself as public intellectual and disciplinary spokesman; gradually, he gathered confidence to draw more and more fields into his nexus of scientific and historical knowledge. His chapter of 1901 provided an early hint towards this public and synthetic ambition. It also demonstrated the impact of prehistory on his thought. He opened:

To write of the progress of archaeology in this century is scarcely possible, as the idea of the subject was unknown a hundred years ago; it is, therefore, the whole history of its opening and development that we have to deal with. The conception of the history of man being preserved to us in material facts, and not only in written words, was quite disregarded until the growth of geology had taught men to read nature for themselves, instead of trusting to the interpretations formed by their ancestors. Even down to the present the academic view is that classical archaeology is more important than other branches, because it serves to illustrate classical literature. Looked at as archaeology, it is, on the

⁷⁵ J. F. McCurdy, 'Oriental research and the Bible' in Hilprecht, *Recent research*, 8.

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contrary, the least important branch, because we already know so much more of the classical ages than we do of others.⁷⁶

By deft sleight of hand Petrie suggested that archaeology was the ‘great new force which thrust itself in to divide’ the brawl—between physics, geology, archaeology, anthropology and theology—which had previously prevented consensus in interpretations of human origins and development.⁷⁷ Claiming for archaeology an ancestry in the great geological ideas of the mid century (and audaciously effacing several decades of resistance to these ideas amongst archaeologists of the Near East) he made an uncompromising case for the centrality of the archaeologist to the most dramatic ‘progress’ of his age.

His embrace of prehistory was uncompromising and triumphalist:

In Egypt an exposure of 7,000 years or more only gives a faint brown tint to flints lying side by side with Paleolithic flints that are black with age. I incline to think that 100,000 years BC for the rise of the [Paleolithic] class and 10,000 BC for the rise of the [Neolithic] class will be a moderate estimate.⁷⁸

He attempted to reduce the diverse interest of the nineteenth century to a simple formula, then cast it off, in order to assign all true knowledge of Egypt to ‘the last ten or fifteen years’ and to claim extraordinary new precision for his science: the ‘rise and progress’ of early Egypt could now be dated through ‘sculpture, metal work, pottery’ with the same precision as the history of the Middle Ages.⁷⁹ Needless to say, few Egyptologists today would share Petrie’s confidence in such detailed knowledge of prehistory; but, more importantly for present purposes, nor had anyone just a few years earlier.

A sense of rapid *fin-de-siècle* progress and the worthlessness of all that had gone before can be found throughout these centennial texts. F. Ll. Griffith described the achievements of Champollion as an island of light in a century of darkness, an ‘evil period of detraction’, before claiming that ‘all liberal culture’ now ‘takes cognizance’ of Egyptological work:

⁷⁶ W. M. F. Petrie, ‘Archaeology’ in *The Progress of the Century* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1901), 73.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 74.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 76.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 81.

To Egyptologists themselves it often seems as if they were only on the threshold of a satisfactory reading of the inscriptions, although progress in this respect has been very great during the last decade.⁸⁰

This is a disciplinary self-confidence that waxed during the following years. Entangled in this newfound self-confidence was intensified interest in ideas of race. Texts of the first decade of the twentieth century are much more heavily loaded with discussion of 'higher races', 'lower races', 'savagery' and the 'nature of a race', than those of the 1880s. 'Racial groups' not 'language groups', still less holy narratives, are the analytic tools that begin to define shapes imposed on the primeval past.

EGYPTIAN MAGIC

One more turn-of-the-century development helped to subvert the Egypt that had been constructed by the EEF. This was the reorientation of British occultism. Egypt had played a fundamental role in the rise of occultism from the 1870s onwards. With new interest in Egyptian mythology after 1890 this had become stronger than ever. Many spiritualists, theosophists and occultists whose mystical interest later 'graduated' to more 'remote' regions such as Tibet, served occult apprenticeships through ancient Egypt. Helena Blavatsky, the figure-head of Indic Theosophy, began her esoteric quest with Egyptian material inspired by Bulwer Lytton. Even the title of her first major publication, *Isis Unveiled*, came from the pronouncement of Arbaces that 'none among the mortals hath ever lifted up my veil, so saith the Isis that you adore; but to the wise that hath been removed'.⁸¹ Blavatsky's turn to India in the late 1870s broadcast loudly the increasing divergence of British occultism into two traditions. These were united by overlapping membership but were philosophically

⁸⁰ F. L. Griffith, 'Egypt and Assyria' in *Authority and Archaeology: Sacred and Profane* (London: John Murray, 1899), 157.

⁸¹ S. B. Liljegren, *Edward Bulwer-Lytton's Novels and 'Isis Unveiled'* (Upsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1957), 14; Ezra Pound's Cantos are another example of a historical schematic inspired by Egypt, but in which Egyptian influences were displaced: only in 1910 did Pound purge the early Cantos of ancient Egypt; Angus Fletcher, 'Ezra Pound's Egypt and the Origin of the Cantos', *Twentieth-century literature*, 48 (2002), 1–21.

distinct, and were identified by geography. An 'Eastern tradition' which united influences from the Indian subcontinent and China was divided from a 'Western tradition' that emphasized the Hermetica, Kabbalah, Gnosticism, Graeco-Roman mysticism and the early-modern Egypt of alchemists and Neoplatonists.

By the 1890s a definitive distinction between these Eastern and Western traditions was the status they accorded to Christianity. The occultists who made greatest use of Egypt repeatedly stressed the origin of their ideas in the pages of the Bible at the same time as they insisted on the inadequacy of established churches. The Old Testament shaped the stories they told of the origin of their orders. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn is one such case. To Samuel MacGregor Mathers (a founder of the Order), angels had formed a 'theosophic school' in Eden; after the fall they 'graciously communicated this heavenly doctrine' in the hope that humanity might return to 'pristine nobility and felicity'. Abraham took this knowledge to Egypt and 'allowed a portion of this mysterious doctrine to ooze out' so that it shaped the philosophical system of priests and pharaohs:

Moses, who was learned in all the wisdom of Egypt, was first initiated into the Qabalah in the land of his birth, but became most proficient in it during his wanderings in the wilderness, when he not only devoted to it the leisure hours of the whole forty years, but received lessons in it from one of the angels . . . He covertly laid down the principles of this secret doctrine in the first four books of the Pentateuch.⁸²

In its early years The Golden Dawn was suffused with this praise of Egyptian wisdom. Members met in the reading room and Egyptian galleries of the British Museum and claimed to have converted Egyptologists including Petrie and Budge to their cause. Florence Farr, celebrated actress and fêted mystic, dived particularly deeply into the work of Egyptologists as she sought lost fundamentals of practical magic. She made her occult agenda venerable by drawing on the Harris papyrus, Hatshepsut's funerary obelisk and the Book of the Dead. She sought an underlying order to the universe that neither science nor religion had the power to interpret or manipulate, but that the more holistic epistemology of the Egyptian priests could conquer.

⁸² S. L. Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled* (London: Redway, 1887), 1.

Like many other occultists, she attempted to write the discoveries of modern Egyptology into the early-modern frameworks of John Everard and Athanasius Kircher. Works including Kircher's *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1650) and Everard's *Divine Pymander of Hermes Trismegistus* (1650) received new editions in the 1880s and 1890s which usually featured advertisements for occult orders in their end-papers (many such orders also advertised in *The Times*). Egypt's priests, Farr insisted, had been a 'philosophical aristocracy', versed in magical arts that had only recently passed from memory: 'they were not only wise, but could use their wisdom. They could give strength to the armies of the nation'.⁸³ They were not an aloof intellectual aristocracy like Matthew Arnold and his peers:

mild saintliness was by no means the ideal of the Egyptian priesthood. Intense practical interest in the life of their country . . . drew a sharp contrast between them and the ascetics of India and Christendom . . . [they]tended to sanitary conditions, and length of life, individual and racial.⁸⁴

Not just Moses, but the New Testament Christ and his apostles were drawn into this Western occult tradition. The medium David Duguid, author of *Hermes, Disciple of Jesus*, made the author of the Hermetica into a thirteenth apostle who accessed the word of Christ through trance and conveyed it from Egypt around the Mediterranean. The creeds also found their place. A Hermetic order known as the Cromlech Temple attracted numerous clergymen including the Dean of Chester; they specified their commitment to Apostolic Succession, the Sacraments, Assumption and Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, and claimed Anglo-Catholic 'orthodoxy' alongside their revival of magic. Archdeacon Colley, speaking to a huge audience in the Albert Hall expressed his faith in the revival of miracle:

The time is not far off when the invisible will be seen, the intangible sensibly felt; when matter will rarefy to spirit and spirit solidify to matter . . . when they of the spiritual world will be able, under fitting conditions to visit us as in Bible times.⁸⁵

⁸³ Florence Farr, *Egyptian Magic* (London: Collectanea Hermetica, 1897), 1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 16–17.

⁸⁵ Thomas Colley, *Phenomena, Bewildering, Psychological* (London: Office of Light, 1905), 7.

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This hope for the future ‘community of spirits’ was based on a recent experience, he explained: ‘four of us . . . were sitting with our medium in perfect accord and taking the utmost care of the tests, which were of a most stringent nature’. Eventually a head began to grow out of the left side of the medium, until a whole body had emerged. As *The Occult Review* reported,

[It] was that of an Egyptian, some eight inches taller than the medium . . . The [archdeacon] examined the flesh of this bronzed Egyptian through a Stanhope lens, observed the frontal ornament of the turban worn by him, and was surprised to find that on trying to feel it the article became impalpable, seeming ‘to melt away like a snowflake’ and then to grow up again . . . ‘From the medium these spirit people came’, it was affirmed, ‘and through the medium they went back to invisibility’.⁸⁶

Many high-profile occultists remained within their existing Christian communions, but some felt the pull of Catholicism; Annie Hornmann and Mathers were amongst those who converted. Throughout this heterodox activity Egypt is fashioned into a weapon against positivism. The ‘false theories and corrupt sciences’ of nineteenth-century rationalism are rejected along with the epistemological divide between faith and scientific knowledge.⁸⁷ A restoration of the unified system of the mystical engineers and inspired architects of antiquity is pursued. The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor (led by the Rev. William Ayton, vicar of Chacombe, Northants.) attempted to write Darwinian evolution into a six-day creation: the evolutionary process was initially spiritual and took on its secondary, biological aspect only when non-corporeal souls ‘evolved’ the crude physical containers that they remain imprisoned in. Countless occultists stressed this spiritual counterpart to evolutionary biology. ‘Modern, or so called *exact science*’, argued Blavatsky,

holds to a one-sided physical evolution . . . avoiding and ignoring the higher or spiritual evolution, which would force our contemporaries to confess the superiority of the ancient philosophers and psychologists over themselves.⁸⁸

Egyptologists were well aware of the occult associations of their discipline. Because many occult organizations endowed their rituals

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Anna Kingsford, *Clothed with the Sun* (London: John M. Watkins, 1889), 13.

⁸⁸ Helena Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* (London: Quaritch, 1877), 2:xxxvi–xxxvii.

with mystique by encoding them in hieroglyphs, Egyptologists routinely received letters like the following (sent to Peter le Page Renouf at the British Museum in 1889):

Dear Sir, I have two certificates from Cairo belonging to the Ancient Rites Society. I can make out all except the Egyptian. It is secret Rites, and I have lost my translator and key. Would you kindly give me a translation if I send my certificate for your perusal.⁸⁹

Novelists played up these links between Egyptologists and the occult, citing for instance, Petrie and Budge as authorities on the existence of astral bodies. But by the late 1890s a great deal of Egyptological occultism was encouraged by Egyptologists themselves. Grenfell told tales of the spirit of a sheikh who blinded him as a tomb robber (but restored his sight when the economic benefits of archaeology for the neighbouring village became clear). Margaret Murray, a devoted Wiccan, shaped Britain's first examinable university course in Egyptology and insisted that 'all good archaeologists are expected to have had at least one occult experience'.⁹⁰ M. W. Blackden worked alongside Howard Carter on the EEF's Archaeological Survey as well as being a mainstay of the Golden Dawn's Isis-Urania Temple. His writing contains many revealing expositions of the occultist's Egypt:

Among the multitude of strange things to be noticed in our swiftly moving modern world, that which, to the outside observer, may appear one of the strangest is that fact that a civilisation which passed away from earth long ages ago can still rivet the imagination of thousands, not merely with a fleeting or dilettante interest but one which can be well termed vital. It is an interest which grips not imagination only but life, casting glamour, if glamour it be, over the struggles and aspirations of the soul.

These are days when the creed of modern science, that creed which has been harder, more dogmatic, more hopelessly blind in the expression of its faith than that of any of the religions, has fallen upon changeable times, when she knows not what from day to day may rouse her further from her dreams. These are times when things that a few years ago were to science but the most abject superstition have

⁸⁹ John Bulmer to Renouf, 26 June 1889: BM ANE, 1889/14. Freemasons are equally open: the secretary of the Surrey Lodge in 1883 requested information for an Egyptological lecture, introducing himself by naming a 'mutual friend', Thomas Hobb, 'Egyptologist' and member of the lodge: BM ANE, 1883/220.

⁹⁰ Margaret Murray, *My First Hundred Years* (London: W. Kimber, 1963), 175.

become fit subjects for the examination, even the persevering study, of acknowledged men of learning.⁹¹

During the 1890s, an Egyptology that was unselfconsciously spiritual coexisted unusually happily with an occultism that was self-consciously learned.

However, at the turn of the century the cosy, occult Egypt beloved of Farr and Blackden met with intense new opposition. Farr found herself marginalized within the Golden Dawn. Her two key 'Egyptological' allies in the organization, S. L. Mathers and Moina Bergson, had decamped to Paris (they were 'endeavouring to restore the mysteries (Egyptian)' and so 'plunged in Egypt' that little else was attended to).⁹² Mathers had carefully maintained a balance between Egyptian and Celtic influence in the Golden Dawn; in his absence the organization found itself pulled between Farr's Egyptians and the Celts of Annie Horniman and W. B. Yeats. Farr, to her dismay, soon met with 'considerable prejudice against Egyptian symbolism'; and 'splits in the order . . . became more and more pronounced'.⁹³ 'The Order', Farr admits, had passed into a 'hopeless state'; 'with the anti-Egyptian feeling about', she informed a correspondent at the Amen-Ra Temple in Edinburgh, 'I shall still refuse to discuss Egyptian formulae with anyone not specifically in sympathy with the ancient Egyptians'.⁹⁴

At the same time, the Golden Dawn was subjected to legal embarrassments that severely damaged its reputation and led to public mockery of its pseudo-Egyptian titlature.⁹⁵ A brief power struggle followed which resulted in the ascendancy of Aleister Crowley, by far the most public occultist of the first decades of the twentieth century. Crowley created a dramatic new rendering of the Western tradition which was bitterly anti-Christian. His *Sex-Magic*, famously enacted in the Great Pyramid, soon scandalized Britain. His *Book of the Law* (1909) was transcribed in Cairo from the words of a spirit guide, Aiwass, and thereafter Crowley spoke of himself as the reincarnation

⁹¹ M. W. Blackden, 'The Wisdom in the Mysteries of Egypt', *Occult Review*, 4 (1906), 305; cf. Petrie on the limits of science, e.g. *Personal religion in Egypt before Christianity*, 17.

⁹² George Mills Harper, *Yeats' Golden Dawn* (London: Barnes & Noble, 1974), 19.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 221.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 222.

⁹⁵ Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment. British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 51–84.

of ‘Ankh-af-na-khonsu’, scribe of the Stele of Revealing. Crowley’s activities were constantly subject to journalistic scrutiny, with reporters infiltrating séances of his ‘Equinox Sect’ in order to expose ‘immorality of the most revolting order’.⁹⁶ When his Egyptianized ‘Rites of Eleusis’ ran to paying audiences in Caxton Hall, Westminster, the press attended but advised the public to stay away:

Remember the long periods of complete darkness – remember the dances and the heavy scented atmosphere, the avowed object of which is to produce what Crowley terms an ‘ecstasy’ – and then say it is fitting that young girls and married women should be allowed to attend such performances under the guise of a new religion.⁹⁷

In the first decade of the century public perception of the relationship between occultism and Christianity was transformed. The ‘Eastern tradition’ did continue to sidestep Christianity, and the Western tradition did remain entangled with Christian tradition; but where this entanglement had once been largely congenial, profound hostility now ran through it.

This was yet another way in which the uniquely close association between biblical Christianity and ancient Egypt that prevailed in the 1880s was undercut as the century ended. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the press still spoke of Egypt’s appeal in biblical terms—‘the part played by the land and its people in biblical history and in the development of civilisation, appeal to every educated man’—but this relationship was no longer so straightforward as it had seemed.⁹⁸ In parallel to Crowley’s occultism, there emerged a handful of leading Egyptologists who still engaged closely with the Bible, but were deeply ambivalent, if not openly hostile to its claims. Margaret Murray, for instance, endeavoured to present excavations in biblical terms (the Osireion became, for instance, ‘the mystery temple of the pharaoh of the Exodus’) yet her career was driven by distaste for the church and desire to undermine its historical claims.⁹⁹ Arthur Weigall similarly provided commentary on biblical Egypt but published increasingly iconoclastic, Frazerian texts culminating in *The*

⁹⁶ ‘Rites of Eleusis’, *Looking Glass* (12 November 1910), 6.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ ‘Recent Lights on Ancient Egypt’, *Quarterly Review* (July 1904), 48.

