

Unruly Appreciations: How contestation shapes the value  
of Pharaonic things

by

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## **Abstract**

How have Egyptian struggles to repatriate and retain Pharaonic artifacts shaped the value and meaning attributed to these iconic but contested objects? And how have these public struggles influenced museum practice from the time of its modern origins? This dissertation works against the archival grain to trace a popular history of three Pharaonic objects (or collections thereof) around which highly-visible campaigns for ownership have been waged: Tutankhamun's treasures, The Bust of Nefertiti, and the obelisk typically titled the 'Paris Needle'. Each chapter examines the contestations through which these objects have gained a foothold in Egyptian liberatory projects and in the global imaginary, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day.

Colonial expeditions in Egypt represent some of the earliest ventures in modern archaeological collection and museology, generating a foundation upon which many of the world's most authoritative museums have constructed their legacies as part of broader nation-building projects. In the case of the 'Tutmanias' of the 1920s and 1970s, media representations leverage public conceptions of ancient history to consolidate Western geopolitical power in the Middle East. Mass media plays a similar role with the Bust of Nefertiti, whose ownership becomes the focus of frenzied publicity in Weimar Germany, reflecting and reproducing the racial, geopolitical, and gendered anxieties of the era. The obelisk's transport from Luxor to Paris produces and mediates the public square in a different way, erasing Egyptian labour while glorifying the feat of its transport to substantiate its value as a trophy. Finally, this dissertation looks to the relocation of Gurna – a supposed "world capital of thieves" atop the Theban Necropolis – as a case

study in intra- and inter-national contestation around the ‘value’ of heritage, preservation, and place.

Doing so, this project draws links between the complex imbrications of artifactual value on the economic, sociological, and semiotic levels. These highly-public yet little-researched anticolonial struggles shed light on the ways in which rhetorics of (economic and affective) ‘appreciation’ are deployed to impose ways of feeling and knowing about history which produce normative museological ends.

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Finally, and perhaps most importantly: this project is dedicated to the millennia-long efforts of the Egyptian people to define their own history, present, and future. I can only hope to have articulated a small portion of the aims that have motivated our many revolutions; *inshallah* we can live to see their fulfillment in our times.

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Figure 2: Still from *Earthenware: Coffin of Isis-Weret*, 2016.

label; little could be gleaned from it as to why it sat here alone in this room with objects only vaguely related to it, in a museum with no significant Ancient Egyptian collection.<sup>1</sup>

This question would be answered by its acquisition report. Donated to the museum by former senator Serge Joyal in 1999, its acquisition is recommended as follows:

Accession of the Isis-Weret coffin is strongly advised as coffins are prized for their artistic value on the Egyptian antiquities market and only occasionally appear for sale. Of course no artifact has left Egypt legally for several decades, which further strengthens the desirability of obtaining this item, as it is highly unlikely that such items will ever again be available from that source.<sup>2</sup>

This note condenses a remarkable proportion of museology's structural underpinnings into the span of sixty-three words. First, there is the question of agency: the coffin is

<sup>1</sup> This label text is available via the object page on the MMFA website: <https://www.mbam.qc.ca/en/works/32397/>

<sup>2</sup>Robert Little and Roberta Shaw, "Acquisition - Rapport de Recherche" (Montreal, 1999).

described as having ‘left’ Egypt, seemingly of its own volition, and not according to the intentions and actions of specific colonial agents with names, bank accounts, and positions of legislative authority. Second, there is the issue of value and valuation: grave goods are described as being significant accessions for the museum’s collection as they are “prized for their artistic value on the Egyptian antiquities market and only occasionally appear for sale.” Market value, cultural value, historical value, and artistic value are imbricated herein, revealing the shared logics that functionally bind them. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly: the slippage of ‘value’ is associated here with ‘desirability.’ But whose desire is being referenced, specifically? What this report points to is in fact a world-wide network of value-production and desire: in 1952, Egyptians took up arms to rid their nation of colonial rule, leading directly to the creation of a stringent set of legal frameworks regulating the export of antiquities. These laws, in turn, impacted the global antiquities market, decreasing the potential supply of Ancient Egyptian grave goods, thereby increasing their (cultural *and* economic) value. The Museum’s desire for the coffin is thus directly entwined with Egyptians’ desire for sovereign control of their own national patrimony, and the value – economic, cultural, and otherwise – accorded to the coffin is thereby entangled with the postcolonial enactment of national autonomy.

This project aims to destabilize these museal<sup>3</sup> mythologies through a series of case studies examining the early history (beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> century) of

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<sup>3</sup> I use ‘museal’ here in Adorno’s sense, which observes that “Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association” insofar as museums “testify to the neutralization of culture.” *Prisms* (MIT Press, 1983), 175.

grassroots campaigns to repatriate and retain Ancient Egyptian things. It traces the post-discovery contestations and utilizations of three sites of historical value: the tomb of Tutankhamun, the Bust of Nefertiti, and the 'Paris Needle'. These are some of the most well-known and oft-discussed Ancient Egyptian things, immediately recognizable to many lay publics through their reproduction in numerous media forms over the course of multiple decades. They are notable as well in that their respective public discourses have been deeply shaped by legacies of contestation, and that this contestation has informed broader structures of museological knowledge- and value-production. The post-discovery biographies of these three sites are traced here through their intra- and extra-institutional contestations, examining the ways in which their value has been constituted through formal and informal claims-making processes. In so doing, this project unpacks the ways that contestations around the meaning and value of cultural patrimony have shaped the terms through which museal structures have regulated bodies, geographies, imaginaries, and economies.

To do this, I undertake an object biography methodology that traces the post-discovery movements and representations of the things in question, documenting their utilizations as part of broader social and political projects. Igor Kopytoff describes this method as follows:

In doing the biography of a thing, one would ask questions similar to those one asks about people: What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its "status" and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized "ages" or periods in the thing's "life," and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what

happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?<sup>4</sup>

One of the possibilities opened up by this method is that of resisting the nation-centric approach that repatriation discourses frequently reproduce; that is, the erasure of political complexity that takes place when a demand is made that France, for example, should return an object to Egypt. This project asks: to which French organizing bodies, specifically, is the demand made, and by whom, specifically, is the return sought? In what political context is the demand made, and how does the demand resist or support existing dynamics of power and oppression within and beyond Egypt? As Paul Basu notes in his discussion of ‘object diaspora’ as method, notions of ‘origin’, ‘exile’, and ‘return’ are deeply fraught, for human populations and museum collections alike.<sup>5</sup> This project resists the lionization of the state — including the postcolonial state — by highlighting histories of grassroots activism and organizing, and their impacts on sites of authority and power. These enactments of anticolonial agitation will be traced through Egyptian media and grey literature, as well as through readings against the grain of archival museum documents (such those pertaining to the coffin of Isis-Weret) for the impacts of such agitation. In doing so, this project aims to recount a kind of ‘history from below’ of these familiar Pharaonic things.

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<sup>4</sup> Igor Kopytoff, “The Biographies of Things,” in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 66–67.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Basu, “Object Diasporas, Resourcing Communities: Sierra Leonean Collections in the Global Museumscape,” *Museum Anthropology* 34, no. 1 (2011): 29–30, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01105.x>.

## 1.1 Museal Foundations

How these things came to act as lynchpins of Western museum collections can be traced to the history of shifting political relations between Egypt and the West, and the ways those relations have been co-constituted by projects of conquest, study, collection, and display. Egypt itself has long held fascination in Europe for its association with the Bible lands and Moses' pharaoh. This symbolic association motivated the antiquities market, so that as early as the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century Sir Thomas Browne would complain of the consumption and objectification of human remains; "The Ægyptian Mummies, which Cambyses or time hath spared, avarice now consumeth."<sup>6</sup>

Yet despite Egypt's long-held presence in European markets and public imaginaries, formal political ties were sparse until 1798, when General Napoleon Bonaparte launched a military campaign to seize control of Ottoman-ruled Egypt. As a show of newfound French republican power, this campaign was founded on strategic grounds as well as ideological ones: Egypt was of critical geopolitical significance as a major outpost of Ottoman control; a nexus of trade routes between Africa, Asia, and Europe; a source of colonial influence in a time of perceived French military vulnerability; and a bulwark against British expansion.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, French control of Egypt was conceived as part of the broader Napoleonic project of global rule through

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<sup>6</sup> Sir Thomas Browne, *Hydriotaphia, Urn Burial With an Account of Some Urns Found at Brampton in Norfolk* (London: Whittingham & Co., 1658), 80.

<sup>7</sup> Vivant Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt, Volume I*, trans. Arthur Aikin, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (New York: Heard and Forman, 1803), xix–xx, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316106020>.

rational order, in line with the reigning principles of Enlightenment thought.<sup>8</sup> The Expedition's success was framed by its architects as a historical inevitability given the new French social order's self-conception as the natural political and philosophical successor of the Roman empire, the rightful ruler of a sadly degraded nation, just as the Ptolemies were to Ancient Egypt's final dynasties.<sup>9</sup>

While the Napoleonic Expedition in Egypt was ultimately a short-lived, dismal failure in terms of its military aims,<sup>10</sup> its cultural impact has been immense and long-lasting. This impact can be seen in the thousands of pages written by those directly and indirectly involved with the Expedition, as well as the acquisition of countless antiquities that still form a significant part of many national museum collections. The publications, exhibitions, and various media reappropriations that followed fundamentally reshaped Egypt's place in the European imagination in ways that continue to resonate across cultural industries until today.<sup>11</sup> Whether intended to be read as fact or fiction, these resultant texts created a field from which Europe's conception of its own place in the world was continuously re-inscribed, one that entrenched a framework of global mastery that hinged on study and collection.

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<sup>8</sup> "It was only by spreading civilization and assimilating manners that [Napoleon] hoped to retain Egypt; and, preparing to put in practice all that theory could suggest for this purpose, he invited men of knowledge and genius in every pursuit to be his companions: sensible, also, of the valuable discoveries to be made in Egypt, he prepared in like manner to bring back these to Europe." Denon, 1:xxx.

<sup>9</sup> Institut D'Égypte, *Memoirs Relative to Egypt*, 1st ed. (London: T. Gilbert, 1800), 354, 455.