⁹⁹ Margaret Murray, *The Osireion* (London: Quaritch, 1904); Margaret Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1921).

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Paganism in Our Christianity (1928).¹⁰⁰ Some Egyptologists after 1900 continued to produce work of uncontroversial (though rarely orthodox) biblical exposition, but the united front was broken. The sense, apparently so secure even in 1895, that Old Testament research and a mission to undermine the higher criticism were the primary reason to look to Egypt and the defining feature of the Egyptologist's identity, was swept away.

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Weigall, *The Paganism in our Christianity* (New York: Putnam's, 1928), 60.

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The New Kingdom

Ancient Egypt and the 'Cycles of Civilization' after 1900

Immersed in prehistory and facing robust challenges to the epistemological grounding of biblical archaeology, Egyptology after 1900 could not operate as it had in the 1880s. The ructions of the turn of the century played themselves out over the following two decades; they were accompanied by a political scene which gave the British a greater share in Egyptological activity at the same time as Egyptological activities began to be more carefully controlled. This period is easily overshadowed by the great Egyptological event of 1922—the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb—and it is all too easy to ascribe all early twentieth-century change in the practices of Egyptology to the crisis that Howard Carter's political clumsiness and colonial ideals brought to a head. This discovery did change Egyptology forever, but it came after the waxing colonial confidence in Egypt (between 1900 and 1914) had been shattered by the Revolution of 1919 and independence in 1922: the Tutankhamun fiascos forced the British to recognize a new situation that had developed over decades. The events of 1919–22 came as a shock to British Egyptologists who continued to favour a naive, obfuscating rhetoric of the unrelation between 'Egyptology' and 'politics'.¹ Several significant texts were issued in the two years before Carter's discovery and investigating one of these—*How*

¹ Indeed, predictions made by Egyptologists before 1919 proved wildly inaccurate: it was assumed, for instance, that antiquities legislation had reached the peak of its severity and would long be liberalized so that Egyptian artefacts would soon flood into Europe.

to *Observe in Archaeology* (1920)—might allow us to pierce the mist and see, free from the shadow of Tut, what changed, and what did not, in British attitudes between 1900 and 1920.

This text entered a large field of works with the title ‘How to Observe’, most of which were much more philosophical than later ‘Observers’ Guides’: this meant that British readers were accustomed to texts that tried to chivvy them into a roving, information-gathering army. Henry de la Beche, in *How to Observe Geology* (1835), aspired to create a band of ‘inquiring and useful’ ‘scientific travellers’ whose knowledge would allow them to make even the dullest and dreariest road ‘a district teeming with interest and pleasure’.² Three years later Harriet Martineau produced an even more extraordinary document. *How to Observe Morals and Manners* was a guide for English men and women ‘wandering over the face of the earth’, which provided the ‘intellectual preparation’ through which ‘national manners’ could be interpreted with scientific rigour.³ A French traveller, Martineau noted, had reported that London diners sat with soup on each side and ‘fish at four corners’; how could British tourists ensure that the assessments they made of other cultures were not equally fanciful?⁴ How could they prevent their statements from revealing more of the observer than the observed?

Many other examples followed; building on this didactic tradition, the contribution published by the British Museum in 1920, *How to Observe in Archaeology*, was nonetheless something new.⁵ This volume, ‘small enough to be easily slipped into the coat pocket’, pooled the resources of the Museum (with its new and short-lived Archaeological Joint Committee), the British Academy and the Foreign Office to create a ‘body of reference, both for Government Departments and for the public, on matters connected with archaeological research in foreign lands’.⁶ It opened with cursory guidance on

² Henry de la Beche, *How to Observe: Geology* (London: Charles Knight, 1835), v.

³ Harriet Martineau, *How to be Observe: Morals and Manners* (London: Charles Knight, 1838), 4.

Martineau’s chapter headings differentiate six distinct components to these ‘National manners’: ‘religion’, ‘general moral notions’, ‘domestic state’, ‘idea of liberty’, ‘progress’ and ‘discourse’.

⁴ *Ibid.* 4.

⁵ See Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2001), chapter 3.

⁶ *How to Observe in Archaeology* (London: British Museum Press, 1920), iii.

archaeological methodology from Petrie and the Museum's Graeco-Roman numismatist G.F. Hill. There followed a chapter on interpreting flint implements, then separate geographical coverage of Greece, Asia Minor, Cyprus, Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Mesopotamia.⁷ Tellingly, the book aimed only to cover the 'Near and Middle East' (no comparable guides were issued for other regions). A list of British officials and archaeological organizations in each country was complemented by summaries of antiquities legislation.

The intended audience for this text was the multitude of British tourists, businessmen and administrators who descended on these regions each year to collect antiquities, yet who might be unaware of the need to record the provenance, nature and destination of acquisitions. The aim was to convert this 'rabble' from a 'menace' into 'an instrument for the advancement of knowledge', to build a network of widely distributed, well-drilled researchers who would informally gather knowledge on behalf of museums.⁸ The authors encouraged travellers to seek basic tuition in ancient history and material culture at archaeological societies or museums; in return for this teaching they should report their findings in careful detail. Archaeological expertise, the authors implied, might be achieved if not in days, then in weeks.

Although the unacceptable nature of practices like dislodging inscribed bricks from walls was emphasized with stern adjectives like 'savage' and 'barbarous', the volume advocated the free acquisition of antiquities and looked forward to an inevitable time when oppressive legal strictures would be liberalized to allow Europeans to do as they wished with the products of their supposed ancestors.⁹ Travellers whose motivation was 'speculation in the pecuniary value' of antiquities were encouraged to consider sale to museums in the first instance.¹⁰ The volume made few concessions to the flood of biblically inspired travellers who still published their travel accounts each year. A chapter on Palestine was provided by R. A. S. Macalister, archaeologist, geologist and instigator of the first course in prehistoric archaeology at Cambridge. He demonstrated *How to Observe's* self-consciously

⁷ E. A. P., 'How to Observe in Archaeology', *Geographical Journal* (1929), 596.

⁸ A. W. Van Buren, 'How to Observe in Archaeology', *Classical Journal* (1920), 124.

⁹ *How to Observe in Archaeology*, e.g., 17, 27.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 2.

‘professional’ and deconstructive pose, discouraging attempts to identify sites with places mentioned in literary texts:

this is a task less easy than it appears to be, and many of the current identifications of Biblical sites call for revision. Similarity of name, on which most of these identifications depend, is apt to be misleading; in many cases sites identified thus with Old Testament places are not older than the Byzantine period.¹¹

Reviews, even in the most august journals, passed over these ideas and instead celebrated the ‘sporting element’ the text encouraged.¹² Flinders Petrie gave instructions to help keep money safe in a ‘risky district’ (stow it ‘in a little bag or screw of paper, loose in the jacket pocket . . . it can then be dropped on any alarm and picked up afterwards’); he also gave detailed instructions for photography in tombs: the lids of two biscuit tins could be set up as reflectors to direct light into the desired areas.¹³

Neither this volume nor its reviews in 1920–1 make even passing mention of the momentous political events in Egypt that culminated in the Revolution of 1919 and independence in 1922; even this work that deals with the practical matters of travel and collecting assumes a fundamental disconnection between archaeology and politics. Yet the array of independent organizations contributing to the volume demonstrates the complex bureaucratic arrangements involved in Egyptology by this period. It shows that transnational networks of archaeological knowledge constituted a more integrated and officially managed field than they had in 1900. It reveals a discipline much more self-consciously concerned with shared techniques and methods than the more irregular and often goal-oriented operations of the biblical archaeologists. Yet *How to Observe* also demonstrates the makeshift, haphazard application of these methods, the limited reach of professional institutions, the wide range of historical activities that ever-larger crowds of tourists engaged in, and the wholesale plunder of artefacts in which both private enterprise and official activity still collaborated. The world glimpsed here is one in which the scale of tourism remained limited enough for the national museum to provide any would-be-explorer with a personalized crash course in how to interpret the pottery, beads and flints they

¹¹ Ibid. 16. ¹² Van Buren, ‘How to Observe’, *Classical Journal*, 124.

¹³ *How to Observe in Archaeology*, 3.

aspired to unearth. Only once the number of tourists increased still more, later in the century, was the line that circumscribed their aspirations drawn severely, and permanently.

Despite its perpetuation of Petrie's earlier aloofness from politics this volume is a profoundly different project from anything conceivable in 1880. Where Egypt is concerned, substantial institutional, political and indeed social, consolidation had reshaped the field of operations of professional archaeologists and Egyptologists. This involved expansion of Egyptology in universities, particularly UCL, Oxford, and Liverpool, as well as the establishment of umbrella institutions like the British Museum's Archaeological Joint Committee with a remit to coordinate the work of voluntary institutions. This consolidation also worked to emphasize certain disciplinary relationships. Egyptology and anthropology were brought together in projects like the Archaeological Survey of Nubia and in institutional arrangements, particularly at UCL. Discussion of the history of Egyptology usually downplays this link: the *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt* (1999), for instance, states that 'because most of their research is text aided, Egyptologists have not often applied anthropological knowledge, methods or theories'.¹⁴ In fact, intertwining of Egyptological and anthropological interest increased so much after 1900 that it is often unhelpful to define a text as part of one tradition or the other: Egyptological articles were placed in anthropological journals such as *Man* and *Biometrika*; Egyptologists chaired anthropological committees; and most strikingly of all, the bestselling popular histories of the period relied on anthropologists rather than Egyptologists when they described ancient Egypt.¹⁵ An extraordinary amount of Egyptological activity in the decades after the recognition of prehistory avoided texts altogether; Cambridge Ritualists, race theorists and anthropologists all encouraged this non-textual Egyptology in which religion played a limited role.

Between 1900 and 1914 the formalization of British power in Egypt and East Africa involved colossal developments in infrastructure such as the first Aswan Dam and Cecil Rhodes's stupefyingly ambitious project to traverse British colonies with a 'Cape to Cairo' railway. Dozens more similarly ambitious schemes were mooted. British

¹⁴ Kathryn Bard & Steven Blake Shubert, *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1999), 156.

¹⁵ See below, on H. G. Wells, *Outline of History* (New York: Collier & Son, 1920).

politicians and engineers imagined teeming European tourist resorts on the equator (overlooked by ‘a statue of Cecil Rhodes’) and others on the banks of the Nubian reservoir that formed behind their new dam at Aswan.¹⁶ The vision of the whole of Africa as a playground for the ‘sporting element’ in European culture has never been stronger than in these first two decades of the twentieth century. The earnest biblical agendas of 1880s Egyptology could be oppressive and orientalist enough; as they diminished, Egyptology tended towards a more bluntly imperialist identity. Far from attempting to evade the censure of colonial officialdom, Egyptology was now embraced by the occupying powers: where Lord Cromer had seen excavation as a potentially fractious nuisance in 1882, he now served as president of the Egypt Exploration Fund. Egyptology was caught up less in Protestant mission, more in technopolitics; it partook in this period’s ‘crisis of liberalism’ as fully as any other field or pursuit. Petrie’s rejection of divine explanations for historical process and embrace of eugenic ones is symptomatic of the quest for a new disciplinary ideology: he had always been fixated by anxieties over Europe’s moral decline (‘the writhing and wriggling of this maggoty’ England as he put it in 1891).¹⁷ Now biological, racial decline also filled him with fear.

The public image of Egyptology in the first two decades of the new century was dominated by the promise of carrying ‘the story of civilization’ further back beyond the pyramids in order to address two connected and powerfully voguish terms: ‘race’ and ‘origins’. Comparative mythology, anthropology and the excavation of early sites like Abydos were all drawn into this quest for the primeval roots of dynastic Egypt. This seemed less the domain of the historian and less connected with the ‘fine arts’ than ever before. The early stages of the rise of ethnology and anthropology in Egyptology were evident before the turn of the century, particularly when Francis Galton persuaded the British Association for the Advancement of Science to stump up money (alongside a larger contribution of his own) for Petrie’s survey of racial characteristics in Egyptian art, published as *Racial Photographs from the Ancient Egyptian Pictures and Sculptures* (1887). This was followed by a flurry of 1890s works including Sayce’s

¹⁶ Report of a lecture given by William Willcocks: ‘Raiyan Canal’, *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*, 40 (1908), 90.

¹⁷ Letter from Petrie to Spurrell, 1891, quoted in W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Seventy Years in Archaeology* (London: Sampson, Low & Marston, 1931), 125–6.

Races of the Old Testament (1891). Sayce insisted that a biblical ethnology was only made possible by Petrie's data of 1887; in a single convenient sentence he thereby dismissed the critical biblical ethnology of 1870s German thinkers such as Ewald. 'Convolutions of the brain' and the 'maxillary angle', Sayce argued, should be measured to demonstrate the 'natural tendencies and mental qualifications' of a race as well as its 'aptitudes and defects'.¹⁸

As Sayce predicted, many others took an interest in the application of Petrie's study to the races of the Bible. When the biblical anthropologist, William Robertson Smith, spent the winter of 1891 in Egypt on a rest cure, he proved unable to keep away from Petrie's excavations and the possibilities for research they offered; an acolyte of McLennan and friend of Wellhausen, Smith's alleged heterodoxy had seen him removed from his chair at New College Edinburgh in the previous decade. Others in the British Egyptological community also demonstrated the influence of *Racial Types*: Amelia Edwards devoted a chapter of *Pharaohs Fellahs and Explorers* (1891) to 'Portrait-Painting in Ancient Egypt' and applied racial principles to the Graeco-Roman mummy portraits from Hawara.

This interest was put onto a completely new level by the recognition of prehistory. Where, in 1895, race had been one amongst many topics of interest, by 1910 it was the dominant category of analysis through which the development of Egyptian civilization was measured and explained. Petrie's sites entertained professors of anatomy, anthropologists seeking craniological measurements, and eugenicists including Galton himself. Slippage between the races of the ancient world and the nations of the modern (widely indulged in by both Petrie and Sayce) had also become commonplace. Egyptologists and anthropologists alike saw the races of the monuments milling around in every Egyptian village.

Like history and Egyptology, anthropology after 1900 was undergoing a painful process of disciplinary definition. Controversy persisted over the roles philology, archaeology, comparative mythology, anatomy and evolutionary theory played in the discipline, and who—Tylor, Lubbock, Morgan, McLennan, Maine, Spencer, Darwin or Huxley—might be seen as the discipline's founding fathers; but the vast majority of anthropologists, whether diffusionist or

¹⁸ e.g. A. H. Sayce, *Races of the Old Testament* (London: RTS, 1891), 3.

cultural-evolutionist, remained historicist in outlook.¹⁹ The quest for anthropological knowledge persisted in tracing racial and cultural traits back to their origins.²⁰

Diverse thinkers looked to clashes, conflicts and intermixing amongst racial groups in the ancient world to provide mechanisms of historical explanation. Race, not God, high politics or economics, was favoured as the agent of progress, its action following laws that could be subjected to scientific measurement and prediction. Once predynastic culture was recognized, Egypt was drawn into efforts to determine these laws and observe their workings. After 1900 scholars and popularizers alike attempted to elucidate the position of Egyptian races in evolutionary and diffusionary narratives. Despite the very different conclusions he arrived at, David Randall MacIver's *Ancient Races of the Thebaid* (1905) drew on the same racial themes and anthropometric research that also inspired Grafton Elliot Smith's activities in Nubia, and Petrie's racial sociology in *Revolutions of Civilization* (1911). Pupils of Petrie, Karl Pearson and Grafton Elliot Smith (all at UCL) were among those who aimed to generate descriptive and statistical data on ancient racial distributions and migrations.

This turn to deterministic measurement of the rise and fall of civilizations went far beyond the academy. Many civilizational schemas echoed patterns favoured by race theorists, while replacing ethnic theories with ideas derived from lengthening of historical timescales and diversifications of geographical interest. From H. G. Wells to Ezra Pound, H. D. and W. B. Yeats, literary figures mused on 'the ancient Egyptian mind' as they attempted to place it in a historical and geographical context constructed from narratives of the cyclical fortunes of ancient and modern societies. Like Petrie, their emphasis on the interaction of civilizations rejected any ideas of 'national purity', locating historical progress in cultural interaction. Even arch-modernists like Pound sought explanations of European

¹⁹ These were the years in which Franz Boas pioneered the techniques of participant observation that would permit anthropologists to operate with less reliance on historical research, but that's a very different story.

²⁰ Some later statements from Malinowski illustrate the point: his 'recantation from evolutionism' in *Sexual Life of Savages*, for instance, described how it was only during the 1920s that he became 'more and more indifferent to the problems of origins' Bronislaw Malinowski, *Sexual Life of Savages* (3rd edn, London: Kegan Paul, 1932), xxii–xxiii.

culture through extra-European origins.²¹ ‘English literature’, Pound insists, ‘has proceeded by intake of exotics’ and the English verse of the future ‘will be a sort of orchestration’ taking into account Chinese, Egyptian, Homeric and Old English ‘systems’.²² Like Petrie, Pound expounded the fusion of North and South, naming the Mediterranean and Baltic basins as the twin cradles of European civilization; he named one essay pursuing this theme ‘I gather the limbs of Osiris’.²³ As Frank Kermode notes, Yeats obsessed over the coexistence of past and future at the point where civilizational ‘cycles’ met: the moment when the supposedly inevitable decline of one civilization gives birth to another (and each dies the other’s life and lives the other’s death).²⁴ Like Petrie, Yeats saw the present not as an ‘exquisite point . . . of time *when life was like the water brimming beautifully but unstably over the rim of a fountain*’, but as a backward-looking moment teetering on the edge of precipitous decline.²⁵ He looked to Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, Rome and Byzantium to diagnose the ills of modern Ireland. Amidst this primitivism—the modernist ‘shock of the old’—the nineteenth-century obsession with origins was intensified in new forms.²⁶

Many literary figures drew heavily on Egyptologists and anthropologists, and the cyclical schemes they imposed on the past had striking similarities. Wells’s *Outline of World History* was by far the best-selling historical text of this period: like both Petrie and Elliot Smith, he proposed schemes that looked remarkably similar to (while claiming to reject) earlier providential narratives of civilizational

²¹ The modernist ‘shock of the old’, explored in Chris Jones, *Strange Likeness: Uses of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) draws on diverse primitivisms; many are indistinguishable from nineteenth-century models but others self-consciously write religion out of history (Pound, for instance, simply refused to translate the closing lines of the Old English poem *The Seafarer* because of its plea to the deity).

²² Ezra Pound, undated essay, ‘The Art of Poetry in Contemporary England’, in Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 44.

²³ Ezra Pound, ‘I Gather the Limbs of Osiris’ in *Ezra Pound: Selected Prose 1909–1965*. Edited by William Cookson (London: Faber, 1973), 21–43.

²⁴ Frank Kermode, *Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 93–127.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ There are of course many other modernist Egypts, including T. S. Eliot’s Cleopatra, who appears repeatedly as either a grand ‘other’ to vitiated modernity or a sexualized ‘other’ to modern civility; for an orientalist reading, see John P. McCombe, ‘Cleopatra and her Problems: T. S. Eliot and the Fetishization of Shakespeare’s Queen of the Nile’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 31 (2008), 23–38.

expansion from the Bible lands, to Europe and beyond. This was quickly followed by a host of ‘universal histories’ of which the children’s books of Hendrik van Loon were Wells’s closest rival in terms of sales. By 1922 the cycles of civilizations associated with Arnold Toynbee’s *Study of History* (1934–61) already dominated the popular historical narratives through which Egypt was interpreted.

PETRIE IN MODERN LIFE

Petrie’s approach to Egypt was transformed by prehistory. His best-selling texts of the first decade of the twentieth century demonstrate the new thinking it inspired. *Methods and Aims in Archaeology* (1904) was a magisterial attempt to define, for the first time, the parameters and best practice of the archaeological discipline and to free archaeology from disciplinary constriction in history and the fine arts. The mere existence of a successful, general guide to archaeology penned by an Egyptologist shows that the study of prehistoric Europe and the ancient Near East had at last been aligned closely enough for fruitful exchange of ideas. Three years later, *Janus in Modern Life* developed themes from Petrie’s prestigious Huxley Memorial Lecture of 1906 (entitled simply ‘Migration’) and was his first publication to combine the racial theories he drew from early Egypt with the principles of cultural evolution and his own prescriptions for social (and racial) advance. He now moved in the most prominent eugenicist clique in history, which included his long-term collaborator Francis Galton and his Hampstead neighbour and fellow UCL lecturer, Karl Pearson. Petrie pursued a eugenic vision that added sweeping historical schemata onto Galton and Pearson’s statistical and biological theories.

He also now socialized with major anthropological and social-Darwinist thinkers, including Herbert Spencer whom he met through attendance at the famous Whitsun gatherings of the evolutionary anthropologist and banker Edward Clodd.²⁷ In the 1920s Petrie even helped enact a clause in Spencer’s will by reviving his grand multi-volume *Descriptive Sociology* with a study of ancient Egypt

²⁷ For instance, ‘Literary Gossip’, *Outlook* (7 July 1900), 731.

(to be categorized under ‘Civilised Societies: Extinct or Decayed’). *Social Life in Ancient Egypt* (1923) was intended as an appetizer for this larger work: ‘a repast drawn from the storehouse’.²⁸ Alongside his new immersion in eugenics, Petrie contributed to the Anti-Socialist Society and the Spencer-inspired British Constitutional Association (becoming president in 1914); he was submerged in the neuroses over ‘national vigour’—enflamed by slowing population growth and the Boer War—that make British thinkers of the early twentieth century appear more wracked with self-doubt, and bent on the ‘scientific’ study of society, than at any point since 1848. Petrie makes an intriguing contrast with another archaeologist, O. G. S. Crawford, who spent these years bewailing the ‘fakery’ and diminishment of modern Britain in terms that echo Petrie’s, but who foresaw redemption in the form of socialist revolution rather than eugenic transformation; for these archaeologists eugenics and socialism constituted parallel attempts to salvage hope from evidence of decline.²⁹ Crawford provides a reminder that the language of modern ‘barbarism’, ‘decay’ and ‘failure of national stock’ is not just a eugenic one in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

But Petrie also continued to produce biblical studies throughout the first decade of the century: the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Religious Tract Society continued to champion his cause. Petrie’s new biblical works demonstrate gradual and partial embrace of critical ideas: scars of the Babel-Bibel Streit. In 1905, cash-strapped, Petrie travelled to Sinai where inscriptions could be found without the expense of extensive excavation. The text he produced, *Researches in Sinai* (1906), expounded his new ideas. Working hard on his public persona, Petrie preferred a baggy, narrative account to a formal excavation report: he expatiated, for instance, on ‘how to accommodate European ideas to the actualities of life’ under the conditions of desert excavation.³⁰ His workforce consisted of thirty-four people at its peak rather than the hundreds he habitually employed at more lavish digs. It was, he insisted, the largest number of labourers to reside in this region since ancient mining expeditions:

²⁸ ‘Social Life in Ancient Egypt’, *Saturday Review* (8 September 1923), 279.

²⁹ Kitty Hauser, *Bloody Old Britain* (London: Granta, 2008).

³⁰ W. M. F. Petrie, *Researches in Sinai* (London: John Murray, 1906), xii.

The needs of providing every mouthful of food at five days' journey from our base, and bringing every drop of water many miles' distance, have given an insight into the conditions there, which is of great importance for comprehending the life of earlier residents, Egyptian and Israelite.³¹

Researches in Sinai discusses the Exodus route at length. Petrie expresses relief that archaeology has countered 'the inability of unchecked literary criticism to deal with historical questions safely', and adopts a strange, partial documentary hypothesis.³² He explains away the numerical inconsistencies in Exodus (beloved of critics from Lessing to Colenso and Milman) as simple mistaken readings of the Hebrew original. Scripture, he implies, is an accurate guide for the conscientious archaeologist and historian. Yet despite this ingrained conservatism *Researches* offers little comfort for the apologist. Petrie insists that Hebrew terms for 'miracle' and 'supernatural' cannot preserve their meaning when translated into a modern vocabulary. The ancient Hebrews possessed so little science that everything was a miracle:

to transfer the statements and views of people of that frame of mind into the precise phraseology of the present age – when the infinitesimal variations of natural laws are the passion of men's lives – is completely hopeless and absurd.³³

Five years later, *Egypt and Israel* struck a more coherent path between criticism and apologetics in its illustration of the 'general historical setting of the Old Testament and Christian times'.³⁴ Here Petrie embraced Bunsen's mid-century idea that Egyptian history should provide a secular shell for the kernel of scriptural history: 'we must understand [scripture] as part of the history of the period . . . to show the point of view of a general historian in regard to these matters'.³⁵ He emphasized how late in Egyptian history the era of Abraham was and discussed the errors of transcribers and compilers of scripture at length. He did, however, reassure readers that these mistakes were always clerical 'misapprehensions and blunders' and never resulted from 'sheer invention'.³⁶ He then approached the 'growth and

³¹ Ibid. vii. ³² Ibid. 195. ³³ Ibid. 202.

³⁴ 'List of new books', *Athenaeum* (1910), 794.

³⁵ W. M. F. Petrie, *Egypt and Israel* (London: SPCK, 1911), iii.

³⁶ Ibid. iv.

development of the Gospels', aiming to demonstrate 'the far-reaching effects of Egyptian thought and worship on the development of Christianity'.³⁷ Petrie explained, three decades later, why he had been unwilling to carry his new ideas to their conclusions in *Researches on Sinai*: although by 1906 his views had already diverged from the 'literalist beliefs' and 'primitive Christianity' of his upbringing, it was only after the death of his father in 1908 that was he willing to make his new perspectives public.³⁸

The ructions of the turn of the century, embodied in Naqada, Oxyrhynchus and 'Babel und Bibel', run like leitmotifs through all Petrie's biblical exposition after 1900. Recognizing this new ambiguity, the Tract Committee of the SPCK prefixed *Egypt and Israel* with a gentle disclaimer:

This work, although it does not altogether represent traditional opinions in regard to the Old and New Testaments, is published as expressing the views of a writer who has done more perhaps than any other to throw light upon the Sacred Writings by his excavations in Bible Lands.

Petrie had also been working hard at the institutional development of Egyptology. His initiatives had begun modestly. After his break with the EEF in 1886 he had established an Egyptian Research Account to fund excavations. During the 1890s he liaised carefully with media throughout Europe and America to gather support and funding; he stressed his own thrifty methods in comparison to the profligacy of Naville and the EEF. He indulged the Chicago-based *Biblical World* by christening them his 'representatives in America' and within weeks local interest in the 'ancient people, among whom the Hebrews dwelt' was such that the Chicago Woman's Club wandered the streets of the windy city evangelizing on behalf of the ERA.³⁹ Each new biblical discovery helped perpetuate publicity successes like this: J. H. Breasted, writing in the *Biblical World* in 1897, was able to wield the Israel Stele in his appeals for support. This monument, bearing a name resembling 'Israel' amidst a list of conquered peoples,

³⁷ Ibid. 111–42.

³⁸ W. M. F. Petrie, *Seventy Years in Archaeology* (London: Sampson, Low & Marston, 1931), 12.

³⁹ J. H. Breasted, 'Professor Petrie's Egyptian Research Account', *Biblical World* (1897), 138.

had been exhumed from the mortuary temple of Merneptah at Thebes in the previous year.⁴⁰

After his second break with the EEF in 1905 Petrie built the ERA into a more ambitious project: the British School of Archaeology in Egypt. The British School's fundraising appeal for excavations at Memphis (1908–1913) included a list of patrons and subscribers: gone were the bishops and reverends of earlier organizations, in their place were public servants such as Cromer and Moritz von Bissing alongside anthropologists including J. G. Frazer. Many of the archaeologists listed were not Egyptologists, but experts in European prehistory. They included acolytes of Augustus Pitt-Rivers' Darwin- and Spencer-influenced approach to archaeology: William Boyd Dawkins, for instance, investigated the antiquity of man through a distinctly geological archaeology, while Henry Balfour, curator of the Pitt-Rivers Museum, instigated courses in physical and cultural anthropology at Oxford (thereby becoming one of the most prolific trainers of anthropologists in Britain). This was an entirely different milieu from the EEF's subscribers, where clergy outnumbered geologists and anthropologists until after the war. The British School also aimed to differentiate itself from the EEF through pedagogic function:

the need of providing for the training of students is even greater in Egypt than it is in Greece and Italy . . . This body is the only such agency and is also the basis of the excavations of Prof. Flinders Petrie, who has had many students associated with his work in past years.⁴¹

Press responses to these appeals demonstrate that neither the economics of archaeology nor the conventions for comparing the British with the ancients had changed dramatically:

We need these appeals if only to remind us how far the British Empire has as yet fallen short of the other great empires of the world as a civilizing force, even of the one it resembles most in aim, Carthage, which at least within itself patronized both Science and Art. With us

⁴⁰ 'Won't the Reverends be pleased', Petrie is said to have commented before predicting that 'this stele will be better known in the world than anything else I have found'; Margaret Drower, *Flinders Petrie, A Life in Archaeology* (London: Gollancz, 1985) 221.

⁴¹ Press release, front-matter W. M. F. Petrie, *Memphis I* (London: Quaritch, 1909).

everything must be achieved by the enterprise of societies of private individuals.⁴²

The emphasis on ‘civilizing’ sits alongside a vogueish pessimism concerning national accomplishments: the great achievements of the French and Germans could never be managed under ‘our form of government’ which was ‘unfit to act’ as guardian to ‘matters of intellectual interest’.⁴³

The pedagogic emphasis of the British School also ran through Petrie’s other achievements of this decade. His turn to teaching had profound implications for the history of Egyptology; it brought a substantial expansion in the numbers of British Egyptologists and resulted in several methodological publications of which *Methods and Aims* is the most substantial (still familiar to, if not actually read by, every undergraduate Egyptologist). This text was the first thorough attempt to define what it is that archaeologists actually do; although its examples focused on Egypt, its arguments were formulated to be useful to excavators everywhere. Short but ambitious, it attempted to cover the organization and techniques of excavation, of recording and publication as well as, most strikingly of all, offering extensive prescriptions for the desirable personality traits of an excavator. The text did not immediately revolutionize Egyptology: Petrie himself followed its strictures only partially and intermittently. Yet it provided a blueprint for development that gathered importance as young Egyptologists confronted it in early stages of their training.

In keeping with Petrie’s popularizing agenda, *Methods and Aims* was half technical manual, half response to public curiosity concerning ‘the way in which the work is done’ and ‘the ends which are pursued’.⁴⁴ It aimed to train the excavator to write scientific reports, and the public to read them. ‘Recently born’, and without a real home to nurture it, Petrie lamented archaeology’s reliance on ‘the Fine Arts or . . . History’.⁴⁵ A true archaeological education was a recipe for ‘a reasonable man’: it could bridge the gap between the ‘BA who

⁴² ‘The Literary Week’, *Academy and Literature* (29 June 1907), 619.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ W. M. F. Petrie, *Methods and Aims in Archaeology* (London: Macmillan, 1904),

viii.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* vii.

knows nothing of natural science’ and the ‘BSc who knows nothing of human nature’.⁴⁶

Archaeology – the knowledge of how man has acquired his present position and powers – is one of the widest studies, best fitted to open the mind, and to produce that type of wide interests and toleration which is the highest result of education.⁴⁷

As in all Petrie’s 1900s works for general audiences, ‘character’ was a crucial theme. Inspired by the Stoic philosopher he carried in his overcoat (Epictetus, in George Long’s 1890 translation), Petrie enumerated the moral and physical qualities required of an archaeologist. From this first chapter, prescribing the excavator’s character, to the closing treatment of archaeological ethics, *Methods and Aims* was a deeply personal effort to shape practice and to dissociate archaeology from the effete dandyism of the Kinglake tradition. The excavator, Petrie insisted, must be prepared for extraordinary discipline, self-sacrifice and stoic disdain for physical comfort. Petrie’s commitment to this doctrine was confirmed by numerous visitors to his sites. Petrie was not, wrote James Henry Breasted, ‘merely careless but deliberately slovenly and dirty’; ‘he served a table so excruciatingly bad that only persons of an iron constitution could survive it’.⁴⁸

Petrie’s emphasis on conscience and moral probity was encouraged by his growing worry over the damage inflicted on Egypt and the funds frittered away by less punctilious rivals, in particular Édouard Naville. The spying in which he engaged Hogarth was symptomatic of his obsessive and neurotic state of mind. He reminded readers of *Methods and Aims* that archaeological evidence is destroyed as rapidly as it can be found: though a science, archaeology was not experimental in nature. The modern travellers who swarmed through Egypt were a barbarian horde like the rabble of Alaric, Giseric and Louis Napoleon that descended on Rome in the fifth and nineteenth centuries.

Engineers everywhere use up buildings as quarries...speculators, native and European, tear to pieces every tomb they can find in the East, and sell the few showy proceeds that have thus lost their meaning and their history. Governments set commissioners to look after things,

⁴⁶ Ibid. viii.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Charles Breasted, *Pioneer to the Past* (New York: Scribner, 1943), 75–6; see also Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 217–18.

who leave the antiquities to be plundered while they are living in useless ease.⁴⁹

Some archaeologists, Petrie insisted, were prepared to wreck everything for the sake of a single work of art: until archaeology was no longer treated as a branch of the fine arts and transfixed by ‘pretty things’ this decimation of the record would persist.

Petrie’s worthy maxims obscure the fact that conflict with Naville was conducted on reasonably level terms. As commentary on ‘the mangled remains of Hawara’ indicates, Petrie’s practices were as worrying to some well-informed commentators as Naville’s.⁵⁰ British writers who were no less concerned with preservation than Petrie continued to praise Naville as the most advanced and proficient excavator in Egypt; he was continually discussed in terms of ‘scientific’ authority.⁵¹ The fact that his vision of scientific method was the practice which allowed prestige pieces to be located most quickly demonstrates how broad and diverse the conception of a ‘scientific’ archaeology remained. Yet Petrie himself treated Egypt like ‘a house on fire’.⁵² The practices advocated in *Methods and Aims* were aspirations to be followed when circumstances allowed; they were not a disinterested account of his excavating experience. Since circumstances in Egypt were troublesome (with amateurs from all nations digging at will even when legal strictures in theory prevented them), Petrie willingly neglected the ethical responsibility to conduct limited, detailed excavation in order that he might record as many sites as possible before Naville and his rapacious ilk could ravage them. Petrie was also stubbornly resistant to any moves by the Egyptian Government to restrict the export of artworks: his funding was secured through export of prestige pieces. No one else acquired ‘pretty things’ from Egypt on the scale that Petrie did in this period. In these ways he was contributor in chief to the conditions that sparked his paranoia.