<sup>10</sup> G A Henty, *At Aboukir and Acre: A Story of Napoleon's Invasion of Egypt* (Tuscon, AZ: Fireship Press, 1899), 311.

<sup>11</sup> As Edward Said argues in *Orientalism*, "For with Napoleon's occupation of Egypt processes were set in motion between East and West that still dominate our contemporary cultural and political perspectives. And the Napoleonic expedition, with its great collective monument of erudition, the *Description de L'Égypte*, provided a scene or setting for Orientalism, since Egypt and subsequently the other Islamic lands were viewed as the live province, the laboratory, the theater of effective Western knowledge about the Orient." Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979), 42–43.

Of these many resulting texts, a few emerge as notable, recurring reference points of Egyptological historiography. Vaunted by its state actors as an enlightened, scholarly mission, the unabridged, official publication of the Napoleonic Expedition's studies was the *Description De l'Égypte* (1826). A massive, twenty-six volume tome, the *Description* covered everything from biology, agriculture, and cartography to five millennia of artistic and cultural history, from the ancient past to the present day. While this was the most comprehensive collection of the Expedition's work — one still touted as a major French civilizational achievement — it was not necessarily the most socially or even academically impactful one; its sheer size necessitated a late publication date, by which point, a great many Egyptological discoveries had been made that rendered its contents all but obsolete.<sup>12</sup> By comparison, the *Mémoires sur l'Égypte* —, a relatively compact collection of scientific writings by the Expeditionary team, published in relatively inexpensive, short volumes over the course of the Expedition (and, unlike the *Description*, translated into English) — acquired a far greater scope of influence. Its tone, unlike the *Description*, was less formal, and its contents geared more towards the interests of the literate French public. These include analyses with potential industrial, medical, military, or agricultural applications, descriptions of antiquities, ethnographic and anthropological taxonomizations, or literary and poetic musings.<sup>13</sup>

Contributing as well to the *Mémoires*' public appeal was a narrative through-line

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<sup>12</sup> Andrew Bednarski, *Holding Egypt: Tracing the Reception of the Description de l'Égypte in Nineteenth-Century Great Britain*. (London: Golden House Publications, 2005), 95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030751330709300131>.

<sup>13</sup> Institut D'Égypte, *Mémoires Sur l'Égypte, Publiés Pendant Les Campagnes Du Général Bonaparte Dans Les Années 1798 and 1799*, 1st ed. (London: T. Gilbert, 1800).

animating the text, ending with a *discours* by Dominique-Vivant Denon, who meditates in rousing prose on the expedition's broad philosophical, scientific, and nationalistic goals. Denon, distinguished among the Expeditionary team for his skill in communicating those abstract goals into compelling art and prose, published the *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte* [Travels in Lower and Upper Egypt, 1802-1803], a personal account of his experiences in the Expedition, which proved a massive commercial success with three printed editions in French as well as translations into English, German, Dutch, and Italian, numbering upwards of forty editions overall.<sup>14</sup>

But despite the differing audiences and impacts of the *Description*, *Mémoires*, and the *Voyage*, they each significantly contributed to a newly emergent mode of popular Egyptological consumption, one that would be described as 'Egyptomania' in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> The cultural impacts of these texts were hardly peripheral to the Expedition's aims: in fact, they were central to it. Edward Said argues that:

Napoleon's military expedition to Egypt was motivated by a desire to capture Egypt, to threaten the British, to demonstrate French power; but Napoleon and his scholarly experts were there also to put Egypt before Europe, in a sense to stage its antiquity, its wealth of associations, cultural importance, and unique aura for a European audience.<sup>16</sup>

This is to say that in many ways, the Expedition's work took place just as much in and through the European public sphere as it did on Egyptian soil. The influence of these texts on the European public imagination was at least threefold; first, as texts *per se*, they

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<sup>14</sup> Bednarski, 54.

<sup>15</sup> Noreen Doyle, "The Earliest Known Uses of 'l'égyptomanie'/'Egyptomania' in French and English," *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 8 (2016): 122–25.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1993), 118.

were voraciously consumed by European publics, instigating a frenzied demand for Egyptian subject matter that would later be described as ‘Egyptomania’, and setting the stage for the hundreds of travel accounts that would be published over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> Second, the expedition produced and inspired a breadth of scholarship that displaced India and the ‘Bible lands’ as the focus of Orientalist study.<sup>18</sup> The implications of the frameworks through which European scholars sought to make Egypt *known* will be examined in greater depth later in this chapter, but suffice it to say at this juncture that this effort was tied to the need to subjugate the nation, assimilate its populace, and make effective use of its resources. Following his return from Egypt and the commercial success of the *Voyage*, Denon would be granted the directorship of the Louvre — which had then recently been renamed the Musée Napoléon — which he would dramatically restructure in accordance with Enlightenment-era civilizational taxonomies.<sup>19</sup> The Louvre, having been repurposed in the wake of the French revolution as a public institution from its former role as the royal collection,<sup>20</sup> demonstrated through its exhibitions and decorative program the new French regime’s self-conception as Egypt’s rightful successor by way of the Roman empire through its exhibitions and decorative program.<sup>21</sup> This new model of a *public* rather than *royal* national collection comes to be tightly imbricated with the Enlightenment’s broader universalisms, allowing the newly-

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<sup>17</sup> Elliott Colla, “Hooked on Pharaonics: Literature and the Appropriations of Ancient Egypt” (University of California, Berkley, 2000), <https://doi.org/10.16953/deusbed.74839>.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1993), 119.

<sup>19</sup> Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 26–27, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203978719>.

<sup>20</sup> Donald Malcolm Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to WWI* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 46.

<sup>21</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 27.

formed French state, as Desan argues, to “[paint] on a worldwide canvas,” allowing revolutionaries to “built legitimacy for their own revolution at home” upon an ideological foundation that “drew on concepts and practices developed in the colonies, and the act of attempting to create an international movement and spread revolution abroad—whether by dialogue, propaganda, or force.”<sup>22</sup> Building “the most beautiful museum in the universe”<sup>23</sup> thus played a role in universalizing the French national project, providing it with a materially and culturally (in)valuable bulwark that “positioned France on the frontlines of international revolution,” justifying expansionism just as it “generated a powerful, global ideology in favor of republicanism, rights, and popular sovereignty.”<sup>24</sup> Not only did this newly imagined model of the museum-as-public-institution widely influence the modern formation of the ‘universal museum’ as it is now most commonly understood,<sup>25</sup> but the confiscation of the Expedition’s loot by the newly-victorious British army also directly fed the British Museum’s foundational collections,<sup>26</sup> which remain some of the largest in the world to date.

## 1.2 Object Desires

Described by Edward Said as “an invasion which was in many ways the very model of a truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another, apparently stronger

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<sup>22</sup> Suzanne Desan, *The French Revolution in Global Perspective*, ed. Suzanne Desan, Lynn Hunt, and William Max Nelson (Cornell University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Marie-Anne Dupuy-Vachey, *Dominique-Vivant Denon : L’œil de Napoléon* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1999), 21, 135. See also: Jean Chatelain, *Dominique Vivant Denon et Le Louvre de Napoléon* (Perrin, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Desan, *The French Revolution in Global Perspective*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Arthur C. Danto, “Masterpieces and the Museum,” *Grand Street* 9, no. 2 (1990): 45, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25007346>.

<sup>26</sup> Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to WWI*, 46–47.

one,”<sup>27</sup> the control of Egypt sought by the Napoleonic Expedition was not only *physical*, but *epistemic* as well. The *Mémoires sur l'Égypte*, compiled by the Expedition's team of multidisciplinary *savants*, describes the motivation as follows:

Egypt has always fixed the attention of the literary world, more than any other portion of Africa. A multitude of travellers have accordingly repaired thither to seek the vestiges of its ancient splendor, but a wretched, and barbarous people, have constantly opposed their researches. It was impossible for the antiquary to rummage to the bosom of the earth, the naturalists were afraid to wander along the fields, the geographer did not dare make use of his instruments: thus the prying eye of the European could merely skim along the banks of the Nile, and beyond its shores we knew little or nothing. But the conquest of Egypt presents a new field for letters. [...] *To conquer, is in other words to march over, and become acquainted with a country* [emphasis added].<sup>28</sup>

Egypt is constructed herein as an ambivalent site of knowledge and desire; it attracts European attentions with its evidence of historical grandeur, but it simultaneously resists knowability with a populace unwilling to yield to the voyeur's gaze. The scale, quantity, and aesthetic power of its antiquities is evident even to the superficial observations of those who “could merely skim along the banks of the Nile,” but *mastery* of the nation and its history are impeded by its consistent refusal to be *made known* in ways productive to prevailing European national projects. This emphatic defense of the “the prying eye of the European” against those who “constantly opposed their researches,” reveals a deep epistemic ambivalence, where Egypt's very *unknowability* — the essentially and incommensurably Oriental nature of its modern nation — bolsters the importance of the Expedition's own efforts at knowledge-production. Conquest is thus folded into the

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<sup>27</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Institut D'Égypte, *Memoirs Relative to Egypt*, 44–45.

“triumphant technique for taking the immense fecundity of the Orient and making it systematically, even alphabetically, knowable by Western ' laymen,”<sup>29</sup> and the *savants* themselves become a kind of ‘knowable community’ (in Said’s sense of Raymond Williams’ term): that is, a group whose normative social structures stand in for those of the reader, and which is projected upon a nation “in such a way as to give it identity, presence, ways of reusable articulation.”<sup>30</sup> These narrative passages — so important to the popularity and accessibility of the *Mémoires* and Denon’s *Voyages* compared to that of the comparatively dry *Description* — gave readers *epistemic* access to a place deemed so deeply resistant to knowability that it should “*require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination.”<sup>31</sup> And so this ambivalence — that between seemingly incommensurable modes of knowledge, visibility, and desire — underlies the texts that emerge from the Expedition, which are typically credited with founding Egyptology as a discipline,<sup>32</sup> and dramatically reshaping archaeology and museum practice.<sup>33</sup>

By reading against the archival grain,<sup>34</sup> this mode of refusal emerges consistently — though subtly — throughout the corpus of these early 19<sup>th</sup> century Egyptological texts.

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979), 65.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1993), 72.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Bednarski, *Holding Egypt: Tracing the Reception of the Description de l’Égypte in Nineteenth-Century Great Britain.*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> See: Erin A Peters, “The Napoleonic Egyptian Scientific Expedition and the Nineteenth-Century Survey Museum” (Seton Hall University, 2009), 89.

<sup>34</sup> As described by Ann Stoler, this is an effort to “write a history from the bottom up by reading upper class sources upside down.” (*Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra’s Plantation Belt, 1870-1979*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), vii, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2760808>.) At the same time, seeing that colonial archives were not only “sites of command—but of countermand as well,” this also entails an effort “to explore the grain with care and read along it first,” leaving space for the intra-national

Egypt and its populace are posited again and again as inscrutable figures; not simply disinterested but “a wretched, and barbarous people”<sup>35</sup> actively resistant to being made known. The desire to *study*, to *know*, to *master* the nation — and insofar as the motivation for study is self-described as *fixation*, it is posited decidedly as *desire* — is thus deployed as impetus for invasion, rather than a by-product of it. Indeed, as Denon’s first English translator remarks, noting the systematic bloodshed that made the Expedition’s discoveries possible: “Learning and science were leagued with arms.”<sup>36</sup>

Denon’s travelogue intersperses descriptions of archaeological findings with the high stakes of their acquisition: his archaeological efforts are interrupted throughout by the Egyptian military’s attempt to halt the French invasion, or by the local populace’s retaliatory efforts against the Expedition’s violence, rape, and plunder.<sup>37</sup> After a bloody victory in Alexandria, Denon meditates on France’s civilizational place atop the Ancient Egyptian, Greco-Roman, Arab, and Turkish historical strata. He describes here a wealth of antiquities that function both as evidence of the vehemence with which Egypt’s successive religious orders guarded antiquities (attesting to the glory of their acquisition

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contestations that emerge even in contexts of pervasive violence. (Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, 50.)

<sup>35</sup> *Memoirs*, 44.

<sup>36</sup> Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt, Volume 1*, 1:XXIX.

<sup>37</sup> Far from an anachronistic application of 21<sup>st</sup> century values to Denon’s time in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, this view is shared by the document’s contemporaneous translator (albeit, one from a rival nation). He remarks that “Denon, not being a soldier by profession, and therefore not hardened to the atrocities of war, has, notwithstanding his natural partiality towards his countrymen, and his personal regard for many of the Chiefs in the expedition, given a fairer account of the treatment which the natives underwent from their invader, than we are likely to receive from any other quarter: and, indeed, of the campaigns in upper Egypt, he is as yet the only historian: in this view, therefore, his narrative is of peculiar value. We see what a dreadful licence of lust, rapine, and slaughter, the French troops were allowed to indulge in, and how whole villages were exterminated upon the bare suspicion of meditating resistance to the ravishers of their women, the desolators of their fields, the incendiaries of their houses.” Denon, 1:IV.

on behalf of France), as well as the apparent local apathy regarding the same antiquities (conversely, reaffirming the French claim on the basis of scholarly superiority in recognizing their value):

Near these baths, one of the principal mosques, formerly a primitive church, entitled St. Athanasius, is situated. This edifice, in as ruinous a state as its style is magnificent, may give some idea of the carelessness of the Turks relative to the objects of which they are the most jealous. Before our arrival, they did not suffer a Christian to approach this building, and chose rather to place a centinel over it than to repair the doors, which in the state in which we found them, would neither shut nor turn on their hinges.

In the middle of the court-yard of this mosque is a small octagonal temple, which contains a bowl of Egyptian black marble, with white and yellow spots, of incomparable beauty, both on account of the substance of which it is formed, and of the innumerable hieroglyphical figures with which it is covered, both withinside and without. This monument, which is, without doubt, a sarcophagus of ancient Egypt, will, perhaps, be hereafter illustrated by volumes of dissertations. It may be considered as a very valuable antique, and as one of our most precious spoils in Egypt, with which it is to be wished that our national museum may be enriched.<sup>38</sup>

The object of colonial desire is constructed here with an ambivalent identification to the indigenous structures of valuation that contributed to the object's preservation through the pre-modern millennia. The described sarcophagus is symbolically overdetermined to the same extent as the Enlightenment project as a whole: Denon's quote exalts in the hieroglyphics' impeccable preservation, which speak to the care<sup>39</sup> with which this millennia-old object has been safeguarded under Pharaonic, Christian, and Muslim rule.

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<sup>38</sup> Denon, 1:49–50.

<sup>39</sup> This may be the requisite point to draw attention to the etymological link between 'curator' and the verb 'to care' (see: Janet Marstine, *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 10, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470776230>). In terms of the colonial function of object-desire and of the erasure of counter-hegemonic, indigenous modes of object-desire, it may be prudent to ask: are there other modes with which care for artifacted things may be manifested? This is to say: are there other, counter-museological modes with which it is possible to curate *or* to care?

At the same time, its edifice is described as “ruinous” and the guarded, inaccessible doorway is treated as evidence of the “carelessness of the Turks relative to the objects of which they are the most jealous,” a phrase that itself summarizes the scene’s contradictions. It becomes necessary to simultaneously advertise and diminish the desire (or more general affective valuation) for the object, and so it must both be a site of jealous safeguarding *and* utter neglect. So the edifice “in as ruinous a state as its style is magnificent” becomes a polysemic signifier, vacillating between that value which might be salvaged by the colonizer capable of recognizing it, and that which was imbued by its original creators. Colonial plunder is rationalized here via the slippage between dual sites of valuation: the object is *valuable enough* to the indigenous<sup>40</sup> population so as to have

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<sup>40</sup> The question of whether or not the present-day Egyptian population is broadly speaking indigenous to Egypt is germane to this study only insofar as ancestry is regarded as legitimate social/legal grounds to lay claim to *patrimony* in both its material and immaterial sense. The issue is additionally confounded by the facts that: 1) Egyptian national self-conceptions have varied enormously through the years (see: Gershoni and Jankowski 1986 and Reid 2015), 2) the science of demography is in its infancy, and sometimes still overlaps disturbingly with that of physiognomy (see: Zakrzewski 2007), 3) Egyptian ‘Arabness’ is deployed both as a stable genetic haplotype *and* an amorphous socio-linguistic mode of political identification (see: Porter 2012), and 4) that the politics of Egyptian identity have been ideologically contested through diverse and mutually exclusive discursive modes by different counter-hegemonic projects, such as those of Afrocentric Kemetism and Egyptian majoritarian and minoritarian political efforts including those of Coptic, Nubian, and diaspora communities). Thus, the structures of geography, knowledge-production, power, and oppression within this discourse are deeply convoluted. Accordingly, I do not stake a claim to the racial makeup of the Ancient Egyptian population, nor will I cite ‘scientific’ research to support or refute claims to indigeneity. As part of this project’s decolonial methodology, I will instead posit that *indigeneity is a political relation to specific lands, constructed in opposition to coloniality*. The Egyptian populace at the time of European conquest is consistently referred to as being ‘native’ or ‘indigènes’ (see for example: Lane 1806); not because the British or French were claiming that Egyptians held an unbroken genetic continuity since time immemorial, but rather, because the indigeneity of the Egyptian population was a socio-political relation to *the European presence itself*. Indigeneity in this sense need not be understood as homogenous or essentialist: it is a political class defined and treated as subject to the colonial regime. In this way, the (predominantly Arabic-speaking, and in that sense Arab) Egyptian populace may be understood as indigenous, while nonetheless occupying a position of socio-political power in relation to the (not necessarily Arab, but still Egyptian) Nubian population, itself also indigenous (see: Venkateswar and Hughes 2013). For these reasons, this project will refer to Egypt’s colonial subjects and their descendants as being ‘indigenous’ (with a lowercase ‘I’) as a means of differentiating this political subject-position from the mode of identification used by Indigenous nations within the ongoing settler-colonies of the Americas and Oceania (which will in turn be capitalized).

been preserved for the centuries necessary to imbue it with its historical value, but not *so* valuable as to necessitate the recognition of local claims to it. The valuation which was necessary for ancient antiquities to be preserved *until* the museum age is thus rendered invisible by an epistemic framework that deems museum intervention necessary for their preservation thereafter.

Denon's interpellation of the museum is vital to deciphering the logics at play here: given that the museum will house the "most precious spoils in Egypt", it bridges the reader in Europe and the writer in Egypt, hinting at the economic and scholarly motives that symbolically co-constitute the sarcophagus. The museum is in this case both the cause *and* effect of Denon's valuative structures: for the sarcophagus to be "one of our most precious spoils," its acquisition is understood to be a hard-won battle. But for such spoils of victory to be rightfully earned in line with the Enlightenment's meritocratic ideals, its antagonist must also be despotic, barbaric, or ignorant; 'careless' of treasures it squanders through neglect. The semantic slippage in the verb 'to *value*' becomes apparent here: The Expedition's scholarly enterprise elucidates the artifact's historical and aesthetic value, and in so doing, bestowing it with real, quantifiable monetary value to a *collection*. In line with David Joselit's conceptualization of 'curation' as a means though which particular modes of selection produce institutional value and meaning, the

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For more on the decolonial politics of this usage, see also: Ruth Panelli, "Social Geographies: Encounters with Indigenous and More-than-White/Anglo Geographies," *Progress in Human Geography* 32, no. 6 (2008): 801–11 and Jay T. Johnson et al., "Creating Anti-Colonial Geographies: Embracing Indigenous Peoples' Knowledges and Rights," *Geographical Research* 45, no. 2 (2007): 117–20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-5871.2007.00441.x>.

process of collection itself transforms the object's transactional sphere from one that is seen to be historically *invaluable* but materially *unvalued*, to one where its civilizational value can be extracted through display.<sup>41</sup> The construction of this ambivalent Egyptian relationship with Pharaonic cultural patrimony contributes both to France's self-proclaimed civilizational supremacy and to actual, material economies of the antiquities market to which the museum is deeply tied.