Other chapters of *Methods and Aims* contain detailed exposition of the best methods for training, surveillance and control of large workforces. This was easier, Petrie asserted, amongst cheap and pliable

⁴⁹ Petrie, *Methods*, 170.

⁵⁰ See above, chapter 4: Whitehouse to Poynter, 27.9.1888, EES VIIIa.3.

⁵¹ e.g. F. L., ‘In the Learned World’, *Academy and Literature* (28 March 1914), 402: ‘Dr Naville . . . the most successful as well as the most learned of the Egyptian excavators working under the English flag’.

⁵² Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 64; Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 19.

Arabs than in Greece or Italy, and in Egypt was easiest with those aged 15–20 ('after that many turn stupid').⁵³ His Galton-inspired obsession with physiognomy shaped his engagement with moderns as well as ancients:

In choosing boys the broad face and square chin are necessary tokens of stamina; and the narrow feminine faces are seldom worth much . . . the face has to be studied for character . . . no influence of recommendations or connections should weigh in the least against the judgement of the appearance.⁵⁴

He did, however, remind his readers that the best of his local workforce were far superior as archaeologists to newly arrived Englishmen and, as possessors of landed wealth and established ancestry, could afford to look down on most Britons who tried to bully them.

Petrie also expounded the roles of photography in archaeology. Although seventy years old by 1904, this technology only gained a secure foothold in the discipline through Petrie; from his first experiments in 1880 he became an obsessive photographer of both artefacts and process.⁵⁵ He championed old-fashioned bulky equipment against the complex 'useless luxury' camera beloved of the 'rich amateur'.⁵⁶ As with many of Petrie's technical advances, photography was developed into a still more integrated element of the excavator's art by George Reisner. Reisner's reports, more than Petrie's, are distilled, scientific and multi-media texts.

Chapter 11, 'Systematic Archaeology', however, was where the real significance of *Methods and Aims* lay. Petrie set before his audience a range of recently developed techniques. Some had informed his practices since the Tel el Hesi excavations of 1890; others emerged out of the new requirement to order and categorize Egyptian prehistory. Some were not Petrie's innovations, but by setting them down in print he ended the need for them to be invented and reinvented year after year. Seriation and stratigraphy, not care and preservation, were Petrie's true claims to have contributed to a paradigm shift, a professional overhaul, in archaeology. Because archaeology could not be an experimental discipline (at least until the advent of electronic survey

⁵³ Petrie, *Methods*, 20.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 21.

⁵⁵ Petrie's extraordinary images of workforces are the subject of a recent volume by Stephen Quirke, *Hidden Hands: Egyptian Workforces in Petrie Excavation Archives, 1880–1924* (London: Duckworth, 2010).

⁵⁶ Petrie, *Methods*, 73.

techniques), seriation and stratigraphy were archaeologists' best claims to scientific status; and until the radiocarbon revolution an extraordinary amount of archaeological effort was expended on establishing prehistoric dates through the techniques enumerated in *Methods and Aims*.

Stratigraphy was not Petrie's invention. Others had recognized the existence of a stratigraphic record that could render familiar geological practices relevant in the interpretation of human remains. Pitt Rivers and Schliemann, even Lepsius in the 1840s, had been among them. At the turn of the century, archaeologists including Petrie and George Reisner helped transform stratigraphy from an occasional technique into the overarching framework and guiding principle used by every excavator. At Tel el Hesi, by investigating a point where a river had cut down through successive levels of the mound, Petrie was able to identify the pottery of successive periods of occupation. This is one of the most famous 'set pieces' in his career; as noted above (chapter 4, p. 4) the theory and its practice were shaped as much by evolutionists and race theorists, from Huxley to Spencer, as by archaeologists themselves. The technique was used to trace strata presumed to have been created by the migration of races and the displacement of old racial groups by new. Stratigraphy therefore aided the repositioning of Egyptian archaeology from an apologetic tradition into one that was defined by both evolutionary and racial principles. Egyptological luminaries such as Amelia Edwards and R. S. Poole are not really a relevant genealogy for early twentieth-century Egyptology; the very different tradition of evolutionists and race theorists including Spencer, Morgan and Galton fits more neatly.

The disciplinary intersections that accompanied these new priorities are evident in the work of Cicely Fawcett, one of Pearson's pupils at UCL. In 1904 Fawcett produced a work that was labelled 'epoch-marking' by one reviewer and said to herald 'the dawn of a period of collaboration' by another.⁵⁷ Fawcett drew Petrie's Naqada discoveries into 'biometry', Pearson's blend of mathematics, biological science and anthropology. This experimental practice applied statistical profiling to biological and anthropological material; it was first used on crabs, then developed until its most notorious application, in the 1920s, to the children of Russian and Polish Jews. Pearson and

⁵⁷ A. Keith, 'Egypt: Craniology', *Man* (1905), 92.

Fawcett's use of skulls from Naqada was a significant step in the development of these theories. In 1895, Pearson had advertised his search for 'about 100 skulls of a homogeneous race'; Petrie had responded.⁵⁸ Pearson's brother, the lawyer Arthur Pearson-Gee, then bankrolled the transport of 103 Naqada skulls to UCL. This was, Pearson enthused, the finest anthropological collection in existence. Over the following decade these crania were compared with collections of Theban mummies, modern Egyptian skulls (apparently pilfered from Cairene Coptic cemeteries) and a 'mixed series' of 'negro skulls' from 'the North of Africa'. Fawcett used these comparisons to trace evolutionary process through the 'single race' to which Naqada culture, dynastic Egyptians and modern Copts were assumed to belong. She observed the heads of this 'unmixed' people grow quickly higher and broader and argued that if traced back beyond Naqada this rapid change would result in a type that 'the anatomist would hesitate to call human' in under 100,000 years.⁵⁹

This work is entirely typical of the cross-fertilization of ideas between historical and scientific fields at this time. Many writers went further than Fawcett, generating narratives of even more rapid evolutionary development, tempted into doing so by the beguiling possibility that evolution might provide a scientific explanation for historical change. It is a bland understatement to say that the prestige of the sciences (and the rhetorical power of phrases like 'scientific method') had risen enormously in the late nineteenth century. Where scientific thinkers like Lyell and Darwin once hankered after recognition in the humanities-dominated establishment, imaginative writers of all stripes now sought the authority of science and despaired when they felt they had not found it. Freud's irritation that *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) read like literary essays and therefore lacked the 'serious stamp of science' is entirely typical of this acute loss of

⁵⁸ Karl Pearson, 'Mathematical contributions to the theory of evolution. III. Heredity, panmixia and regression', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* (1896), 253–318; see also M. E. Magnello, 'Non-Correlation of Biometrics and Eugenics: Rival Forms of Laboratory Work in Karl Pearson's Career at UCL' *History of Science*, 37.2 (1999), 123–50.

⁵⁹ Cicely Fawcett & Alice Lee, 'Second Study of the Variation and Correlation of the Human Skull, with Special Reference to the Naqada Crania', *Biometrika*, 1.4 (August 1902), 433.

confidence in the epistemology of the humanities.⁶⁰ This was perhaps the last moment at which a conscientious *litterateur* could claim authority in fields ranging across the arts and sciences without appearing (entirely) ludicrous; this authority was usually achieved through scientific treatment of the arts. Freud, Galton, Benjamin Kidd, Ernest Newman and many others aspired towards this ideal of multi-competence; H. G. Wells (as an acolyte of Huxley, superbly qualified) might be considered amongst the most authoritative. Petrie worked as hard as any of them to be seen as a balanced oracle of both ‘letters’ and ‘science’.

Inspired by the apparent significance of his finds to the study of race, Petrie continued his efforts to engage a new generalist audience in *Janus in Modern Life* (1907) and *The Revolutions of Civilization* (1911). He asked whether the civilizational ‘laws’ he discovered in Egypt applied to later empires. To achieve this he read Thomas Hodgkin on the barbarian migrations of late antiquity, and reread Gibbon and Mommsen. His research into these transhistorical patterns served twin purposes. The ruling castes of Egypt and Rome could, Petrie felt, add historical proofs to the biological argument Francis Galton had developed for the principle that mental aptitude, physical health and moral fibre were all hereditary qualities that ran through strong bloodlines and were absent from weaker families or races. Petrie’s second purpose was to draw a political agenda out of his analysis of the past. In these philosophizing texts (chapter titles include ‘The Meaning of Life’) Petrie took his fascination with the idea of ‘character’ much further than he had in *Methods and Aims*. ‘Character’ now denoted both the personal abilities of the individual and the collective capacities of the ‘race’; slippage between the two (or assumption that they are so similar as to require no differentiation) is constant. ‘Character’ could be improved or degraded by a process of ‘competition . . . in the mental field’.⁶¹ ‘Improved variations of mind’ or ‘mental atrophy’ were collective products of independent activity or sloth at the level of the individual.⁶²

⁶⁰ Josef Breuer & Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic, 1895), 160–1.

⁶¹ W. M. F. Petrie, *Janus in Modern Life* (London: Archibald Constable, 1907), esp. chs 1 & 2, ‘Character, the Basis of Society’ & ‘Present Changes of Character’.

⁶² *Ibid.* 7, 13–14.

Petrie first set out to demonstrate that the racial ‘character’ of a people, rather than its modes of governance or environmental conditions, determined success or failure in the global power struggle. ‘Races of a low character’, he insisted, ‘necessarily fall under the domination of other races who have a higher or stronger character’.⁶³ He then constructed direct lessons from the historical experience of ‘nations’ ancient and modern to determine the course of action to preserve the racial pre-eminence of the British and prolong their threatened imperial power. There was little unusual in the idea that the example of Greek and Roman decline warned against the results of ‘mental atrophy’ but Petrie brought the lesson home by arguing that France had already gone the way of ancient empires. By exiling their best middle-class racial stock (the Huguenots) the French had brought about the Revolution of 1789; the subsequent execution or dismissal of the best aristocratic minds ‘drained that land of nearly all the hereditary ability of the race’.⁶⁴ The consequence was ‘a nation of mediocrities . . . Almost every leading name is that of a foreigner . . . Waddington . . . Gambetta, Maspero’.⁶⁵

To Petrie, Egypt, Rome, Elizabethan England and Revolutionary France carried lessons that could be transferred directly to the present to ‘warn us of evils to come and save us from violence and confusion’.⁶⁶ Neither climate nor government, history showed, could alleviate the human condition in any lasting fashion. ‘Natural selection as struggle’ was ‘the sole physical means of permanent elevation’ that determined the success of nations.⁶⁷ Here was the crux of Petrie’s argument: the flimsy, unhistorical tour of the past was a framework on which to hang anti-socialist invective. The ease of conditions in British manufacturing, which misguided liberal reforms had brought about, ‘atrophied the ordinary working mind to a point which is dangerously low in comparison with that of other races’.⁶⁸ His argument that social welfare would result in the degeneration of races was put most succinctly in his Huxley Lecture to the Royal Anthropological Institute: ‘equality of wages, maintenance of the incapable by the capable, equal opportunities of life for children of bad stock as

⁶³ Ibid. 1. ⁶⁴ Ibid. 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 4; this was, of course the era of *Année sociologique* when the leading historical and sociological thought in Europe was French.

⁶⁶ Ibid. vii. ⁶⁷ Ibid. 3. ⁶⁸ Ibid. 8.

well as good stock, and exclusion of more economical labour, are the surest means of national extinction'.⁶⁹

Yet even if 'good stock' were given the freedom to rise, Petrie harboured no vision of imminent evolutionary improvement. His scheme rejected rapid biological change, just as it ironed out historical difference. Galton himself had argued that ancient Athenians were the most perfect biological type in history; Petrie placed the pinnacles of ancient Egyptian civilization at the same lofty level. Great changes in man had not occurred in the last ten thousand years, and would not come about in the next. 'The highest type of ancient man differs almost inappreciably from the highest type of modern man, certainly not by a tenth the difference that may be seen between different types at present'.⁷⁰ The earliest Egyptians displayed all the 'finesse of conduct in public life' of the best twentieth-century public figures, and had a 'fine suavity and kindliness'.⁷¹ 'There is not a single class or a single public body at present that practically stands as high as the ideal of two hundred generations ago'.⁷² 'Zeal for minute accuracy' in 4700 BC was as 'perfect' as that of a Royal Society paper of our day, and the occupants of Egyptian palaces had artistic sensibilities that were no less refined than the very best in 1907. Like thinking moderns they would have 'revolted at most of the products of our present time'.⁷³ Where are these great aesthetes now, Petrie asked. He suggested that strong races like the Egyptians, Athenians, Romans and Britons decline not because they are compromised by interbreeding or race-mixture but because they are damaged from within when their own weaker elements are permitted to proliferate and the reproductive capacity of their elites is constrained: modern philistine-socialists and reformers, as well as unrestricted emigration to the New World, threaten to end the eminence of the English national type and send Britons the way of pharaohs, archons and caesars.

Janus in Modern Life was published by G. P. Putnam's Sons in their extended series, 'Questions of the Day'. Petrie appeared here alongside a host of American worthies including Theodore Roosevelt.⁷⁴ But by the time *Janus* was published Roosevelt was knee-deep in the 1907

⁶⁹ W. M. F. Petrie, *Migration* (London: private edition, 1906), 32.

⁷⁰ Petrie, *Janus*, 10.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.* 11–12.

⁷⁴ Theodore Roosevelt, *Essays on Practical Politics*, (New York: Putnam, 1888).

bankers' crisis and discussion of heredity, tariff reform and general issues of protectionist, anti-Democrat economics dominated the subject matter of Putnam's series. While *Janus* was in press the Race Betterment Foundation had been inaugurated in Michigan; in London, the same year saw the creation under Karl Pearson of the Francis Galton Laboratory for the Study of National Eugenics. As Diane Paul and James Moore note, it was in this decade that the new science of eugenics, greeted sceptically in the 1880s and 1890s, finally 'caught on' (although never quite achieving the cachet in Britain it enjoyed in Germany and the US).⁷⁵ Its slow accrual of support occurred in parallel with the 'strange death' of British liberalism. Successive political crises from 1886 onwards, including the shocking defection to the Tories of Joseph Chamberlain and deep division during the Boer War, had seemed to debilitate the Liberal Party. One last great rallying of liberal opinion (in the face of suicidal Conservative misjudgements) resulted in a surprise Liberal victory in the 1906 election. This was the last Liberal majority in British parliamentary history; the Liberals' social reforms split public opinion and roused a flood of anti-liberal propaganda from socialists and Conservatives alike. Petrie's British Constitutional Association was established to forestall these reforms; it made its loudest protests in an unsuccessful campaign against Lloyd George's National Insurance Act but had a quieter time under Petrie's leadership after 1914. Liberal thinkers, including the political and economic theorist J. A. Hobson, soon identified and analysed their predicament in texts like *The Crisis of Liberalism* (1909) and the Liberal Party's fate after this administration has become a textbook staple.⁷⁶

Amidst intense debate over social policy, Galton's seemingly scientific solutions to sociological quandaries flourished: he used a personal memoir of 1908 to define the principles of heredity collated under the title of eugenics. This was neither a scientific discipline nor a political creed; it was a set of assumptions that allowed social differentiation to be explained and guided through biology. Finding advocates on both the political left and right, in the Church and

⁷⁵ Diane Paul & James Moore, 'The Darwinian Context' in A. Bashford & P. Levine (eds), *Oxford Handbook to the History of Eugenics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 37.

⁷⁶ Trevor Wilson, *Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914–35* (London: Collins, 1966); Paul Adelman, *Decline of the Liberal Party, 1910–1931* (London, Longman, 1995).

anti-clerical movements, in the humanities and the sciences, the closest thing to a unifying factor among major eugenic texts of this decade is their general disdain for ‘sentimental liberalism’. Galton wrote that the ‘first object’ of eugenics

is to check the birth-rate of the Unfit, instead of allowing them to come into being, though doomed in large numbers to perish prematurely. The second object is the improvement of the race by furthering the productivity of the Fit by early marriages and healthful rearing of their children. Natural selection rests upon excessive production and wholesale destruction; Eugenics on bringing no more individuals into the world than can be properly cared for, and those only of the best stocks.⁷⁷

One further principle, absent in Galton’s definition, runs through most eugenic manifestos, this being that eugenic mission involved identifying underlying laws that unite biology, sociology and history: according to Caleb Saleeby, for instance, eugenics ‘is at once a science, and a religion, based upon the laws of life and recognizing in them the foundation of society’.⁷⁸

In keeping with these holistic claims Petrie’s next contribution to the eugenic cause swept across the epistemologies of the social sciences, biology, history and religion to construct a strident critique of liberal ideology. This contribution came in 1911, the year that saw both Galton’s death and a new peak in the ascendancy of his ideas. In that year Pearson became the first professor of eugenics in Britain, taking the Galton Chair at UCL. But this was not the only significant indicator of the power of eugenics in 1911. Galton had been campaigning since the 1870s for the collection of statistics that could allow anthropometric measurements to be related to social class. If ‘biological quality’ and social status were linked, Galton insisted, workers in the most ‘eminent’ occupations would have anthropometric characteristics in common. One demographic trend that worried eugenic commentators was expressed as the idea that the worthy ‘brain-working’ classes appeared to be reproducing more slowly than the lower ‘hand-working’ classes. The ‘national stock’ was thereby degenerating. As Simon Szreter has demonstrated, the ‘professional model’ of class, which still shapes our interpretation of

⁷⁷ Francis Galton, *Memories of My Life* (London: Methuen, 1908), 323.