### 1.3 Object Values in Flux

While a great deal of writing since the 1980s has critically engaged with museology's colonial history and the ways that Enlightenment taxonomies have contributed through the museum's authority to entrench dominant social hierarchies,<sup>42</sup> less emphasis has been placed to date on the ways in which resistance in the Global South has *functionally* shaped museum practice. How, for example, did early legal and popular efforts to curb the Westward flow of cultural patrimony affect the way that the resulting collections were exhibited, studied, understood, consumed, published, and valued? One demonstration of this legacy can be seen in Egypt's colonial-era antiquities protection laws. For example, excavated finds in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were split up via the *partage* system between the archaeologist (or the patron/institution they represented) and

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<sup>41</sup> David Joselit, *Heritage and Debt* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020), 191.

For more on the mechanisms through which objects traverse incommensurable transactional spheres, see: Igor Kopytoff, "The Biographies of Things," in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 77.

<sup>42</sup> A more comprehensive discussion on this 'civilizing' function of the museum is taken up in the 'Museum models' section below, but Tony Bennett effectively articulates this phenomenon by stating: "In practice, museums, and especially art galleries, have often been effectively appropriated by social elites so that, rather than functioning as institutions of homogenization, as reforming thought had envisaged, they have continued to play a significant role in differentiating elite from popular social classes." Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York, London: Routledge, 1995), 28.

the Egyptian government (or, more specifically, a representative of the Ministry of Antiquities, which was uniformly helmed by European colonial officers until the 1952 revolution).<sup>43</sup> Under this system, both parties were to come to an agreement as to the total financial value of the finds and negotiate an even split, 50/50 for each party, based on that agreed-upon value. As Achraf Al-Achmawi argues, this legal framework served a compromise of sorts between the powerful European pressure on the Ottoman court to turn a blind eye to the unstemmed tide of illicit antiquities exports, and the increasing pressure from within Egypt to retain a firm hold on what little of the nation's patrimony remained.<sup>44</sup>

The accompanying requirement to financially quantify the value of each object before it could enter museum collections can be understood as a 'passage point' through which the artifact — a 'boundary object' in Susan Leigh Star's sense — is 'translated' or 'funnelled' from one epistemic framework to another.<sup>45</sup> Through this system, social, historical, artistic, and geopolitical complexity is winnowed down to *price*: a single, quantifiable metric that permits institutional valuation. This legal framework's resultant structures have endured until the present day despite many subsequent re-appraisals of the objects in question. Most notably, this can be witnessed in the ongoing efforts to repatriate the Bust of Nefertiti, in which both the Egyptian and German governments have been effectively restricted to legal arguments about whether or not the Bust's

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<sup>43</sup> James Cuno, *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage*, 2011, xxxiii.

<sup>44</sup> Achraf El-Achmawi, *Sariqat Mashrou'a* (Cairo: Al Dar Al Masriah Al Lubnaniah, 2012), 18.

<sup>45</sup> Susan Leigh Star and James R Griesemer, "Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39," *Social Studies of Science* 19, no. 3 (1989): 387-420.

market value was fraudulently represented — all despite the fact that from the moment of its excavation, it has never been nor was it ever intended to be auctioned at market, making its price tag all but meaningless as a representation of the intricate social, political, and historical factors that have contributed to its iconic status.<sup>46</sup> Following its discovery, German fears of an Egyptian political backlash resulted in a nearly decade-long halt on exhibiting or publishing about the Bust<sup>47</sup>, and when the ban was eventually lifted, the German press strove to circumvent such controversy by immediately and vociferously positing it as an icon of German identity.<sup>48</sup> Institutional responses such as these can be understood as a functional part of the museum's coloniality, a way in which competing sites of object-desire<sup>49</sup> have shaped museum processes since the late 18<sup>th</sup> — early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The role of *desire* here is critical, as it is a mode of artifactual valuation that has at times been elided by institutional discourses. I posit here that one of the ways that object-desire comes to be calcified within an artifact's popular conceptualization is through its

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<sup>46</sup> El-Achmawi, *Sariqat Mashrou'a*, 208–26.

<sup>47</sup> Donald Malcolm Reid, *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from WWI to Nasser* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2015), 110.

<sup>48</sup> Claudia Breger, "The 'Berlin' Nefertiti Bust: Imperial Fantasies in Twentieth-Century German Archaeological Discourse," in *The Body of the Queen: Gender and Rule in the Courty World, 1500-2000*, ed. Regina. Schulte, 2020, 281–99.

<sup>49</sup> For analyses of museological object-oriented love and desire from an affect studies perspective, see: Hilary Geoghegan and Alison Hess, "Object-Love at the Science Museum: Cultural Geographies of Museum Storerooms," *Cultural Geographies* 22, no. 3 (2015): 445–65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474014539247>; and Jude Hill, "The Story of the Amulet: Locating the Enchantment of Collections," *Journal of Material Culture* 12, no. 1 (2007): 65–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183507074562>.

Conversely, for a critical re-consideration of object-centered *negative* affect, see: Monica Eileen Patterson, "Objects of Hatred : The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia as 'Counter-Museum,'" in *Curating Difficult Knowledge*, ed. Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E Milton, and Monica Eileen Patterson (Palgrave, 2014), 55–71; Erica Lehrer, "Most Disturbing Souvenirs: Curative Museology in a Cultural Conflict Zone," in *Curatorial Dreams: Critics Imagine Exhibitions*, 2016, 46–63.

designation as a ‘masterpiece’ or ‘trophy’. This concept of the artifact as a trophy of imperial conquest is a frequently alluded-to but rarely materially unpacked concept. Despite the long-acknowledged role of the museum as an ideological apparatus of the European colonial engine, there is little analysis of the social, political, and economic function of such trophies. How, specifically, does the trophy lend value to an institution, and what work does it perform as a marker of specific valuative structures?

For Arthur Danto, conquest is in fact *definitional* both to museums and their collections: he bids us to consider: “if you were Napoleon, whether you would steal those works. If not, they are not masterpieces, and belong in museums only if we change the concept of the museum.”<sup>50</sup> The categories of ‘masterpiece’ and ‘trophy’ overlap here in their function as part of the material and symbolic disenfranchisement of a social Other; within that overlap is the category of *spolia opima* or ‘rich spoils,’ in the Roman tradition of that “most exalted military honor” which “fell to a Roman general who had [...] killed the enemy leader in battle and stripped the corpse of its armor.”<sup>51</sup> This framework – cited by Major-General Herbert Taylor as rationale for his seizure of the Rosetta Stone from the defeated Napoleonic forces<sup>52</sup> – hinges on both the teleological function of *spolia* as the rightful gains of their possessor, and from their status as *opima* which conferred through prowess of their acquisition. In Danto’s framework, the ‘masterpiece’ functions

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<sup>50</sup> Danto, “Masterpieces and the Museum,” 115.

<sup>51</sup> Harriet I. Flower, “The Tradition of the Spolia Opima: M. Claudius Marcellus and Augustus,” *Classical Antiquity* 19, no. 1 (2000): 34. See also J. W. Rich, “Drusus and the Spolia Opima,” *The Classical Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (1999): 544–55.

<sup>52</sup> Taylor makes sure to designate the Stone as “a proud trophy of the arms of Britain (I could almost say *spolia opima*), not plundered from defenceless inhabitants but honourably acquired by the fortune of war.” The Trustees of the British Museum, *The Rosetta Stone in the British Museum* (London, 1929), 28.

as such a trophy. It is a thing *would have been worth stealing* because it could serve the kinds of ends that such spoils of war serve: that is, it would have been *very difficult to obtain*, and is thus worthy of conquest for its power to communicate the hardship *of* that conquest, thereby valorizing and legitimizing it.

For Danto, this process is foundational to the museum's institutional aims. But while Danto's framework makes visible the ways that the affective value *already* bound up with the object motivates subsequent conquest, it elides the way that the process of *conquest itself* confers the status of *opima*, that which transforms an object into a trophy, a masterpiece. Thus the masterpiece — the historical object that elicits the kind of affective response we see in Denon's description of the Alexandrian sarcophagus — is posited here as an object of desire, one seen both to *contain* value at the moment of its theft, and to *gain* it through that same process that deems it worthy of plunder. But the desire that contributes to the object's valuation also has an additional function: since part of the museum's esteem is obtained through the knowledge that another has been deprived of the same acquisition, colonial object-desire is bound up with the valuative logics of artifactual conquest, control and display. This is to say that a museum collection garners part of its esteem from its reputation as a storehouse of especially notable and unique items, ones that it may convincingly claim that *it alone* has. This, I argue, is the function of the trophy; an object whose value derives not only from its own discretely held properties, but also from its owner's implicit power to dispossess it from other, less worthy mantles.

But while the *value* that ‘source communities’<sup>53</sup> contribute to such trophies bolsters the status of a collection, the *modes* of valuation through which objects were defined prior to their artifaction are diminished to make way for the trophy-winner’s unique merit. For example, Erasmus Wilson’s compiled account of the British acquisition of one of the Alexandrian obelisks explicitly describes it as a trophy, noting that:

It is scarcely necessary to say, those obelisks have for ages been admired for their magnitude, workmanship, and antiquity. After the glorious termination of the conjoint expedition to Egypt in 1801, it was proposed by some officers of high rank to convey to England this identical obelisk as an appropriate trophy.<sup>54</sup>

The abstract admiration of obelisks is clearly linked here with its appropriateness as a trophy; but, *by whom, in what way, and for what reasons* it is admired remains an ambivalent theme in the text. British desire for it is evident: Samuel Briggs, consul at the time in Alexandria, equates it with the prior British gift of a military naval vessel to Egypt’s Ottoman Viceroy.<sup>55</sup> While the same letter suggests that Muhammad Ali Pasha held the same stance, other texts in the publication hold a dimmer view of the Egyptian public. Despite having remained on the same site since the rein of Thutmose III around 1450 BCE, General Sir James Alexander worried that the obelisk “might be converted into building materials ere long, if not looked after.”<sup>56</sup> Along similar lines, Wilson describes the obelisk’s condition as “almost as fresh as if [...] just issued from the

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<sup>53</sup> For an extended discussion on the construction, contestation, and critique of the ‘source community’ more broadly, see: Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, “Introduction,” in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader* (Edmonton: AU Press, 2005), 1–16.

<sup>54</sup> Erasmus Wilson, *Cleopatra’s Needle: With Brief Notes on Egypt and Egyptian Obelisks* (London: Brain & Company, 1877), 187.

<sup>55</sup> Wilson, 187.

<sup>56</sup> Wilson, 194.

workman's hand," attributing the bulk of its damage to millennia of sandstorms,<sup>57</sup> though he later gravely states that "before its transport to London became the theme of discussion, there were few probably who cared for it."<sup>58</sup> And while the care required to preserve the obelisk during the intervening millennia is rendered invisible, another, more political form of safeguarding is also entirely disregarded in the text: the local outcry over the loss this obelisk and the two others titled 'Cleopatra's Needle' resulted in Egypt's first edicts to protect Pharaonic antiquities.<sup>59</sup> Wilson's account explicates the violence of such conquest within the social and legal norms of the British literate class,<sup>60</sup> and accordingly, the obelisk's status as a trophy is reiterated in relation to those who have been deprived of it: in this case, both the French<sup>61</sup> and Egyptians.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Wilson, 23–24.

<sup>58</sup> Wilson, 182.

<sup>59</sup> Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to WWI*, 102–3.

<sup>60</sup> An official report by Arthur Arnold on the obelisk's acquisition reassures the reader that "It forms no part of any structure; it is not protected, nor in any way cared for by the Egyptians; and, within fifty yards of the ground in which the English column is lying, there is another, apparently of the same age and size, carved with hieroglyphics of similar character. It appears to me, therefore, that the English people could, if they please, appropriate this gift free from any fear or feeling that in doing so they would be 'spoiling the Egyptians.'" "

Wilson, *Cleopatra's Needle: With Brief Notes on Egypt and Egyptian Obelisks*, 196.

<sup>61</sup> The British geopolitical need for an obelisk is reiterated throughout the text as a means of asserting British imperial power in relation to France. On this, Consul Samuel Briggs remarks: "The removal to England of so massive a body would, no doubt, be a work of some difficulty and expense; but similar undertakings have been accomplished by the ancient Romans. [Obelisks], however, still attest the power and grandeur of the ancient masters of the world; and if the bronze column erected at Paris in modern times serves to ornament that city, and perpetuate the trophies of the French arms, this Egyptian obelisk, in the capital of England, would equally remain a permanent memorial of British achievements [...]" in Wilson, *Cleopatra's Needle: With Brief Notes on Egypt and Egyptian Obelisks*, 188-189.

<sup>62</sup> In the same text, General Sir James Alexander Wilson connects the trophy's valuation with its dispossession in same deeply dissonant thought: "To remove works of art from countries where they form ornaments, and are conspicuous objects of interest, is quite unworthy of a great people; but the obelisk in question lies in dishonour among low huts in the outskirts of Alexandria, and might well be spared to ornament one of our capital cities." In Wilson, 192.

These ambivalent modes of value-attribution can be better understood if — as part of a broader goal of unsettling the colonial foundations underpinning Egyptological thought — one discards the normativity typically attributed to ‘artifacts’ as a category. Even naming the ‘artifact’ as such attributes to it a particular mode of valuation, one that reduces human remains and grave goods to objects of study. Elliot Colla describes this process as one of ‘artifaction’, noting that: “even though the processes of artifaction and figuration attempted to construct antiquities as inert matter, the stuff itself often did not obey this command. The proliferation of mummy fictions in English and French literatures attests to the anxieties that attended this.”<sup>63</sup> Heterogenous modes of object-valuation were endemic even within the colonial centre, and within this thicket of overdetermination, resistance can be located wherever *things* of great value can be found.<sup>64</sup> Ultimately, this is all to say that *even though* Egyptian modes of desire and ‘preservation’ did indeed take place (such as with the Alexandrian obelisk), the

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<sup>63</sup> Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 19.

<sup>64</sup> The typologies through which the objects of this study gain their ontological determinations are themselves the terrain of long-held contestations; in Arabic, Pharaonic things might be termed *āthār* or *antīka* (antiquities), *aṣnām* (idols), *tuḥaf* (treasures), or *maṣāḥit* (cursed things), among other terms. Yet the epistemologies that underlie these terms are the very ones which are stymied by the disciplinary imposition of museal valuations. Accordingly, in order to critically engage with those valuations, I will use ‘artifact’ in this study to refer to objects that have undergone such processes of artifaction insofar as they have come to hold value for projects of collection, study, or display. For a historiography of the emergence of ‘artifact’ as a mode of object-taxonomy and for more on processes of artifaction, see: Colla, 1–66.

Conversely, the term ‘thing’ will be used here to suggest to the agential capacity of such material sites, as framed by Martin Heidegger and elucidated upon by Bill Brown. For further elaboration on such things, see: Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 1–22, and Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1971), 164–84.

Finally, I will use both ‘heritage’ and ‘patrimony’ to refer to the in-/tangible aspects of national and cultural histories (in the same sense as the Arabic *‘turāṭ’*); ‘heritage’ more so when history, broadly speaking, is in focus, and ‘patrimony’ when national claims to material culture are at stake. For more on ‘heritage’ in the tangible/intangible sense, see: Dawson Munjeri, “Tangible and Intangible Heritage: From Difference to Convergence,” *Museum International* 56, no. 1–2 (2004): 12–20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1350-0775.2004.00453.x.s>

designation of historical things as objects of study is not a self-evident one, nor is the imperative to ‘preserve’ such ‘objects’.

As Igor Kopytoff argues, there are different social spheres within which exchange occurs, with culturally specific value structures attributed to the circumstances under which each one operates. One of the ways in which colonial legal processes function is through the rupture of such epistemic systems and the imposition of new ones, where “the value-homogenizing-drive of the exchange system has an enormous momentum, producing results that both culture and individual cognition often oppose, but in inconsistent and even contradictory ways.”<sup>65</sup> What emerges from this is a disjuncture, or rather, a series of disjunctures that are central to the analysis of the incommensurable ways in which artifacts have been or can be *valued*. As David Graeber argues, most attempts to theorize social conceptions of value hinge on three different connotations of ‘value’:

1. “values” in the sociological sense: conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life
2. “value” in the economic sense: the degree to which objects are *desired* [emphasis added], particularly, as measured by how much others are willing to give up to get them
3. “value” in the linguistic sense, which goes back to the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure (1966), and might be most simply glossed as “meaningful difference”<sup>66</sup>

Graeber examines the interstices between the sociological, economic, and linguistic senses of ‘value’ insofar as they are applied to all spheres, both abstract and material. But

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<sup>65</sup> Kopytoff, “The Biographies of Things,” 76–77.

<sup>66</sup> David Graeber, *Toward An Anthropological Theory of Value* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780312299064>.

artifacts occupy a particular intersection of these valuative modes, one in which economic value (i.e., ‘market price’) and symbolic value (i.e., what an object ‘means’) hinge on several concomitant sociological values. Alois Riegl, by comparison, posits a conceptual framework through which artifactual objects are interpreted in accordance with a number of such interrelated though discrete values — i.e. use value, artistic value, age value, commemorative value, etc.<sup>67</sup> Historical sites and objects have been examined through a number of other valuative lenses as well; Timothy Mitchell, for example, draws on Heideggerian principles in *Colonising Egypt* to argue that Egyptological displays are centered on a concept of the world-as-exhibition, one in which colonial power is enacted through display and control.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, Elliot Colla argues in *Conflicted Antiquities* that *artifaction* — the process through which particular formations of material culture are taxonomized as part of the discrete category of ‘artifact’ — is itself a contested and ambivalent construction through which artifactual value has been appraised.<sup>69</sup> Riegl argues that while these different valuative systems need not conflict (i.e. Al-Azhar may be understood to have use value as a functioning mosque, artistic value in its decorative program, and age value in its thousand-year history), at other times they may be incommensurable (i.e. while super high-rise hotels in Mecca may facilitate the increasing

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<sup>67</sup> Alois Riegl, *The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development*, trans. Karin Bruckner and Karen Williams (Vienna: W. Braumuller, 1903), 69–83.

<sup>68</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 13.

<sup>69</sup> Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 1–10.

pilgrimages to Islam's holiest city, they may also be seen to erode the site's historical and commemorative value).

Nonetheless, as we have seen, the interpellation of ancient things into the museum (and its concomitant values of collection, preservation, education, and display) is as a means of situating artifact valuation at the intersection between the social and economic mode. Or rather, it is a means of substantiating an epistemic framework wherein social and economic modes of value-production are *always-already* coupled. The collector's gaze that projects upon a thing and declares that it belongs in a museum is a gaze that recasts *things* into *objects* that one would expect to find in a museum, negating, in turn, those functions and values that the museum is structurally incapable of supporting. These valuative tensions are critical to artifactual discourses: when one mourns the value that is lost when a historical object goes unstudied, that object is posited as one that benefits from study (i.e., a document) as opposed to one that derives its value from its status as one that ought not be subjected to study (i.e., human remains). When one grieves an object's state of disrepair and strives to see it preserved, one enshrines it as the type of object that necessitates timely repair (i.e., a machine) and not one that whose historical value is enriched or substantiated by its patina (i.e., a monument). When an object is excavated so that it may be better appreciated through display, it is re-cast as one intended for exhibition (i.e., an artwork) and not one that is degraded by extended exposure (i.e., a corpse). These delineations are hardly neutral: they distribute diverse global epistemologies into value-laden hierarchies, disciplining publics to produce normative systems of affect and valuation.

I posit here that the colonial valuative systems I have identified are structured around a series of normative assumptions: that it is better for things to last forever than it is to allow them to gradually decay, that if an object is valued it should not be hidden from the view of *appreciative* publics, that if an object is valued it should be studied, that studying the past is important enough as to justify the desecration of (particular) human remains and burial grounds, etc. These assumptions continue to underlie contemporary museology, though they need not do so. Campaigns to return artifacts to their respective nations of origin are often deeply controversial since they challenge these foundational normative values; it is precisely for this reason that theorizing such campaigns is of such critical significance to the real, material decolonization of the museum.