⁷⁸ Caleb Saleeby, *Parenthood and Race Culture* (London: Cassell, 1909), ix.

British social structure, entered the census in 1911 as a means of testing Galton's theory.⁷⁹

Petrie's work of 1911, *The Revolutions of Civilization*, attempted to give Galton's claims a more rigorous historical exposition and evidential basis than either *Janus* or Galton's own expressions of Hellenophilia had achieved. This became one of the most influential works that Petrie ever published; as Richard Overy notes, it conveyed ideas about the childhood, maturity and dotage of civilizations that Petrie borrowed from Spengler, but in the 1920s and 1930s

Petrie's conclusions were just as likely to be cited as Spengler's. The address by George Bernard Shaw on the pessimism of the present cited Flinders Petrie not Spengler, as the source for the view that the process of democratisation, urbanisation and the worship of wealth invariably led to the internal degeneration and death of all civilisations. Shaw exploited Petrie's 'new history' again in a radio broadcast in 1937 to support the argument that 'no civilisation, however splendid, illustrious and like our own' could survive the conflicts over wealth and democracy characteristic of the modern age.⁸⁰

In a chapter entitled 'The Nature of Civilisation', Petrie stated that archaeology in the Near East had given the present generation the power to interpret the past with a breadth of vision that had been impossible only a decade before. The time had come, he proclaimed, for a general theory of civilization. A recurrent and quantifiable phenomenon (best measured by quality of sculpture), civilization 'should be examined like any other action of Nature'.⁸¹ Petrie asked whether, from this scientific vantage, the 'meaning' and 'regular structure' of the 'ceaseless turmoil and striving' of millennia could be identified.⁸² He then asked whether the 'general principles' that shaped the past could be projected into the future. Both questions were answered with forceful affirmatives. This is an emphatic and unqualified statement of that quest for overarching and testable historical law, whether evolutionary or economic, that is symptomatic

⁷⁹ Simon Szreter, 'The Official Representation of Social Classes in Britain', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35 (April 1992), 285–317.

⁸⁰ Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age* (London: Penguin, 2010), 25–6; Frederick Martens, 'A Philosophy of History which Renders Music her Due', *Sackbut* (May 1924), 304.

⁸¹ W. M. F. Petrie, *The Revolutions of Civilisation* (London: Harper, 1911), 5.

⁸² *Ibid.* 2.

of the disciplinary struggles of the first four decades of the century; it is scientism taken to extraordinary lengths. Not just eugenicists but anthropologists like Marcel Mauss and historians from J. S. Bury to Arnold Toynbee presented this quest for scientific law as a symbol of scholarly rigour.

Amidst this struggle for disciplinary power Petrie made his case for the eminence of archaeology. His conviction that archaeology combined the potential of both history and the natural sciences was carried much further in *Revolutions* than in *Methods and Aims*; here he went on the offensive against rival disciplines. He insisted that the historian's tendency to bewail the collapse of the Roman Empire was comparable to the lament of a child who has only known one summer and cannot understand when winter comes that it is not a lasting catastrophe but part of a natural cycle. Only the archaeologist, informed by many more millennia and able to unite the written past of history with the deep prehistoric past of anthropology, could take the unsentimental perspective of the seasoned adult.

As the setting for the longest continuous series of the revolutions of civilization, Egypt was the ultimate case study in which laws governing the present could be discerned. Eight cycles of glorious rise and painful fall could be observed in Egypt over the ten millennia that ended with Muslim decline (from the sophistication of the eleventh century to pastiche in the fifteenth). The rules identified in Egypt could be applied more widely. The first cycle that could be identified in Europe was Mycenaean and was identical with Egypt's fourth cycle. From that point onwards Europe and Egypt could be observed rising and falling together. Petrie demonstrated this by comparing Egyptian architecture between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries with that in England. Under the category 'massive fortifications', the Cairo Gates were contemporaneous with the Tower of London; in the 'lighter style' the Cairo Citadel (1183) paralleled the Canterbury Choir (1180); the 'end of good enrichment' could be seen in the Mosque of Sultan Hasan (1362) and Trinity College Cambridge (1350); a corrupted style with 'overloaded decoration' was then evident in the Tomb of Kait Bey (1474) and Crosby Hall (1470).⁸³

From this single, medieval instance Petrie extrapolated back millennia: from the Neolithic period onwards the rise and fall of

⁸³ Ibid. 38–39.

civilization in Egypt and in Europe was in perfect phase. His efforts towards scientific rigour include graphs in which the rise and fall of art in Egypt and Europe is plotted on axis of ‘artistic quality’ against ‘time’ from 5000 BC to AD 1000. These measures, Petrie insisted, allowed the ‘quality’ of one civilizational moment to be judged against another: ‘the medieval wave (VIII)’ for instance ‘is here ranked as intermediate in value between the Mycenaean (VI) and the Classical (VII)’.⁸⁴

Where Europe and Egypt followed parallel paths, other societies, including those of Mesopotamia and India, pursued the same trajectory in different phase: ‘Eastern civilisations’ run a little over three hundred years in advance of the West so that ‘on the rise of a wave the East is more civilised; while on the fall . . . it is less civilised’.⁸⁵ This difference of phase explained ‘the constant struggle between East and West . . . If Mesopotamia and Europe were in the same phase there would be a balance of power, as there is around the Mediterranean’. As always in Petrie’s worldview Egypt is emphatically part of the Mediterranean world: it is Western, never Eastern.

The Revolutions of Civilisation was, much like *Janus*, not a history text, but a book of present-oriented social theory that used vague and largely unsupported historical narrative as a crutch. Assuming that inevitable and deterministic rise and fall was an unbreakable law of history, Petrie aimed to identify the motive force behind decline in both the Egyptian Old Empire and the Modern West. The imminence of the latter he identified, as in *Janus*, in demographic ‘deterioration’ and the success of socialism. The agents of change he described in classic social Darwinist terms: ‘Man must strive with Nature or with man, if he is not to fall back and degenerate. The harder a nation strives, the more capable it will be’.⁸⁶ Cold northern winters, Petrie argued, created vigorous races whose tendency was to migrate towards gentler climes; here they initially entered into productive strife with indigenous populations causing ‘rapid advance during the centuries after an invasion’ until the invaders were entirely normalized and ‘decay sets in’; ‘the easier life is rendered the more easy is decay and degradation’.⁸⁷ Because of initial hostilities, the complete assimilation of racial stocks took around eight centuries. This was the ‘wavelength’ of each ‘revolution of civilization’; it explained why cycles in East and West were identical in duration despite being out

⁸⁴ Ibid. 87.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 108.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 125.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 126.

of phase. Welfare reforms like those being enacted by the liberal government were an unmistakable marker that the point of stagnation had been reached in Britain.

Revolutions belongs to a substantial body of work produced in the years before the First World War that was characterized by racially-configured, eugenic, musings on imminent social collapse. Petrie did not have to wait until Bernard Shaw's advocacy for his historical schemes to be taken up: he is quoted and borrowed from regularly. When A. J. Hubbard, in *The Fate of Empires* (1913), attempted to measure the lifespan of civilizations according to their racial qualities ('why has the Athenian vanished, why is the Jew indestructible?') he used Petrie to demonstrate that 'the appearance of Socialism' was the principle marker of decadence in civilizations ancient and modern: Diocletian, on this reading, was as much a socialist as Ramsay MacDonald. *Janus* was, to Hubbard, 'one of the most interesting and most wholly admirable works that have been written in recent years'.⁸⁸

The ideas that inspired Petrie's social theory are also present in his more traditional Egyptological texts. He now used racial mixture to explain what he saw as the strengths of ancient Egyptian culture and to 'excuse' or explain away its perceived deficiencies. From 1898 onwards his works on Egyptian religion posited racial explanations for the extraordinary complexity and obscurity of pharaonic cult. 'It may seem strange to say', he wrote, 'that we are greatly in the dark about a religion which has left us the most ample remains of any in the ancient world'.⁸⁹ He enumerated the 'discordances of Egyptian religion' (such as the array of gods differentiated by name but not function) and attempted to explain them through the 'mixture of religions and races' out of which they had gradually been accreted.⁹⁰ Despite Petrie's efforts to 'set aside all the framework of mind and thought . . . to recrystallize in a different system', this had the effect of making Egyptian religion haphazard and contingent in contrast to organic Christian logic.⁹¹ The multiform Egyptian self—ka, ba and so on—was taken to be a nonsensical accretion of incompatible ideas in

⁸⁸ A. J. Hubbard, *The Fate of Empires: being an Enquiry into the Stability of Civilisation* (London: Longmans, 1913), 129–33.

⁸⁹ W. M. F. Petrie, *Religion and Conscience in Ancient Egypt* (London: Methuen, 1898), 11.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 13.

stark contrast to the supposedly neat (and objectively real) Augustinian division of body, mind and soul.

Acquisition of anthropometric information had, by 1910, become one of the chief occupations of many excavators in Egypt. Attracted by the wealth of new prehistoric material, anthropologists entered the field in force. Pearson and Fawcett's interpretation of Egyptian racial identity was contested by other cliques of anthropometric scholars. David Randall MacIver had become a devotee of Tylor's anthropology at Queen's College, Oxford. He had intended to conduct fieldwork in Yucatan until he met Petrie in 1898. He was soon studying under Griffith as Laycock student of Egyptology at Worcester College and from 1903 worked with the Oxford Professor of Anatomy, Arthur Thomson, to produce studies of Egyptian crania and a volume entitled *The Ancient Races of the Thebaid* (1905). This work argued that two distinct races—'a negroid and a non-negroid, living side by side . . . of equal caste'—could be identified in ancient Egypt.⁹² Because these populations did not interbreed their racial types coexisted over millennia. Sceptical reviewers noted that MacIver's system would identify thirty per cent of skulls from the plague pits of Whitechapel as negroid. 'The negroid Egyptian is not a negro', insisted the pioneering palaeo-anthropologist Arthur Keith, 'if craniology fails to distinguish between negroid and non-negroid crania, how can it be expected to distinguish between races that are less strongly contrasted?'⁹³ Similar scepticism can be observed elsewhere: much speculation 'regarding the racial constitution of the ancient Egyptians', surmised *Nature* in 1911, 'may prove to have only passing value'.⁹⁴ Craniological techniques had, however, gathered many advocates. Contrasting the theories of MacIver (two Egyptian races which did not interbreed), Fawcett (one Egyptian race) and Petrie (six or more Egyptian races which did interbreed) demonstrates just how speculative anthropometric approaches to ancient Egypt remained. All three of these theories were expressed with absolute conviction and prickly dismissal of alternatives; rarely did genuine engagement take place in print.

Petrie was making significant headway in other fields at the same time as his sociological ideas allied him with race theorists. It was in

⁹² David Randall-MacIver, *The Ancient Races of the Thebaid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 106.

⁹³ Keith, 'Egypt: Craniology', *Man*, 91–6.

⁹⁴ 'The Ancient Inhabitants of the Nile Valley', *Nature* (5 January 1911), 310–12.

the years between *Methods* in 1904 and *Revolutions* in 1911 that his pedagogic schemes finally began to flourish. In the years immediately after its foundation in 1892, the Edwards Professorship had not run smoothly. Poole had been Professor of Classical Archaeology since 1889. The lasting enmity between the two professors was such that several Egyptological projects were thwarted. For instance, Petrie still lacked confidence in his linguistic ability and sought to hire Griffith to take language classes on his behalf; when Poole objected, Griffith's informal and intermittent seminars had to be conducted in Petrie's private Torrington Square apartment.

Eight students initially enrolled on UCL's Egyptology course and Petrie's lectures on Egyptian history were consistently attended by between twenty and forty people. Egyptology at UCL was profoundly different from the courses led by Erman and Ebers in Berlin and Leipzig. Petrie conceived it as a training ground for archaeologists rather than a historical or philological discipline. His lifelong disdain for formal schooling was not subverted by his role in its provision: 'no greater mistake is made', he insisted in his first lecture, 'than supposing that an excavator must needs be a scholar'.⁹⁵ In the spirit of Edwards' bequest, the overwhelming majority of his trainees were women, including seven of the eight initial registrants. 'We are overrun', Petrie wrote to Percy Gardner,

with Lady students... three of them are good draughtswomen and colourists, and I hope to plant them out at Sakkara and Thebes to copy tombs and hieroglyphics. It will be a great help if we develop a corps of lady artists to turn on to important places.⁹⁶

Only in 1910 was this informal training developed into a more comprehensive examinable course; this was largely the initiative of Margaret Murray who had enrolled as a student in 1894. By 1895 she had published on 'The descent of property in the early periods of Egyptian history' and in 1898 had taken over Griffith's language courses, inheriting his enthusiasm for the linguistic advances of Adolf Erman.⁹⁷ In 1908 Murray introduced evening classes that

⁹⁵ Appendix A in Rosalind M. Janssen, *Egyptology at University College London, 1892–1992* (London: UCL, 1992), 98.

⁹⁶ In 1900 UCL's gender balance was 397 women to 1098 men: H. H. Bellot, *University College London, 1826–1926* (London, University of London Press, 1929), 400.

⁹⁷ Griffith and his new wife, Katie Bradbury (friend and colleague of both Edwards and Petrie), had moved to her family home in Ashton-under-Lyne (also the town in which Norman de Garis Davies preached).

gradually expanded the range of teaching on offer. The diploma course she formalized two years later included history, languages, ‘recent discoveries’ and ‘drawing to scale’ but also featured mineralogy and her own great interests, physical anthropology and ethnology.

Murray crops up in an extraordinary array of early twentieth-century social and intellectual movements, but her professional life was devoted to two great enthusiasms. One of these was expressed through extensive Egyptological fieldwork and dozens of publications, including one that dramatically outsold everything written by Petrie: *The Splendour that was Egypt* (1949). Her other specialism made her one of the most significant contributors to the folklore movement and the study of witchcraft: *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921) is the classic statement of what became known as the Murrayite theory. This theory posited an expansive pagan underground that persisted from the Neolithic into the fifteenth century and provided concerted opposition to the Church; persecuted figures from Thomas Beckett to those executed as witches became votaries of this cult of a horned god.

Murray’s twin interests were in fact inseparable and date back to her encounter with James Frazer’s *Golden Bough* in the 1890s. She soon wrote Frazerian contributions to Egyptology with titles like ‘Evidence for the Custom of Killing the King in Ancient Egypt’. Frazer’s theory of the killing of kings was ‘not at first received by all’, she wrote, but had been ‘triumphantly confirmed in the end by Dr Seligmann’s discoveries among the Shilluks of the Nile Valley’ (an ethnological survey of the ‘pagan Nilotic tribes’ undertaken in 1909–10).⁹⁸ With her characteristic taste for the *longue durée* she argued that the ritual could be traced from living tribes on the Upper Nile back to the pharaohs. Informing readers, disarmingly, that there was no evidence for her theory, she deployed a typically ‘Murrayite’ turn of phrase: ‘we may . . . possess our souls in patience till the final confirmatory proof is found’.⁹⁹ Murray was also a practicing Wiccan and opinions diverge on the degree of irony on show in such well-documented events as her effort to ‘blast’ a

⁹⁸ ‘Evidence for Killing the King in Ancient Egypt’, *Man* (1914), 17–23; C. G. Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* (London: Routledge, 1932). Seligmann’s final ‘n’ had been dropped in 1914.

⁹⁹ ‘Evidence for Killing the King’, *Man* (1914), 17–23.

recent UCL appointee by ‘mixing up ingredients in a frying pan in the presence of two colleagues’.¹⁰⁰

Although later scholars of witchcraft have asserted that ‘no British folklorist can remember Dr Margaret Murray without embarrassment’, her range of interests and love of vast historical narratives were not particularly eccentric for someone engaged with ancient Egypt in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁰¹ The influence of Frazer ran wide and deep; Freud had begun his collection of Egyptian antiquities; and British culture was awash with the Egyptian imagery of Crowleyan occultism: attempts to write spirit and science into a discipline that occupied a space between history and anthropology were widespread.

ASWAN AND ELLIOT SMITH

The most significant Egyptological crisis of the first decade of the twentieth century consolidated the roles of race, anthropology and prehistory in Egyptology. It also enticed a figure who, very briefly, gave ancient Egypt a controversial eminence in anthropological debate. Since the late 1880s the British Government had been drawing up plans for its most ambitious intervention in Egyptian infrastructure. The Aswan Dam was intended to revolutionize Egypt’s productive capacity, bringing Nile agriculture into ‘modernity’ from a condition supposedly ‘unchanged since the ancients’.¹⁰² British engineers coveted similar irrigation projects on the Tigris and Euphrates and, as usual, they gave themselves grand historical pedigrees that started in the pages of the Bible. Joseph, it was argued, had been the first incomer to Egypt to use hydraulic expertise to revolutionize the nation’s agriculture. Some even argued that Joseph built the pyramids to store water in times of drought; they had been set in

¹⁰⁰ Ronald Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 200–1; Max Mallowan, ‘Murray, Margaret Alice (1863–1963)’, rev. R. S. Simpson, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35169>>, accessed 18 September 2011.