In addition, I argue that one mode of valuation that has been insufficiently theorized is that of the *artifact-as-trophy*: while the non-Western objects that line the shelves of Western national museums are often metaphorically described as a trophy,<sup>70</sup> the symbolic and material implications of this are largely unexamined. In *The New Museology*, Ludmilla Jordanova introduces the stakes of this designation: examining the role of *mastery* as the primary social *telos* motivating both colonial expansion and the domination of the natural world by Western societies, Jordanova argues that

In both instances, we can legitimately speak of prized objects, of trophies, the spoils of war. The trophy simultaneously expresses victory, ownership, control,

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<sup>70</sup> See for example: Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511819582>., Brian Wallis, "Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy," in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 203., Ludmilla Jordanova, "Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Museums," in *The New Museology* ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 32., Philip Wright, "The Quality of Visitors Experiences in Art Museums" in Vergo, 135.

and dominion. As such it has three qualities - it presents in material form, however incompletely, sets of practices; it triggers fantasies and memories; and it elicits admiration.<sup>71</sup>

Jordanova finds that an analysis of the social function of the museum must therefore challenge the ideological grounds upon which institutional assertions of power are based. While her analysis goes on to productively investigate museological manifestations of bio-power and body horror, she expands no further on this intriguing insight on the museological function of the trophy. For Jordanova, the museal trophy occupies the intersection between materiality and desire; it “presents in material form [...] sets of practices” through which the museum produces the “fantasies and memories” projected upon its collections, which, in turn, “elicits admiration” that substantiates the value of those same objects. Insofar as valuable things are conscripted to function as public trophies in institutional settings, their valuation can be envisioned as an upwards-moving spiral, with a circular valuative logic that substantiates itself through its own foundational premises, yet is nonetheless capable of continuously building real, material equity. At the same time, the network of meanings held by such things blooms past and spills out of their constraints, retaining traces of the efforts that contributed to their meaning prior to their institutionalization.

This conceptualization of the *artifact-as-trophy* functions at the intersection of social, linguistic, and economic modes of valuation; its meaning and importance are part-and-parcel with its market price. The artifact-as-trophy is in this sense overdetermined,

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<sup>71</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, “Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Museums” in Vergo, *The New Museology*, 32.

and the most iconic and oft-reproduced artifacts are especially so. As the artifactual image takes on a multiplicity of socially constructed meanings, its value is inflated in turn, making contestation for its ownership all the more productive to its function as a trophy. In this way, the museum feeds on the contestation of its collections, and it is in part for this reason that the texts of the Napoleonic Expedition continuously glorify the vigour with which the Egyptian population sought to retain control of its nation's patrimony.

#### **1.4 Knowledge/Production/Economies**

I have examined some of the ways that colonial desire works through indigenous contestations to constitute artifactual value, and in turn, how museum collections entrench the normativity of such desire to entrench their own status as emblems of national glory. Knowledge production works in tandem with these processes of valuation to supply narratives that valorize the struggle to dispossess colonies of their patrimony, thereby re-inscribing the value of the artifact as war trophy. But beyond these modes of valuation, systems of disciplinary knowledge production — in this case, archaeology and Egyptology more specifically — also work to produce colonial subjects as a means of rationalizing and maintaining the political economy of empire. This is, in part, the process influentially described by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, through which

The specialist does the immediate translation of mere Oriental matter into useful substance: the Oriental becomes, for example, a subject race, an example of an "Oriental" mentality, all for the enhancement of the "authority" at home.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 44.

Said's intervention is, importantly, not simply about a system of misrepresentation and stereotyping (though naturally, those abound): it is an argument for the very real social and material utility of producing systems of authority and knowledges that substantiate colonial claims to land, resources, and 'subject races'. The production of an "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'" other in Orient also produces a Europe that is "rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'."<sup>73</sup> But in addition to the obvious self-interest of reproducing racist social hierarchies, Orientalizing frameworks also produce 'subject races' that are always already dispossessed of a rich cultural patrimony of which they are deemed ignorant, as *knowledge production itself* is constructed as a prerequisite for sovereignty.

To examine the way in which Egyptological knowledge production produces subjects incapable of laying claim to their nation's own patrimony, I turn here to an instructive scene from Denon's *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, quoted at length for its utility:

Here the pitiless reader, sitting quietly at his table with his map before him, will say to the poor, hungry, harassed traveller, exposed to all the trouble of war: "I see no account of Aphroditopolis, Crocodilopolis, Ptolemais — what is become of all these towns? What had you to do there, if you could not give any account of them? Had you not a horse to carry you, an army to protect you, and an interpreter to answer all your questions — and have I not relied upon you to give me some information on all these subjects? But, kind reader, please to [sic] recollect, that we are surrounded with Arabs and Mamelukes, and that, in all probability, I should be made prisoner, pillaged, and very likely killed, if I had thought proper to venture only a hundred paces from the column to fetch some of the bricks of Aphroditopolis. [...] A little more patience, and we shall go and turn over a foil entirely new to the curious traveller, to see the places which Herodotus himself has only described from the lying reports which were given to him, and which

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<sup>73</sup> Said, 40.

modern travellers have only been able to draw and measure, surrounded by every cause of anxiety, without daring to lose sight of the river, plundered on every pretence by the reis, by their interpreter, by every *sheik*, *basha*, and *kiachef*, into whose hands they might happen to fall; abandoned by some of their servants, pillaged by others, suspected of sorcery, tormented on account of treasures which they were supposed to have found, or to be in quest of, obliged, in taking drawings, to have an eye on the attendants that surrounded them, who were ready to destroy the fruits of their labours, if not to make an attempt on their persons; these travellers, under such circumstances, cannot be blamed in transmitting very imperfect accounts of countries so curious, but at the same time so dangerous to visit.<sup>74</sup>

Laid bare here are several of the key processes through which knowledge production works in tandem with ambivalent object desires to justify colonial modes of dispossession: first, as in the previous example of the Alexandrian sarcophagus, Denon constructs an Egyptian populace with a bifurcated relation to its cultural patrimony. The quest to *know* Egypt is presented as a heretofore impossible one; these are “places which Herodotus himself has only described from the lying reports which were given to him,” ones populated with a violent and irrational populace disinterested in the merit of the history-making project at hand. Yet the populace is not *simply* disinterested; they are also seen to be deeply invested in *resisting* the scholars’ project, aiming to “destroy the fruits of their labours” or “make an attempt on their persons.”

Within this framework, it is the Expeditionary forces that are “plundered” and “pillaged,” and not the invaded nation. Egyptians are dispossessed of these ‘treasures’ not because they do not value the objects in question, but because they value them *incorrectly*; either by extracting and commodifying particular loci of perceived value

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<sup>74</sup> Vivant Denon, *Travels In Upper And Lower Egypt Vol. 2*, trans. Arthur Aikin (London: Longman and Rees, 1803), 22–24.

insufficiently (i.e., impeding the progress of knowledge by threatening earnest scholars), or excessively (i.e., ‘plundering’ tombs or the French invaders). As Brenna Bhandar argues in *Colonial Lives of Property*, “laws of property also reflect and consolidate language, ways of seeing, and modes of subjectivity that render indigenous and colonized populations as outside history, lacking the requisite cultural practices, habits of thought, and economic organization to be considered as sovereign, rational economic subjects.”<sup>75</sup> Colonial legal frameworks consistently hinge on Lockean principles which enshrine *improvement* as the basis of a natural justice of property ownership. This principle is laid out in Locke’s 17<sup>th</sup> century *Two Treatises on Government*, in which the natural right to property is delimited to that which one mixes with their labour.<sup>76</sup> Labour is posited here as the key mechanism through which ‘the common’ — defined by Locke as “the earth and all that is therein,” God-given to mankind — is transformed from a place of potentially wasted bounty to a tamed and productive site of industry.<sup>77</sup> To this end, labour is also understood as that which aids the broader Christian goal of putting to use that which God hath given. In failing to do so, man runs the risk of allowing God-given creation to go to waste in defiance of natural law and the rights of his fellow man, who may otherwise have made use of those fruits that rotted on their trees, unpicked.<sup>78</sup> Thus, the labour theory of property principle is understood not just as a *prerogative* but an

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<sup>75</sup> Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1743872119837083>.

<sup>76</sup> John Locke, *Treatise of Civil Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Charles Sherman, 3rd ed. (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1965).

<sup>77</sup> Locke, 18.

<sup>78</sup> Locke, 25.

*imperative*, that “God and his reason commanded [man] to subdue the earth, i.e., improve it for the benefit of life, and therein lay out something upon it that was his own, his labour.”<sup>79</sup> This mode of acquisition is directly associated with the value-attribution mechanisms through which *things* become *objects* such that they serve anthropocentric purposes. In Locke’s view,

For whatever bread is more worth than acorns, wine than water, and cloth or silk than leaves, skins, or moss, that is wholly owing to labour and industry : the one of these being the food and raiment which unassisted nature furnishes us with; the other, provisions which our industry and pains prepare for us; which how much they exceed the other in value when any one hath computed, he will then see how much labour makes the far greatest part of the value of things we enjoy in this world.<sup>80</sup>

This process of objectification can be understood as the inverse of Bill Brown’s reflection on *things*: in this case, it is when things *start* working for us that they cease to inhabit the world as things *qua* things.<sup>81</sup> The Lockean doctrine lays bare the deep imbrication between liberal modes of political economy, value-production, and coloniality: if a mummy is transformed from a human body – an agential subject with its own intrinsic personhood – to an object of study, then 19<sup>th</sup> century Egypt’s predominating Muslim imperative to leave tombs undisturbed can be Orientalized as a form of indolence and superstition, a fundamental antipathy to knowledge-production. If, similarly, grave goods are transformed from *things* performing their duty by remaining with their original

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<sup>79</sup> Locke, 18.

<sup>80</sup> Locke, 28.

<sup>81</sup> “We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily.” Brown, “Thing Theory,” 4.

owners to *artifacts* whose social role is to be made known, they thus become objects that must work for us and upon which we must work in order to extract their God-granted value.<sup>82</sup>

Within the Egyptological episteme, the artifact is taxonomized in accordance with its historical value,<sup>83</sup> and the extraction or improvement of such value hinges on its study. To know Egypt is to gain the right to control it; not simply because mastery of a nation's history, language, and culture is a strategic boon to its economic and political control, but also, as an argument for the natural, legal right to it. As Locke and other progenitors of the Enlightenment posit, the rights to land and all that is on it which might be improved through labour is forfeit by those who fail to exploit it. That which ought to be studied but which remains unstudied is therefore unclaimed, part of 'the common' granted to those with the wherewithal to seize it.