¹⁰¹ Jacqueline Simpson, ‘Margaret Murray: Who Believed Her and Why?’, *Folklore*, 105 (1994), 89–96.

¹⁰² R. H. Brown, *The Fayum and Lake Moeris* (London, Edward Stanford, 1892) is an early example.

verdant gardens watered by sophisticated irrigation technologies.¹⁰³ British engineers, it was felt, were latter-day avatars of Joseph, and should attempt to recreate aspects of the system he, with divine guidance, had developed. Even after the turn of the century many, including Sir William Willcocks (the leading civil-engineer on the Dam), looked at the modern Bible lands and asked where their ancient prosperity had gone.¹⁰⁴ Where was the glorious city of Ur, home of Abraham? The answer Willcocks gave was that the rivers on which these cities' trade thrived had changed level or course, forcing catastrophic decline: through the manipulation of rivers these regions could be restored to their ancient glory.

French influence still ran through much of the Egyptian administration, but the British had demanded authority over irrigation (guaranteeing French control of the Antiquities Service in exchange). British officials, fresh from service in established imperial settings, crowded over the limitless possibilities for personal renown, national glory and human progress. Sir Colin Scott Moncrieff used a paean to the British Inspector General of Irrigation, Major Robert Hanbury Brown, to celebrate the scope for a feat of engineering that would echo through the ages. He mocked French and German impracticality and 'Mameluk misrule' before concluding that 'it has fallen to the honourable lot of a small band of English engineers, most of them trained in India, to effect a revolution in the irrigation system of Old Egypt'.¹⁰⁵ Beginning at 'Victoria Nyanza', cascading over the 'Ripon Falls' into 'Lake Albert', the Nile could almost, wrote Sidney Lowe in 1914, be called 'a British waterway': 'in no part of its course of 3700 miles does it touch territory which is not British or under British influence'.¹⁰⁶

Amongst engineers, megalomaniac schemes like the Aswan Dam that was proposed as the key to expanding Egyptian productivity were always referred back to the ancients. Monuments from Gizeh to Karnak gave engineering a vast historical pedigree at the same time

¹⁰³ Cope Whitehouse, 'The Raian Moeris; or Storage Reservoir of Middle Egypt', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, 9 (1887), 608–13; see also Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 60.

¹⁰⁴ William Willcocks, *The Restoration of the Ancient Irrigation Works on the Tigris, or the Recreation of Chaldea* (Cairo: National Printing Department, 1903).

¹⁰⁵ R. H. Brown, *The Fayum and Lake Moeris*, preface by C. Scott Moncrieff, v.

¹⁰⁶ Sidney Low, *Egypt in Transition* (London: Smith, Elder & Co. 1914), 134–5.

as they seemed to throw down a gauntlet to aspirational moderns.¹⁰⁷ If the British government could match the ancients then supplies of cotton, tax revenues, and a healthy productive population could be guaranteed. Egyptian civilization was thought to have begun with the colossal effort of redirecting the Nile at Memphis, and another outmuscling of the river seemed like a fitting way to begin a new era for the country. The Nile valley would, in the words of one engineer, once again be ‘the theatre of a gigantic engineering exploit, audacious perhaps, but certain of success and ministering to man’s necessities’.¹⁰⁸ Outlay on the project was predicted to be ‘some of the best money Egypt had spent since’ the building of Lake Moeris ‘four-thousand years ago’.¹⁰⁹ The biblical Joseph who saved Egypt from famine was *the* ancient model. This is a powerful reminder that even those who seemed to show least concern for the destruction of monuments were far from insensible to ancient history. As much as any archaeologist, they felt themselves to be engaged in a spiritual and practical ‘relationship’ with the ancient Egyptians.

Even the destruction of temples through the flooding of Upper Egypt could be presented as an act of historical restoration. The schemes that seemed to minister most powerfully to Egypt’s present needs were referred back to the desires of the pharaoh Amenhemat. This strange mixture of the industrial and biblical, the ancient and progressive, is constantly evoked in the rhetoric of engineers and administrators. The American lawyer employed by the British government to assess the viability of rival schemes, for instance, liked to describe Lake Moeris and the Raian Delta as ‘the Yorkshire of the Pre-Christian world’.¹¹⁰

Organizations, including the Society for the Preservation of the Monuments of Ancient Egypt and the Egypt Exploration Fund, did campaign against the Aswan Dam, but their campaigns were hampered by concern that they might compromise both economic

¹⁰⁷ Similar comparison of the Great Pyramid with projects like modern Nile bridges is scattered through the 1874 edition of Samuel Smiles’ *Lives of the Engineers* (London: John Murray, 1874), e.g. 5:249–50.

¹⁰⁸ F. C. Penfield, ‘Harnessing the Nile’, *Century Magazine*, 57 (1899), 483.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Cope Whitehouse, ‘Lake Moeris, From Recent Explorations in the Moeris Basin and the Wadi Fadhi’, *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York*, 14 (1882), 89.

and humanitarian development. 1890s opposition to the Dam relied on Philae, pearl of the Nile, to generate its emotive appeal. Edward Poynter, founding president of the SPMAE, had made his breakthrough into the art establishment with a huge canvas entitled *Israel in Egypt* (1867), based on the biblical description of the construction of Pithom by Israelite slave labour. Spectacular Delta architecture did not still stand, so *Israel in Egypt* ignored Philae's location at the wrong end of Egypt and its construction over a millennium later and made it a feature of the geography of the Exodus. Twenty years on, Poynter was the powerful public face of Philae's cause.¹¹¹ He devoted the efforts of the SPMAE to saving the Philae temple complex, lobbying Lord Salisbury, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Lord Cromer, Consul General of Egypt, with lengthy lists of signatures.¹¹² Correspondence with Cecil was frequent and detailed: the dam must go ahead, the society argued, but an alternative site must be found so that Philae was not submerged.

After much stalling a compromise was reached which suited almost no one. The dam was constructed so that Philae was only subjected to limited flooding (up to five months a year) but the capacity of the reservoir was far smaller than was needed. Before the construction was even complete plans had been drawn up to raise the dam; they were carried out between 1907 and 1912.¹¹³ The rapid development of Egyptology during the 1890s meant that by the time waters were about to flood a large swathe of Nubia it was no longer the drowning of Philae that most upset Egyptologists.

As a representative of the EEF and a surprise appointment to the post of Chief Inspector of Antiquities in 1905, Arthur Weigall, trained by Petrie, went to particular efforts to underplay Philae's importance. The most powerful figure in British Egyptology argued that 'the temporary and apparently harmless inundation of the ruins for five months each year [was] well worth the several millions of precious government money' that would have been expended on any other

¹¹¹ Poynter was appointed Director of the National Gallery in 1894 and president of the Royal Academy two years later.

¹¹² These petitions (EES VIIIb, VIIIc) were made on aesthetic grounds: 'considered from an artistic point of view, these sculptured stones are abounding in the highest qualities of conception and execution'.

¹¹³ Further work was required between 1929 and 1933, before hope for the dam's adequacy was abandoned altogether and the High Dam planned.

suitable irrigation project.¹¹⁴ He conceded that the colour of Philae's reliefs *would* disappear but argued that this was irrelevant: 'artistically [the loss] will not be much felt'.¹¹⁵ 'Sentimentally of course, one deeply regrets the flooding of the temple'; but those who place sentiment above practical considerations were, he argued, the intellectual equivalent of drunks on the Old Kent Road, 'whose legs had lost their cunning'.¹¹⁶ In their opposition to the dam, tourists, artists and romantic archaeologists had allowed themselves to look foolish: their hysterical reaction made them appear mentally 'unbalanced', like 'Vegetarians, Anti-Vivisectionists, Militant Suffragists [and] Little Englanders'.¹¹⁷ 'What remains of the objections', he asked, after just a moment's sober thought? 'Nothing, except an undefined sense of dismay'.¹¹⁸ 'What has been lost in Philae', Weigall wrote, 'has been gained a thousand fold... in the scientific excavation of the cemeteries farther to the south'.¹¹⁹ This is a significant statement. These cemeteries were the great new cause that demonstrated a decisive shift in Egyptological concerns.

Nubia was now recognized as offering rich yields for prehistoric remains: a category that had not even been recognized when the initial wrangling over Philae had taken place. Demanding urgent action, Maspero (reinstated as Director General of the Antiquities Service) sanctioned an archaeological survey of Nubia to be directed by the geologist (later director of the London Science Museum) H. G. Lyons. Lyons had already conducted a *Physiography of the River Nile* (1906) and was close to completing his *Cadastral Survey of Egypt* (1908). The international project he now coordinated provides, in its nature and scale, a striking measure of the transformation of the archaeological world that had occurred within one decade. With emphasis placed firmly on the origins of Nubian history, its Egyptological contributors included experts on the earliest dynasties including George Reisner, and soon also drew on anatomical and anthropological expertise.¹²⁰ The Survey's first publication established its ambitions:

¹¹⁴ Arthur Weigall, *Treasury of Ancient Egypt* (London: Blackwood, 1910), 269.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. ¹¹⁶ Ibid. 276. ¹¹⁷ Ibid. ¹¹⁸ Ibid. ¹¹⁹ Ibid. 280.

¹²⁰ As the Survey commenced, Reisner's study of prehistoric Naga-ed-Deir was going through the press. This showcased his ability to extend and reinforce the archaeological developments the EEF and Petrie had begun in the preceding decade. By the time he was appointed to the Nubian survey Reisner had proved much more successful than Petrie in disentangling himself from the quest to stock museums and

intimate acquaintance with early Egyptian art and civilization was especially valuable in the study of this region, for it . . . provide[d] a firm basis for anthropological studies; for a thorough study of such a region involved not only the collection of objects and reconstruction of the culture of the people who had once inhabited the valley, but also the determination of their race and ethnological affinities.¹²¹

The focus was no longer on spectacular temples, but on revealing what ‘the large number of ancient sites which are not known, but which very certainly exist’ might reveal of the migrations and interactions of early man.¹²² The vast majority of this huge salvage operation took place in cemeteries, sometimes on extremely ancient material dating back to the beginning of the fourth millennium BC. The new techniques of stratigraphy and seriation proved their worth in establishing separate historical eras for this region and identifying several distinctive cultures; the most significant were soon designated A, C and X Groups. The histories of these groups were interpreted in narratives of migration, invasion, racial ‘blending’, and ‘grafting’: ‘the X-group people’ for instance ‘were strongly Negroid aliens who had suddenly made their way north into Nubia’.¹²³ As with all contemporaneous study of Egyptian prehistory the emphases were on establishing the regional distribution and physical characteristics of various predynastic ethnic groups identified by skull shape and cultural traits.¹²⁴

The Survey’s anthropological expert, Grafton Elliot Smith, was more an accidental acquisition than an appointment, having turned up of his own volition to investigate Reisner’s disinterred cadavers. He had been trained in anatomy in his native Sydney, then by Alexander Macalister at Cambridge. In 1900 Macalister had proposed

in making ambitions to record excavation in painstaking detail into lived reality rather than expressed aspiration; see M. A. Hoffmann, *Egypt Before the Pharaohs* (2nd edn London: Michael O’Mara Books, 1991), 252–3.

¹²¹ H. G. Lyons, Preface to Reisner (ed.), *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia, Report for 1907–8* (Cairo: National Printing Department, 1910).

¹²² Arthur Weigall, *Report on the Antiquities of Lower Nubia* (Cairo: National Printing Department, 1907).

¹²³ Grafton Elliot Smith (ed.), *Archaeological Survey of Nubia, Bulletin 5* (Cairo: National Printing Department, 1910), 12.

¹²⁴ Petrie, *Revolutions*; V. G. Childe, *Origins of European Civilisation* (New York: Knopf, 1925); as with other ideological influences on archaeology, these themes were not confined to archaeological discourse: the contemporary civilizational schemes of W. B. Yeats and H. G. Wells, for instance, employ comparable models.

him as the first chair of anatomy at Lord Cromer's new medical school in Cairo; in the words of A. J. E. Cave, at this moment 'Egypt's spell ensnared him to his own lifelong enthrallment'.¹²⁵ In the following year Elliot Smith supplemented this role by advising Reisner and the University of California's Hearst Egyptological expedition. Even before the Nubian project, he had begun to investigate the mummies of pharaohs with the new technology of x-rays and embarked on research into disease amongst the ancient Egyptians that has been credited as having 'changed the course of palaeopathology'.¹²⁶ When the Nubian survey commenced, Elliot Smith saw a chance to determine the racial identity of the early Egyptians once and for all and rushed to the village of Shellal to investigate. Like Petrie he assumed that race 'is certainly the determining cause of the modifications of culture' that occurred over centuries in prehistoric Nubia.¹²⁷

Swamped with skeletal remains, Reisner and Lyons embraced the assistance offered by Elliot Smith and his young colleague Frederic Wood Jones. In recounting the collaboration that ensued, Elliot Smith gave a brief account of the roles and duties of an anthropological advisor to Egyptologists. The first task, he suggested, was to provide elementary information: the sex, age and any obvious medical history (including mutilations such as circumcision) of a skeleton, as well as enumerating affinities between skeletons that showed consanguinity (whether of race or family).¹²⁸ The second and more important task was to study the 'form and proportions of face, the shape of the head and the nature of the hair' and by collecting large amounts of this information, to draw up detailed studies of racial characteristics.¹²⁹ Wood Jones later described the realities of measuring skeletons in the field, in a biographical record of Elliot Smith:

He sat at one end of the grave and I at the other. The heat was terrific; the metal callipers became too hot to hold with comfort unless care was

¹²⁵ A. J. E. Cave, 'A Master Anatomist' in W. R. Dawson (ed.), *Sir Grafton Elliot Smith: a Biographical Record by His Colleagues* (London: J. Cape, 1938), 195.

¹²⁶ G. J. Armelagos & J. O. Mills, 'Palaeopathology as a Science: the Contribution of Egyptology' in W. V. Davies & R. Walker (eds), *Biological Anthropology and the Study of Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 3.

¹²⁷ Elliot Smith (ed.), *Archaeological Survey* 5, 7.

¹²⁸ G. A. Reisner (ed.), *Archaeological Survey of Nubia Bulletin 1* (Cairo: National Printing Department, 1908), 26.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

taken to place them in what little shade was thrown by one's own body. The flies were legion, they swarmed about our faces and crept into our eyes. Every now and again a hot swirl of dust, of very evil origin, would come circling across the dry mud plain and over the grave where we sat. Elliot Smith's voice was peculiarly deep and level . . . a maddening one when employed in the monotonous recitation of endless measurements and figures. I brushed the dust and the flies from my face and wrote, seeming without end, 'minimum frontal breadth ninety-one, bizygo-matic breadth one thirty-seven, cranial breadth'. At intervals I would look at my entirely serene . . . chief and wondered how much longer I could stand it . . . and then, throwing the hot callipers into the sand, he gave his opinion of the flies, the dust, the heat, the village of Shellal and the ancient dead in one comprehensive and highly descriptive sentence that must have come straight from the remembered repertoire of his student days in Sydney.¹³⁰

Despite the many strange claims that Egyptologists in this period were not interested in anthropology and anthropologists were not interested in Egypt, the Nubian discoveries ensured that British journals were soon riddled with anthropological articles on ancient Egypt. These ranged from Murray's Frazerian articles on king-killing rituals to papers read to the Royal Anthropological Institute with titles like 'The Influence of Egypt on African Death Ceremonies', delivered by T. F. McIlwraith in 1921.¹³¹ This paper suggested that funerary practices in West Africa must either have come from Egypt via the Niger or else via seafarers who 'established a centre of Egyptian civilisation on the Guinea Coast'; typically Egyptologists (including Margaret Murray) and anthropologists (including Elliot Smith) were present to contribute responses. The relationship between Egyptologists and anthropologists was so close that archaeological workforces themselves became the subject of anthropological study. One of the leading anthropologists of his generation, W. H. R. Rivers, found camping with Egyptologists the most convenient means for researching 'The Colour Vision of the Natives of Upper Egypt'.¹³² This is not to say that the relationship was ever easy: Reisner and his anthropologists at Shellal often found their cooperative impulses

¹³⁰ F. Wood Jones, 'In Egypt and Nubia' in Dawson, *Grafton Elliot Smith*, 142.

¹³¹ 'The Influence of Egypt on African Death Ceremonies', *Nature* (24 November 1921), 418–19.

¹³² W. H. R. Rivers, 'The Colour Vision of the Natives of Upper Egypt', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* (1901), 229–47.

strained, most dramatically when archaeological and anatomical techniques for the seemingly simple task of identifying the gender of mummified skeletons failed to produce the same results.

Elliot Smith's work in Nubia inspired the theory with which his name has become inextricably associated: hyperdiffusionism (or heliocentric diffusionism). This was the idea that all culture traits and all innovations were carried from one culture to another and originated from a unique source. Nothing so complex as agriculture would be developed more than once; no vague Tylorian 'psychic unity of mankind' could explain why geographically distant regions stepped out of the 'stone age' at similar times; only the direct influence of advanced civilization upon backward peoples could account for their emergence from barbarism.