Thus, Denon's assertion that he "should be made prisoner, pillaged, and very likely killed" for seizing the bricks of Aphroditopolis is not only a demonstration of his bravery for narrative purposes; it is also a real, material means of claim-making, a way of positing not only artifacts but *knowledge itself* as the hard-won trophy of imperial conquest. Local resistance to the Expedition's scholarly project is thus instrumental to its cultural aims even as it impedes its military ones, as such resistance demonstrates the

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<sup>82</sup> This is not to say that the actions of individual Egyptologists, collectors, and colonial officers were necessarily directly influenced by Locke's writing; rather, that Locke's deep influence on Enlightenment thought as a whole shaped the cultural milieu in which coloniality was undertaken, contributing to a set of social and political norms that underlay the European presence in Egypt.

<sup>83</sup> See: Alois Riegl, *The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development*, trans. Karin Bruckner and Karen Williams (Vienna: W. Braumuller, 1903).

foundational disjuncture of how or if antiquities ought to be used. That Egyptians did not appear to *want* their historical sites to be studied by the invading French forces was justification for the invasion itself, extending the ‘artifact’ argument to Egypt as a whole. This posited Egypt as a derelict site<sup>84</sup> that civilized peoples are not only *entitled* to claim, but are in fact *duty bound* to do so by both God and reason. In this sense, epistemic violence is concomitant with military violence, and the abstract value of scholarly study to be deeply interwoven with the more obvious material value of the golden funerary masks and gemstone-studded sarcophagi of which Egypt was despoiled. In the Expedition’s own terms, “To conquer, is in other words to march over, and become acquainted with a country.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Locke’s work bears a complex relation to the legal concept of ‘*terra nullius*’ (or ‘nobody’s land’), which was used to justify imperial domination by claiming land to be ‘uncivilized’ and therefore ‘vacant’ despite its continuous sovereignty by indigenous peoples. While numerous scholars find *terra nullius* to have been cited in the colonial conquest of the Americas, its use as a legal justification in the Old World is somewhat more abstract. David Armitage, (*The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 97.), for example, argues that the concept was broadly used in colonial projects worldwide, while Lauren Benton and Benjamin Straumann find that it was largely cited only indirectly, and even then, only as part of a broader set of juridical tools. These tools included an intersecting set of Roman legal concepts, chief among which is *res nullius* (or ‘nobody’s thing), for which individuals or states could lay claim by means of *usucapio* (occupation over time) (see: “Acquiring Empire by Law : From Roman Doctrine to Early Modern European Practice,” *American Society for Legal History* 28, no. 1 (2010): 1–16.). One means through which property could become *res nullius* is through its perceived abandonment (*res derelictae*). This provided a legal and ideological rationale through which property *with* a traceable owner or sovereign could nonetheless be claimed by another party if its original owner’s means of usage were deemed sufficiently similar to dereliction. Thus, while Egypt may have been understood as being *pre-eminently* ‘civilized’, the same legal framework could nonetheless provide a groundwork for its domination.

For more on the relation between ‘*terra nullius*’, colonialism, and cultural patrimony, see: David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 181.

<sup>85</sup> Institut D’Égypte, *Memoirs Relative to Egypt*, 45.

## 1.5 *Hurma* and indigenous appreciation

Thus far, I have focused on the intersecting means through which colonial desire becomes bound up with indigenous modes of valuation. Desire and value — affect and economy — power the engine that drives artifactual discourses, from the ideological arguments around their ownership to the popular re-appropriations of their associated imagery. They emerge together, subtly or explicitly, in artifactual claims-making processes when *feelings* about heritage are tied to normative ideas about its use. The Napoleonic Expedition's work, for example, makes politico-legal claims to Pharaonic patrimony through contrasting modes of *appreciation*: the “carelessness of the Turks relative to the objects of which they are the most jealous” is a French claim to objects that the Turks do not *appreciate* enough, or in the right way. I use ‘appreciation’ here to suggest a framework that interweaves the affective and economic modalities: cultured peoples *appreciate* art by patronizing cultural institutions, and blue-chip real estate *appreciates* in value when its socially constructed worth on the market is felt to have increased. Conversely, a museum in a neoliberal economy is a corporate entity with fiduciary responsibilities, whose collections constitute part of its holdings, and they, too, appreciate in value when their social and political importance increases. And art, like

real-estate, is a major site of investment,<sup>86</sup> with a market value closely tied to the ways in which the art in question is discussed, perceived, and consumed.<sup>87</sup>

‘Appreciation’ in this sense is one of the rhetorical foundations upon which heritage claims are made. It is continuously leveraged in artifactual claims-making processes. For example, Raymond de Verniac Saint-Maur who captained the French ship transporting the Luxor obelisk to the Place de la Concorde asserts that:

The Persians of Cambyses smashing statues, overthrowing the temples and the palaces, setting fire to the dwelling of the living and profaning that of the dead, to erase at the same time the testimonies of their defeat and those of the victories of their enemies; the Ptolemies completing the ruin of Thebes to give Alexandria a supremacy which it could only attain by this act of destruction; the first Christians hammering and covering with mud the rest of the painted sculptures which could indicate the origin of their religious ceremonies; the Arabs, the Koran in hand, annihilating as dangerous all that he did not ordain to keep, here are the real barbarians whose stupid fury we must deplore: but France, stealing an obelisk from the Nile’s continuously rising soil, or from the savage ignorance of the Turks, who until now have respected these soaring needles only for fear of their fall and the impossibility of removing the debris; France for this fact acquired the rights thanks to learned Europe, to which all the monuments of antiquity belong, *because only she knows how to appreciate them*. Antiquity is land which by natural right belongs to the one who cultivates it to collect its fruits.<sup>88</sup> [emphasis added]

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<sup>86</sup> See Velthuis and Coslor for more on the ways that the art market has since the 1960s transformed from one of ‘real goods’, to a ‘financialized’ one that treats art as a form of pure capital: Olav Velthuis and Erica Coslor, “The Financialization of Art,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Finance*, ed. Karin Knorr Cetina and Alex Preda (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 471–87. For more on the social and economic implications of the financialization of the cultural sector, see Sven Lütticken, “Art and the Crisis of Value,” *New Left Review* 106, no. June 2016 (2016): 111–36.

<sup>87</sup> At the same time, cultural institutions serve to entrench capitalist hegemony by codifying different modes of cultural consumption as markers of class difference. See: Pierre Bourdieu, “The Aristocracy of Culture,” *Media, Culture & Society* 2, no. 3 (1980): 225–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/016344378000200303>.

<sup>88</sup> Raymond de Verniac Saint-Maur, *Voyage Du Luxor En Egypte, Enterpris per Ordre Du Roi Pour Transporter, de Thebes a Paris l’un Des Obelisques Sesostris* (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1835), 37–38.

Saint-Maur lays out the prototypical rationale by which Europe (typified here as France) is posited at the pinnacle of an affective terrain built atop a Pharaonic foundation. France acquires the rights to all antiquity because she alone correctly appreciates it; this mode of appreciation is affective (only the learned of France *feel* the pain of lost history) and economic (by smashing valuable statues, these barbarians squander the fruits of their land). The Enlightenment-era conceptualization of natural rights hinges on an abstracted understanding of Reason that considers accumulation to be a self-evident and rational ends, one entirely divorced from base motives such as desire. But *desire*, imbricated here with *value* in the form of *appreciation*, emerges as a salient category through which the nominally rational domain of property law is consistently debated: 19<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian nationalist efforts sought to promote a mainstream form of Pharaonic appreciation as a means of safeguarding antiquities,<sup>89</sup> and even contemporary historiographies trace the origins of this counter-colonial form of appreciation to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, class and race relations within Egypt can be seen as a disciplinary domain through which structures of feeling are weaponized. Elliot Colla reminds us that:

Just as colonial administrators routinely relied upon preservationist ideology to justify their expropriation of Pharaonic antiquities, so Egyptian elites found it useful for exerting new forms of control over rural populations. Thus concepts such as appreciation and preservation implied much more than a way of thinking aesthetically and historically about objects—they also had vast implications for developing new forms of political governance.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Michael Wood, “The Use of the Pharaonic Past in Modern Egyptian Nationalism,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 35, no. 1998 (1998): 181, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40000469>.

<sup>90</sup> Fayza Haikal, “Egypt’s Past Regenerated by Its Own People,” in *Consuming Ancient Egypt*, ed. Sally MacDonald and Michael Rice (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2003), 125.

<sup>91</sup> Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, 18.

Colla's argument underscores the civilizing function of appreciation: by instilling normative structures of feeling, i.e., the proper form of Pharaonic appreciation, preservation can be ensured. Preservation is necessary if artifacts are to be studied, exhibited, and utilized to nation-building ends— that is, if their value is to be extracted. The appreciation of artifacts, like that of art and stock values, must be cultivated, and cultivation has functioned as one of the museum's core functions as its modern form was developed through the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>92</sup>

Saint-Maur's image of Antiquity as a land for which natural rights must be sowed echoes the Lockean framework of the un-/cultivated commons: if Antiquity is understood as an orchard, then by failing to *care enough to make use* of it, we waste what it may offer in knowledge, prestige, and wealth. But what if Antiquity was not an orchard, but a *nation*; a gathering<sup>93</sup> of agency and sovereignty that does not exist for us but for itself? What if Antiquity was comprised not of objects, but *things*?

To this point, I will assert here that I do not hold that prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Egyptians necessarily broadly *appreciated* Pharaonic things in this sense. This is to say they may not have, as a matter of course, extracted their associated scholarly or economic value. This is also to say that before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that Egyptians did not necessarily

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<sup>92</sup> This function is discussed at length by Tony Bennett in *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. Interestingly, G.A. Gaballa notes that the Egyptian Museum in Cairo was one of the first in the world to be built for the sole function *as* a museum, rather than as a re-purposed palace: Mohammad Salih Ali, *The Egyptian Museum*, ed. G.A. Gaballa (Cairo: Supreme Council of Antiquities, 1999), 7.