As we have seen, effusive praise had been showered over the pharaohs from the 1880s onwards. Yet Elliot Smith's enthusiasm for Egypt, his 'sole source' of civilization, was so intense that even the paeans that flowed from the pens of Poole and Petrie did not satisfy his feeling that Egypt was under-appreciated: 'the writings that embody the achievements of modern scholarship and fill the swollen shelves of our libraries will be searched in vain for any just appreciation of the influence exerted by Egypt's early civilisation on Europe and the world at large'.¹³³ Elliot Smith's Egyptian overachievers were not the late Theban empire builders but the vigorous races of the Neolithic and the early dynasties. In a strange slippage between evidence and object Smith insisted that 'The cemeteries of Egypt were truly the birthplace of the arts and crafts of civilisation'. Yet the predynastic Egyptians 'did a great deal more than merely invent agriculture and devise the earliest statecraft and religion': they gradually exported it around an otherwise benighted globe.¹³⁴ When the search for precious metals spurred the Egyptians into vast trading journeys they carried their innovations with them. Nothing invented in Egypt need ever be invented again: the cromlechs of Europe were not independent initiatives but crude attempts to emulate the 'vast originals' of the Nile whose reputation was known everywhere. 'In Egypt', Elliot Smith wrote, 'originated the germs of the civilisation of

¹³³ Grafton Elliot Smith, *The Ancient Egyptians and the Origins of Civilisation* (London: Harper, 1911), 22.

¹³⁴ Grafton Elliot Smith, *In the Beginning* (New York: Morrow, 1928), 38; also xi, 5–7.

the whole world'.¹³⁵ Where Bunsen had recoiled from making Egypt anything so portentous as a point of origin for civilization, Elliot Smith had no qualms in pushing the Egyptians as the ultimate source of all good things. In arguing that Egypt was the sole originator of progress, he and his followers credited the early dynasties with extraordinary sophistication and global agency. The theory did not just posit the significance of Egypt to the circulation of ideas around the ancient world, but made understanding early Egypt an essential prerequisite for interpreting all later cultural development.

When Elliot Smith published *The Ancient Egyptians and the Origin of Civilisation* (1911) his theories collided with an anthropological field dominated by cultural evolution. The timeless conflict between diffusionism and evolutionism—to quote George Stocking, the two 'Ur-forms of anthropological speculation'—seemed to have been resolved through the evolutionist influence of Darwin and Tylor. Tylor's entry on anthropology in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1910–11) seemed to herald the total eclipse of diffusionist approaches:

It is now certain that there has ever been an inherent tendency in man . . . to develop culture by the same stages and in the same way . . . an example in point is that of pyramid building. No ethnical relationship can ever have existed between the Aztecs and the Egyptians; yet each race developed the idea of the pyramid tomb through that psychological similarity which is as much a characteristic of the species man as is his physique.¹³⁶

Yet only a year later W. H. R. Rivers challenged Tylor's complacency: 'matters which a few years ago were regarded as settled . . . today are as uncertain as ever'.¹³⁷ In surveying the anthropology of the 1910s Herbert Spinden (veteran of the great Yucatan expedition, soon to be appointed curator of the Harvard Peabody Museum) wrote with regret that the anthropological world had been startled out of the comparative calm it had enjoyed since the marginalization of earlier

¹³⁵ Ibid. ix; see also Grafton Elliot Smith & W. R. Dawson, *Egyptian Mummies* (London: Kegan Paul, 1924).

¹³⁶ E. B. Tylor, 'Anthropology' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Eleventh Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910–11), 2:119.

¹³⁷ George Stocking, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888–1951* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 179.

diffusionists (including Schliemann and Sayce) ‘who had trailed civilisation by the swastika and the ring-and-cross symbol’.¹³⁸

The change in momentum was such that the next edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* replaced Tylor’s article with a contribution from Elliot Smith. ‘Intensive studies’ of the prehistory of Egypt and the Near East, Smith wrote,

have made it possible to understand the origin of civilisation . . . it is now possible confidently to sketch out the process whereby the common civilisation was diffused into Europe, to Turkestan and India, to Siberia and China, to Indonesia and Oceania, until it finally crossed the Pacific to central America and Peru.¹³⁹

This resulted in

the demolition of many of the dogmas which for half a century had paralysed ethnological investigation and prevented those who were collecting the evidence from appreciating its real significance . . . [many ethnologists] were preparing to repudiate the fashionable doctrine, which had been expressed in its most extreme form in the earlier article in this Encyclopaedia.¹⁴⁰

Elliot Smith published an extraordinary number of diffusionist works over the following two decades. Rivers gave him prestige support in major works such as his *History of Melanesian Society* (1914) and lectures on *Kinship and Social Organisation* (1915). Elliot Smith’s many students gradually occupied a large number of illustrious university posts. Among them, W. J. Perry, who occupied chairs at both Manchester and UCL, did most to extend hyperdiffusionist

¹³⁸ Herbert Spinden (ed.), *Culture: the Diffusion Controversy* (New York: Norton, 1927), 51. Old Testament Egypt frequently intrudes in earlier diffusionist schemes such as Edward King’s *History of Mexico* (1831–48); the apparent discovery of Egyptian items buried in Britain and Ireland can be found in several letters written to the British Museum between 1880 and 1910: these include the discovery of a scarab in a field in Brighton (M. J. Barker to Dr S. Birch, 24 August 1884: BM ANE, 1884/15); the discovery of Egyptian beads in ‘Irish lake dwellings’ near Cork (Robert Day to Wallis Budge, 7 November 1887: BM ANE, 1887/75); and the acquisition—in exchange for a glass of stout—of an Egyptian or Phoenician dagger from the workman who dug it up at Charing Cross (E. Dreveton to E. Budge, 13 July & 16 August 1898: BM ANE, 1898/160–3; E. Dreveton to L. W. King, 18 August 1898: BM ANE, 1898/159 [as occasionally elsewhere, the archive here contains contradictions: there are two sets of letters numbered 158–64 for 1898, the series cited here comes first]).

¹³⁹ Grafton Elliot Smith, ‘Anthropology’ in *Encyclopaedia Britannica Twelfth Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 12th edn 1922), 2:143.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

principles; not until the New Diffusionists of the 1970s would Elliot Smith's ideas find such advocacy again.

Perry posited a vast sophisticated 'archaic civilisation', 'uniform in nature', that covered the Near East, Australasia, and Pacific America in prehistory. This culture found its way around the world, superseding the customs of other less innovative peoples, but also gradually deteriorating, especially on its fringes: 'loss of culture was a constant feature of the outlying parts of the region, the earliest communities in North America, Oceania and elsewhere being more advanced in arts and crafts than those that followed'.¹⁴¹ In Perry's scheme (just as prone to reflective idealism as late nineteenth-century Egyptology), this archaic culture was initially completely peaceful. 'Warfare', he wrote (in the aftermath of the First World War),

began in a highly organised condition of society, and thus is not a fundamental mode of behaviour common to mankind... warfare is the outcome of social institutions that can be modified, and thus the problem of its abolition is ultimately soluble.¹⁴²

Perry pushed the idea that the quest for metals was the driving force of this peaceful expansion of sophisticated culture. The development of copper tools that could be traced in Egypt convinced him that it was Egyptian craftsmen who had discovered the use of copper and raised civilization out of the 'slough of the Stone Age', beginning three great processes: the Neolithic (or agricultural) revolution, the urban revolution, and the emergence of Iron-Age craftsmanship.¹⁴³ Technological superiority had led to a form of cultural imperialism that saw the habits and beliefs of these wise Egyptians borrowed or imitated along with their tools.

If the Egyptians of the Bible taught Moses their wisdom, then the diffusionists' Egyptians taught the world agriculture, architecture, religion, art and politics. Elliot Smith and Perry were well aware of the extent to which their work harmonized with biblical passages like

¹⁴¹ W. J. Perry, *Children of the Sun* (London: Methuen, 1923), 3.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 4.

¹⁴³ Perry, *Children*, 3; Smith, *Ancient Egyptians*, xiv. These works argued that the discovery of the economic value of copper had led Egyptians to search abroad for sources of the ore, and led them into contact with other peoples. Flint tools in Europe had been developed in imitation of the forms of Egyptian copper and (after 2500 BC) bronze implements. The very apparatus of Europe's development from barbarity had been inferior copies of innovative Egyptian models.

Genesis 10. Despite Elliot Smith's professed lack of interest in Christianity he was immersed in the Old Testament and quoted it prolifically; *The Ancient Egyptians and the Origins of Civilisation* opens, for instance, with a quote from Ecclesiastes. Hyperdiffusionism's critics continued to make great play of the tendency to use anthropology as a tool for finding everywhere

knowledge of Adam and Eve, the Tower of Babel, Noah's Ark upon the Flood, and dry-shod crossing of the Red Sea, the Crucifixion of Christ and the subsequent worship of the Cross with much impedimenta of Christianity.¹⁴⁴

Both Elliot Smith and his detractors remained fixated with the question of human origins. Egypt was still a powerful link between prehistory and history; between the sciences and the humanities, between the 'primitive' and the 'civilized'.

By the time he contributed to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Elliot Smith had been drawn into the hotbed of prehistoric speculation that was University College London. He was now a colleague of Pearson, Petrie and Murray. But his relationship with Egyptologists was always troubled. As early as 1910, Elliot Smith's criticism of Petrie's scholarship had deteriorated into a bitter exchange of personal attacks. When Petrie published studies on Naqada cannibalism (extending the arguments established in 'Eaten with Honour', above), Elliot Smith accused him of writing 'pure fiction':

All who are interested in the serious attempts that are being made to reconstruct the real history of ancient Egypt and to sift established truth from wild conjecture must deplore Prof Flinders Petrie's attempt . . . to revivify the corpse of a belief in the supposition that the archaic Egyptians were in the habit of cutting up their dead.¹⁴⁵

Petrie's interpretation of predynastic Egyptians as mutilators of the dead had been, according to Elliot Smith, 'effectually hanged, drawn and quartered': archaeologists of the next millennium might find more supposed 'evidence' for cannibalism in the English graveyards of 1910 than Petrie had recovered from Egypt.¹⁴⁶ Only 'lack of

¹⁴⁴ Spinden, *Culture*, 45–6; this phenomenon had been noted earlier, e.g. T. H. Huxley, *Collected Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1893–5), 2:423–4.

¹⁴⁵ Grafton Elliot Smith, 'Early Burial Customs in Egypt', *Nature* (13 December 1910), 461–2.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

familiarity' with anatomy had allowed Petrie to misrepresent the nature of early Egyptian society: Petrie spoke of 'grooves' left by human 'gnawing' on bones; French archaeologists had called the same deformities 'syphilitic ulcers'. Elliot Smith deplored both theories, insisting that, two years earlier, he had 'proved' that 'the damage was inflicted by small necrophilous beetles'.¹⁴⁷ In later attacks Elliot Smith accused Petrie of finding gothic, 'Jack the Ripper practices' everywhere because he was a romantic blinded to practical explanations by 'the glamour of Egypt'.¹⁴⁸ Petrie, in turn, wrote on the opening page of his copy of the second edition of Elliot Smith's *Ancient Egyptians*, 'The asserted facts are largely untrue & the vague statements unsupported'; 'What a romance!!' was scribbled later in the work alongside numerous disavowals of evidence and technique.¹⁴⁹ After Elliot Smith's appointment at UCL the two refused to speak, despite Margaret Murray's efforts to mediate between them. Both attended the Board of Studies in Anthropology which Murray chaired. The success of a meeting, she wrote, required that they be sat out of each other's eye-line; otherwise 'there were sarcastic remarks and bitter retorts all the time'.¹⁵⁰

Elliot Smith's influence on disciplinary anthropology was short-lived. Yet he had a profound impact on public perception of ancient Egypt. After Egyptologists had abandoned some of the principles on which their extraordinary relationship with the 1880s public had been based, space was open for others, of whom Elliot Smith was the most prominent, to usurp their roles. Petrie's 'migrations' inspired George Bernard Shaw in the 1920s, but the true bestselling historical narratives of this period, such as H. G. Wells's *Outline of History* (1920), drew their vision of ancient Egypt from Elliot Smith. Although anthropological theory was developing fast in very different directions, only with *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and *Patterns of Culture* (1934) did Boas and Malinowski produce schemes that could be adapted to general consumption as easily as hyperdiffusion. Amidst the anthropological enthusiasm of the early 1930s Elliot

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Grafton Elliot Smith, 'Early Burial Customs in Egypt', *Nature* (27 December 1910), 529–30.

¹⁴⁹ See H. A. Waldron, 'The Study of the Human Remains from Nubia', *Medical History*, 44 (2000), 382.

¹⁵⁰ Margaret Murray, *My First Hundred Years* (London: William Kimber, 1963), 165.

Smith wrote bestsellers of his own, including *The Search for Man's Ancestors* (1931), which perpetuated his public presence long after his anthropological prestige had diminished. His echoes of the Old Testament resounded, in more literal forms, through the work of popular diffusionists: the moment when Jehovah gave the law to Moses even became 'a turning point in the history of anthropology'.¹⁵¹

These dynamic grand-narratives were perfectly suited to the new trend for universal histories, which despite their comprehensive aims, tended to gloss over early millennia as quickly and simply as possible. These works required seemingly scientific renderings of early 'civilization' that could be conveyed in straightforward narrative without the need for caveats or convolutions. Chief among these texts was H. G. Wells's *Outline of History* (according to one commentator in 1937 'far and away the best selling popular history of all time').¹⁵² Wells suggested that in the Neolithic a single mummy-making, megalith-building culture dominated much of the globe. He described the 'brownish' 'brunets' of this 'heliolithic culture',

Oozing . . . through the warmer regions of the world, drifting by canoes often across wide stretches of sea. It was then the highest culture in the world; it sustained the largest, most highly developed communities. And its region of origin may have been, as Elliot Smith suggests, the Mediterranean and North African region.¹⁵³

Like Petrie, Wells used his history to look to the future: 'to enlist the experience of mankind in the service of his destiny'.¹⁵⁴ And Wells's enthusiasm was such that he even wrote diffusionist anthropology into his fiction. The theories of 'Elliot Smith and Rivers' generate an afternoon's archaeological relief for the troubled protagonists of *The Secret Places of the Heart*: Sir Richmond and Dr Martineau ponder the possibility of finding 'a potsherd' at Silbury 'from early Knossos or a fragment of glass from Pepi's Egypt'.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Smith, *Ancient Egyptians*, 1; Hendrik van Loon, *The Story of Mankind* (New York: Liveright, 1922), 38–41.

¹⁵² Van Loon's work sold 75,000 copies in its first edition; J. S. Rubin, *Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 219.

¹⁵³ H. G. Wells, *Outline of History* (New York: Collier & Son, 1920), 120.

¹⁵⁴ Carl Becker, *Everyman His Own Historian* (New York: Quadrangle, 1935), 182; Rubin, *Making of Middlebrow Culture*, 211.

¹⁵⁵ H. G. Wells, *The Secret Places of the Heart* (London: Macmillan, 1922).

Another ‘universal history’, Hendrik van Loon’s *Story of Mankind* was used widely in schools on both sides of the Atlantic. It received the first Newbery Medal for children’s literature and led to van Loon being heralded as ‘instructor-at-large in civilised values’ after the First World War.¹⁵⁶ This work outlines Egypt’s pre-eminence in the ancient world and builds this into a qualified embrace of Elliot Smith. Van Loon describes how those who ‘lived in the great European wilderness were rapidly learning new things. It is safe to say that in due course of time they would have given up the ways of savages and would have developed a civilisation of their own. But suddenly there came an end to their isolation. They were discovered’ by Egyptian traders.¹⁵⁷

In these forms ancient Egypt remained Gerald Massey’s ‘light of the world’ and the EEF’s fount of modern Europe’s ‘wisdom’. Civilized man was still seen emerging in the Near East and spiralling out to educate the globe. Elliot Smith provided schemes that allowed readers to maintain these familiar, age-old narratives of history, shored up not with scripture but with anthropometric measurements, radiography of royal mummies and diffusionist anthropology. George Bernard Shaw labelled the *Outline of History* a replacement for Genesis; Egyptology itself was not now a proving ground for the Pentateuch but a substitute for it.¹⁵⁸ These authors did not so much reject biblical narratives as translate them into secular, scientized forms.¹⁵⁹

Genesis chapter 10 was rejected as ethnological evidence but the scheme it had once supported still shaped popular anthropology. Egyptology allowed the assumption that civilization developed from a point of origin in the Near East to survive the rejection of the

¹⁵⁶ Rubin, *Making of Middlebrow Culture*, 217.

¹⁵⁷ Van Loon, *Story of Mankind*, 17.

¹⁵⁸ Wells, for instance approached biblical history with the most sceptical tone he could muster, yet proved completely unwilling to subvert its underlying patterns: e.g. ‘It is a striking tribute to the power of the written assertion over realities in men’s minds that this Bible narrative has imposed, not only upon the Christian, but upon the Moslem world, the belief that King Solomon was not only one of the most magnificent, but one of the wisest of men. Yet the first book of Kings tells in detail his utmost splendours, and beside the beauty and wonder of the buildings and organisations of such great monarchs as Thothmes III or Rameses II or half a dozen other Pharaohs . . . they are trivial. His temple was . . . the size of a small villa residence . . . And as for his wisdom and statecraft, one need go no further than the Bible to see that Solomon was a mere helper in the wide-reaching schemes of the trader-king Hiram, and his kingdom a pawn between Phoenicia and Egypt. His importance was due largely to the temporary enfeblement of Egypt’, Wells, *Outline*, 143.

¹⁵⁹ Rubin, *Making of Middlebrow Culture*, 213.

scriptural evidence that had once been its rationale. As J. M. Blaut has argued, even the cultural evolutionists of the 1910s, who were bitterly opposed to diffusion as an anthropological explanation, still assumed that the Near East had been first to ascend each rung on a developmental ladder. They subverted the diffusionist model much less than they claimed to: ‘all’ of this scholarship is diffusionist, he argues. Heliocentric diffusionism, Blaut continues, did not originate in anthropological scholarship but came from the assumptions of European society at large: ‘diffusionist scholars were, in essence, elaborating and codifying’ a largely unexamined assumption of European culture ‘in the realms of scholarship’.¹⁶⁰

Both the bestselling status of the universal history and the popular authority of hyperdiffusionism were aided by the First World War. Rivers and Elliot Smith gained great prestige through the conflict, researching shellshock at Maghull Military Hospital and treating wounded soldiers; Rivers was soon lionized in verse and prose by his patient, Siegfried Sassoon.¹⁶¹ Wells and van Loon turned to diffusion in a conscious effort to dislodge the ideologies they felt had brought the War about. Existing histories, Wells argued, were ‘unfit for the modern world’ because of their division along stark national lines and their emphasis on national and racial difference rather than similarity. A truly comprehensive history would show the importance of shared characteristics and the contingency of divergences. It would demonstrate that ‘men form one universal brotherhood, that they spring from one common origin’: the universal history was ‘universalizing’ in more than geographical and chronological scope.¹⁶² Van Loon conceived of his history as a rewriting of history necessitated by an entirely new perspective in the present:

The world has just passed through an agony of pain compared to which the French Revolution was a mere incident. The shock has been so great that it has killed the last spark of hope in the breasts of millions of men. They were chanting a hymn of progress, and four years of slaughter

¹⁶⁰ J. M. Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World* (New York: Guilford, 1993), 13.

¹⁶¹ Daniel Hipp, *The Poetry of Shellshock* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 152–153.

¹⁶² Wells, *Outline*, 929. An equally teleological variety of the universal history emerged in Germany slightly earlier, Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* being completed in 1914 and published in 1918.

followed their prayers for peace. ‘Is it worth while,’ so they ask, ‘to work and slave for the benefit of creatures who have not yet passed beyond the stage of the earliest cave men?’¹⁶³

The son of a pastor, van Loon nurtured a lingering sense that the new human sciences ought to show they could embody or inherit old biblical teaching while discarding the myth in which it had once been encrusted. This was a widely felt imperative to reinterpret the ancient world. On its publication in 1891, discussion of Sayce’s *Races of the Old Testament* emphasized some distinctively polygenist ideas including the principle that ‘the mixture of negroes and Europeans . . . results after two or three generations in sterility’.¹⁶⁴ But reviewers of the first postwar edition chose to focus on a paragraph that echoed the sentiments of Wells and van Loon:

Common characteristics . . . in spite of racial diversities, make all the world akin. We are all cast in the same mould, we are all, as St Paul says, ‘of one blood’. Our wants and infirmities, our desires and hopes, our feelings and emotions, are the same to whatever race we belong . . . Give the Fuegian the education of an Englishman, and he becomes an Englishman in ideas and life. God ‘hath made of one blood all nations and men for to dwell on all the face of the earth’ . . . we are all bound together by a common nature; we can all alike claim a common ancestry, and recognise that we have each been made ‘in the image’ of the Creator.¹⁶⁵

These themes also found expression in fiction. The spiritual (and often Utopian) Egypt of writers like Rider Haggard was now used to encourage timeless humane values in war-ravaged Europe. The narrative of Norma Lorimer’s *There was a King in Egypt* leaps between the Egyptian desert and London. Its Egyptologist protagonists value both the ‘pacifist’ philosophy of Akhenaten and the permanence of the Valley of the Kings:

Here the homes of the dead seem so forsaken, so humble. Death has triumphed. In the Valley of the dead were the eternal citizens, their homes were immortal. The dead have no abiding cities [in Europe], and

¹⁶³ Van Loon, *Story of Mankind*, 457.

¹⁶⁴ A. H. Sayce, *The Races of the Old Testament* (London: RTS, 1891), 16–17; for detailed discussion of ideas on hybridity, see Robert Young, *Colonial Desire* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁶⁵ A. H. Sayce, *The Races of the Old Testament* (Revised edn, London, RTS, 1925), 62–3.

even the palaces of the living will be crumbled into powder before Egypt's tombs show any signs of wear and decay.¹⁶⁶

Michael Amory, the book's visionary hero, is a mouthpiece for pacifist and anti-imperial sentiments: 'Damn empire building... if people would only stick to their own natural territory and not go straying into other people's!'; 'fundamental truths are not made by empire-builders... God is the only monarch whose throne is not tottering'.¹⁶⁷ The book is set in 1914, and when the outbreak of war ensues it draws to its close with the frontline death of an Egyptologist. Lorimer presses home the contingency of European crisis by discussing wartime events through the lens of Egyptian history and representing war as dreamlike in contrast to the peaceable 'realities' of the ancient past.

The war also caused soul searching amongst Egyptologists themselves. 1914 was supposed to be a momentous year for the EEF as they finally found an answer to the tension between technical reportage and public appeal that had dogged them since 1882. A new vehicle, the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, was to replace excavation reports as the medium through which the Fund communicated with its public. Unfortunately, in its first five years the *JEA* had little to communicate. But even when excavation was suspended, irregular meetings continued to take place in the EEF's offices. At these, a postwar agenda for the EEF was shaped. On 3 October 1916 H. G. Lyons, J. G. Milne and A. H. Gardiner met. With 'scientific' as their watchword these three Egyptologists asserted their conviction that postwar excavation would be carried out with cutting-edge techniques (in this wartime fermata, the reputation of Naville was finally challenged).¹⁶⁸ Since the new *Journal* could present the organization's public face, excavation reports need no longer strike a compromise between scientific authority and narrative appeal. They should be overhauled into true technical manuals after the example of Reisner: the three Egyptologists concluded that there is 'no longer any necessity for restricting the scientific treatment... in the memoirs which should deal as thoroughly and scientifically as possible with the matter they treat'.¹⁶⁹ The war also forced the suspension of

¹⁶⁶ Norma Lorimer, *There was a King in Egypt* (London: Stanley Paul, 1918), 370.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 70, 105; Lorimer's conception of heaven expresses similar sentiments: 'that world where black faces shall turn white and white faces shall turn black'; *Ibid.* 88.

¹⁶⁸ EEF Sub-committee report, 3 October 1916, XVIII 32.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

subscriptions to the EEF. Few of those who had been continuous subscribers since the nineteenth century renewed their support in 1919. The war provided a genuine watershed in the EEF's priorities and support base. When the Fund regrouped in 1919, this new identity was signalled by a new name: the Egypt Exploration Society. In the ensuing drive for new subscriptions the EES demonstrated how far the terms of its appeal had changed; no longer would the Old Testament feature in publicity or publications.

Indeed, it was a mainstay of the EES, T. E. Peet, who used his own popularizing works to voice powerful rebuttals of the early arguments of Petrie and the EEF. In *The Egypt of the Old Testament* (1922) Peet argued that:

The question of the route of the Exodus has proved a happy playing field for the amateur. The reason is, as always in such cases, that it is a field where it is extremely difficult either to prove or disprove anything at all, so the sage and the fool may work in it almost on level terms. Even in the most scholarly discussions on the subject one point of vital importance is almost always overlooked. The whole geography of the sojourn in Egypt is . . . anachronistic, having been imposed on the original tradition long after the events themselves. Thus we are not in any position to discover what routes the Israelites really followed, except in so far as we may conjecture it by the application of common sense to the problem. All that we can hope to recover is the route which the compilers of the ninth century BC and onward thought they had followed, which is a very different thing.¹⁷⁰

Petrie, Peet argued, had been far too ready to identify sites with cities known from literature. Reviews were largely positive and spoke of Peet's analysis of a biblical 'cul-de-sac' in archaeological thought; his was 'an eminently sane treatment of the subject, disfigured neither by the extravagances (now happily almost buried in oblivion) of the more extreme "Higher Critics" nor by the ignorant obscurantism of their more extreme opponents.'¹⁷¹

This was a moment of substantive change for biblical archaeology everywhere. The British Mandate in Jerusalem, following the collapse

¹⁷⁰ T. E. Peet, *Egypt and the Old Testament* (Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool, 1922), 31.

¹⁷¹ H. R. Hall, 'Egypt and the Old Testament', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 43:1 (1923), 82; J. L. M., 'Egypt and the Old Testament', *Geographical Journal* 62:4 (October 1923), 313.

of the Ottoman Empire, created a felicitous field for European and American scholars, including the great doyen of biblical archaeology William Foxwell Albright. Young Egyptologists with an interest in the Bible frequently turned their attention instead to the expanding field of official excavations in the Holy Land.¹⁷² John Garstang—Blackburn-born archaeologist of Meroe, the Hittites and Glosop—is perhaps the best-known case; from his *Land of the Hittites* (1910) to *The Foundations of Bible History: Joshua-Judges* (1931) and *The Heritage of Solomon* (his 1934 contribution to Herbert Spencer's Descriptive Sociology), Garstang turned from Egyptology to biblical archaeology (a distinction that would not have been required in the previous generation).

Archaeologists like Garstang developed a technical archaeology of the Bible that was increasingly distant from the old 'Sunday School' audiences. The impact of the British Mandate on the archaeological imagination was equally equivocal. Bureaucracy and construction in the troubled worldly Jerusalem of the 1920s could easily displace dreams of a city caught between the heavens and the earth: megalomaniac schemes to return Jerusalem to its form in the age of Christ had once looked idealistic and interesting; when reform became possible they simply looked harebrained and improbable. Although the archaeology of Palestine became more permissive, its ideological range was curtailed, and, in the hands of Albright and his international cast of colleagues, the geographical scope of biblical archaeology contracted. Besides the great Ur excavations of Leonard Woolley (which also began in 1922), the Holy Land dominated.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire, to which the establishment of the British Mandate was a response, had momentous results in Egypt. The veneer of authority that the British had managed to erect through the idea that Egypt remained an Ottoman satellite aided and upheld by Britain became untenable with the end of Ottoman rule. At the same moment as the League of Nations confirmed the imposition of British power in Jerusalem, that power was deposed in Egypt.

Ironically, it was from the eighteenth dynasty and the family of Akhenaten—whose culture had been used to demonstrate the

¹⁷² Garstang had excavated at Melandra near Glosop in 1899, before working with Petrie at Abydos, collaborating with Sayce on Hittite research, and conducting his own excavations in Meroe. After the war he was appointed to the School of Archaeology in Jerusalem and turned his attention to Palestine and the Levant.

thorough integration of the ancient Near East—that the discovery which emphasized the new divergence between Egyptology and the archaeology of the Holy Land emerged. The discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb forced European Egyptologists and their readers to recognize a new archaeological order in Egypt. They had, until 1922, been able to believe that Western 'enlightened' engagement with ancient history stood in stark contrast to a purely synchronic and unhistorical 'mind' of modern Egypt. Threaded through with history, British identity had posited an unhistorical other represented by the supposedly timeless state of the Egyptian fellaheen. With the disagreements that broke out between Carter and the Egyptian government—which are traced authoritatively in two of the most accomplished studies of the history of Egyptology—this jealously guarded 'difference' unravelled.¹⁷³

At first, coverage in the British press echoed Carter in its evocation of 'marvels' and 'wonders'. Rider Haggard, Marie Corelli and Arthur Conan Doyle lent their pens to myths of the tomb's curse (although for years afterwards journalists would ask why 'this flash of the past has prompted no significant treatment in prose or verse like Horace Smith's 'Address to a Mummy' or Loti's 'Desert)').¹⁷⁴ Then came the famous disputes between Carter and the Egyptian Government which resulted from Carter's attempts to treat the tomb as private property, and his continuing assumption that Egyptology was a European prerogative. As his colleague Weigall noted, 'Egypt is an independent nation and Egyptians are becoming increasingly aware of the fact . . . but among those who have not yet adjusted their minds to the new order, many of the European and American excavators and Egyptologists are, unfortunately, to be classed'.¹⁷⁵ The British press initially responded with surprise, accusing the Egyptian authorities of behaviour that was 'wilfully hostile and provocative'.¹⁷⁶ *The Saturday Review* was, on multiple occasions, particularly hostile: the Egyptian Government, they insisted, was 'making use of a trivial difference of opinion between persons to foster a serious difference of opinion

¹⁷³ Elliot Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); D. M. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁷⁴ 'The Tomb of Tutankhamen', *Bookman* (December 1923), 78.

¹⁷⁵ Arthur Weigall, *Tutankhamen and Other Essays* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1923), 16.

¹⁷⁶ 'Tutankh-Amen and Egyptian Independence', *Saturday Review* (23 February 1924), 176.

between nations'.¹⁷⁷ The reviewer continued by casting doubt on Egyptian capacity for self-governance while feigning sympathy: 'We make every excuse we can. It may be that the national sense (though there can be but little historical consciousness in such mixed blood) is in some degree piqued by the spectacle of foreigners foraging among the native monuments'.¹⁷⁸ On another occasion a correspondent quoted Pliny as he dismissed the Egyptians as 'a windy and insolent people' characterized by 'temperamental weakness'; 'Tutankhamun as a link with the age-long past meant nothing to them'; recent events were a 'childish tour de force' in which Howard Carter was 'the innocent victim'.¹⁷⁹ 'He may well, we think, be forgiven a temporary lapse of patience when called from this high pursuit to consider whether the pundits of a local kingdom, through consanguinity with the Pharaoh, were entitled to impose restrictions on his great undertaking... the Egyptian government has dealt a fatal blow at scientific research'. As so often over the previous forty years, the press refused to recognize the intrinsically political nature of archaeology in Egypt, and protested that two things so disparate as 'Egyptology' and 'politics' should have been brought into contact. The category of 'religion', once so dominant in the reception of Egypt, was now largely confined to specialist, niche periodicals. When *The Quiver* ('an illustrated magazine for Sunday and General Reading', aimed at the young) celebrated 'the light [Tutankhamun] may throw on the sacred narrative', this was a quiet voice confined to the Sunday school.

Carter's 'wonderful things' triggered a famous response in Europe, with 'publishers vying to satisfy the public appetite for Egypt'.¹⁸⁰ Some Egyptologists, including Weigall, took up 'the popular craving for romancing' and 'sensation' with 'unblushing' essays on topics like 'The Ancient Ghouls of Thebes' and 'The Malevolence of Ancient Spirits'. These perpetuated the famous curse motifs that Marie Cor-elli's letter to *The Times* had begun. Popular novelists found it easier to get away with this than Weigall: 'the ghosts in the book are the fly that spoils the ointment', scowled *The Saturday Review*.¹⁸¹ *Punch* indicated the full range of the sensation by portraying two navvies

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 177.

¹⁷⁹ 'The Luxor Tomb Dispute', *Saturday Review* (29 March 1924), 322.

¹⁸⁰ 'Unfolding the Past', *Saturday Review*, 136 (1 December 1923), 598.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.; Weigall, *Tutankhamen*.

arguing over the date of Amenhotep III. Bewildered by the intensity and diversity of interest, the Egyptologist H. R. Hall speculated that he would soon meet London-born children named ‘Tutankhamen’.¹⁸²

Egyptologists now had a new task: rather than attempting to whip up popular interest, as they had for every previous discovery, they turned their attention to attempting to control, repress and moderate the outpouring of elaborate theories. Budge was right, insisted *The Saturday Review*, to assert that ‘we know no more now about the history [of this period] than we did before the tomb of Tutankhamun was opened’.¹⁸³ Hall sought to remind the public that this was ‘one of the least distinguished of Egyptian monarchs . . . an ephemeral appearance’.¹⁸⁴ Weigall warned that the inflammatory sensationalism of the European press combined with the headstrong behaviour of excavators (and the wealthy hobbyists who backed them) ‘may cause the stopping of all foreign excavation in Egypt’.

This was the beginning of another new dispensation in Egyptology. It was more familiar in its balance of international relations, in its disjunction between huge popular interest and scholarship, in the blues and golds that have dominated Egypt’s iconography since November 1922, and in the central role of hieroglyphic, not biblical, interpretation. Tutankhamun was an Egyptian; never a Hebrew or a Greek. His case sets into relief the extraordinary dispensation that had dominated most of the period covered by this book, in which various versions of classical and biblical Egypt had been written deep into the domestic cultural politics of Britain. From the nonconformists of Newcastle to Flinders Petrie himself, ancient Egypt had been entangled in the historical, scientific and religious contentions that defined the era. The unprecedented transformations in that period’s cultural life had shaped Egyptology, and Egyptology in turn had driven these transformations on, forming the new society in which it was developed. By 1922, however, the dialogues conducted by Egyptologists and their popularizers were with very different Egyptian dead.

¹⁸² H. R. Hall, ‘The Recent Discoveries in Egypt’, *Fortnightly Review*, 113 (April 1923), 676.

¹⁸³ ‘Tutankhamen: Amenism, Atenism and Egyptian Monotheism’, *Saturday Review*, 135 (23 June 1923), 842.

¹⁸⁴ Hall, ‘The Recent Discoveries’, *Fortnightly*, 676.

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