<sup>93</sup>I rely here again on Heidegger's conceptualization of this term in "The Thing." Obviously, coloniality's framework of value-production reduces nations to their object-ness rather than their thing-ness.

broadly *do* Egyptology.<sup>94</sup> It is also to suggest that the normative affective position with regards to Pharaonic heritage may not have been altogether positive. It is, however, *not* to say that pre-modern Egyptians did not *care about* or *preserve* Pharaonic things: in fact, Egyptian and European sources both suggest that the Egyptians who most closely interacted with Pharaonic things cared deeply — albeit differently — about them. Indeed, their modes of care were not only *compatible* with preservation, but *necessary* for it. By way of example, I will refer to two affective loci compiled from various medieval<sup>95</sup> Egyptian sources and described by Ulrich Haarmann:

In the thirteenth century zealots appear on the scene who ‘crusaded’ against the pagan monuments. For them the representations of living beings among the pharaonic remains were particularly detestable. Around 1260 a pious and learned Suhrawadi sufi, Qutb al-din al-Qastallani (d. 686/1287), hit the sphinx with his shoes (*lalaka*). With this gesture he demonstrated his contempt to all those numerous fellow countrymen who venerated the sphinx, visited it in the spring, burnt precious aromatic substances such as milk-thistle (*shuka’ a*) and safflower (*badhawward*) for it, murmured certain formulae sixty-three times and then expected the idol to fulfil their wishes. There are more traditions dating from the thirteenth-century concerned with the sphinx as endowed with the gift of complying with human requests.<sup>96</sup> [...]

In 7/1311 the statue of Isis in Fustat opposite Giza was broken down. In 750/1350 the monolithic so-called ‘green chapel’ of Memphis was destroyed. Its spoils were re-used as thresholds in amir Shaykhu’s *khanqah* in Cairo, as a symbol of the victory of Islam over the old pagan spirits, yet obviously also as an invocation of their help for the new, Islamic, sanctuary. The attitude of the contemporary chroniclers towards these zealous activities is ambiguous. They date not flatly

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<sup>94</sup> Okasha El-Daly and Donald Malcolm Reid present two different yet compelling arguments concerning the pre-19<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian study of Egyptian history. I will examine these approaches — and how they relate to the idea of a historical *discipline* more broadly — in the **Conclusion**.

<sup>95</sup> In the Egyptian context, I will use ‘medieval’ as my sources in this section do, referring to the period from the beginning of the Muslim conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup> century up to Muhammad Ali’s reign in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>96</sup> Ulrich Haarmann, “Regional Sentiment in Medieval Islamic Egypt,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 43, no. 1 (1980): 62.

deny the continuing power of the old idols. Rather, they report triumphantly and with obvious relief that no visible damage ensued after the destruction, and that the evil eye had lost its power.<sup>97</sup>

Haarmann's work demonstrates that these moments were understood then, as they are now, as affectively intense points of ideological confrontation. On the one hand, we see in these instances popular re-appropriations of Pharaonic *things* seen to contain or convey power or protection. On the other hand, there are theologically-motivated iconoclasms — ranging from the shoe-based insult of the Sphinx to the destruction of a monumentally beautiful chapel — seeking to diminish or contain the sway these things apparently have over the populace. The actions of those who strove to destroy these sites of power and those who sought their intercession may seem irreconcilable, but both ends of this spectrum are motivated by a congruent set of affective relations to the thing: one that combines fear, respect, suspicion, awe, and caution. These emotive benchmarks surface again in another revealing moment from 13<sup>th</sup>-century Egypt:

In Idrisi's *Anwar* [...] we hear of the retainer Ridwan al-Farrach who, in Fatimid days, breaks into the pyramid, is killed inside, and then appears to his company as a spectre warning them in "hieratic language" (*al-kalam al kahini*) never to violate the dignity (Arabic *hurma*) of the old kings.<sup>98</sup>

*Hurma* can be understood as a conceptual model for a counter-extractive mode of valuation, a 'structure of feeling' expansive enough to contain the competing desires to venerate and annihilate. Stemming from the Arabic root Ḥ-R-M from which *ḥarām* (forbidden), *ḥareem* (women), and *ḥarem* (domestic space for women) are derived, it is

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<sup>97</sup> Haarmann, 63.

<sup>98</sup> Ulrich Haarmann, "Medieval Muslim Perceptions of Ancient Egypt," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms* (Leiden/Brill, 1996), 607.

semantically linked not just to ‘dignity’, but to ‘taboo’ more broadly.<sup>99</sup> In fact, while Haarmann translates *ḥurma* as ‘dignity’, it is a somewhat more abstract concept, encompassing inviolability, sanctity, and respect (particularly in relation to the human body), the physical integrity of a person, privacy, protection, privilege, and honor.<sup>100</sup> *Ḥurma* does not imply positive affect: as a form of taboo, it is associated more so with fear, respect, awe, and circumspection. *Ḥurma* does, however, demand a broad sense of socio-metaphysical unity with (once) living beings, an ethical imperative to preserve the sanctity of death and the dead.<sup>101</sup> In this sense, the Pharaonic thing is imbued both with the fear of and respect for the dead, as suggested by the fact that the Sphinx is still today, as it was in Al-Marquzi’s time, called *Abu el-Houl*; the progenitor of terror.

I posit that a normative view — not *the* normative view, as Egypt has always been ideologically heterogenous — in Muslim-majority Egypt has not necessarily been to

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<sup>99</sup> Note that this root differs from that of *haram* (pyramid), which begins with *hā* rather than *ḥā*.

<sup>100</sup> For utilizations and analyses of *ḥurma* in context, see: Birgit Krawietz, *Die Ḥurma* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1991); Roxanne D Marcotte, “The ‘Religionated’ Body: Fatwas and Body Parts,” in *Medicine, Religion, and the Body*, ed. Elizabeth Burns Coleman (Brill, 2009); Christian Lange and Isabel María Fierro Bello, *Public Violence in Islamic Societies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Asim I. Padela and Jasser Auda, “The Moral Status of Organ Donation and Transplantation within Islamic Law: The Fiqh Council of North America’s Position,” *Transplantation Direct*, 2020, 1–7., Rana Sobh and Russell W. Belk, “Privacy and Gendered Spaces in Arab Gulf Homes,” *Home Cultures* 8, no. 3 (2011): 317–40; Kamaruzaman Jusoff, Siti Akmar, and Abu Samah, “Environmental Sustainability: What Islam Propagates,” *World Applied Sciences Journal* 12, no. November (2011): 46–53; Mawil Izzī Dien, “Islam and the Environment: Towards an ‘Islamic’ Ecumenical View” 5 (2013): 33–52; Omar Sultan Haque, “Brain Death and Its Entanglements : A Redefinition of Personhood for Islamic Ethics,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 36, no. 1 (2008): 13–36; John Hunwick, “Secular Power and Religious Authority in Muslim Society: The Case of Songhay,” *The Journal of African History* 37, no. 2 (1996): 175–94, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853700035180>; Manfred Sing, “Sacred Law Reconsidered: The Similarity of Bioethical Debates in Islamic Contexts and Western Societies,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 36, no. 1 (2008): 97–121; Ahmad A Nasr, “Review : EUNUCHS IN ISLAMIC SOCIETY Reviewed Work (s): Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society by Shaun Marmon,” *Sudanic Africa* 12 (2001): 170–75.

<sup>101</sup> So much so that navigating the bio-ethics of organ donation poses a real social challenge in Muslim-majority nations. See: Asim I. Padela and Taha A. Bassar, “Brain Death: The Challenges of Translating Medical Science into Islamic Bioethical Discourse,” *Islamic Law* 31 (2012): 433–50.

*appreciate* Pharaonic things, but rather, to imbue them with *ḥurma*, to regard them as something *muḥarram*; too holy *or* too evil to be touched.<sup>102</sup> The normativity of this attitude towards gravesites and the dead was noted in 1798 by the *savants* of the Napoleonic Expedition in an unusually poetic passage:

Modern Egyptians still have, like the ancients, a special respect for the dead. The funeral, without having the same pageantry as in the time of the Pharaohs, is accompanied by great ceremony: the bodies are no longer embalmed; but they are deposited at least with dignity in the tomb which must be their eternal asylum; the service of the dead is done with ceremony; relatives and friends of the deceased give public displays of deep sorrow, and respect for tombs is one of the most inviolable principles of Muslim law [...] The eternal concession: once a place has served as a burial site, it must remain deserted; one may no longer build or plant there: the land intended to serve man his final retreat, must belong to him exclusively; one would fear to disturb the rest of their ashes if one allowed the farmer to drag there the blade of his plough. When a cemetery is full, one does not dispute with the bones of the dead the place which has been granted to them; nothing is overturned; no grave is excavated: the peasant rests there eternally under the modest stone which was consecrated to him long ago; the rich need not buy at great expense the uncertain promise of owning in their own right the narrow space which they must occupy in the tomb.<sup>103</sup>

For Haarmann, the incidents he describes demonstrate that medieval Egypt held an ambivalent view of Pharaonic heritage; that for the predominantly Muslim population, Islam “purified and thus ennobled the Egyptian heritage.”<sup>104</sup> By re-appropriating Pharaonic objects through a heterogenous worldview, “one could be proud to be a citizen of Egypt, the eternal, even in the times of medieval Islam, when the contours of regional

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<sup>102</sup> Torojman translates this concept in this way that brings together sanctity and evil:

<https://torjoman.com/dictionary/ar/search/arabic-english/محرم>

<sup>103</sup> L’Expedition De L’Armée Francaise, *Description de l’Egypte Vol. 2 P.2* (Paris: L’imprimerie Royale, 1818), 447–48.

<sup>104</sup> Haarmann, “Regional Sentiment in Medieval Islamic Egypt,” 66.

and also of ethnic cultures within the Islamic *oikoumene* were so difficult to discern.”<sup>105</sup> Haarmann’s view represents a mid-point of sorts between the standpoints occupied by Michael Cook and Okasha al-Daly; respectively, that medieval Egyptian writing “conveys no sense whatsoever of identification with the people and culture which created them,”<sup>106</sup> or, conversely, that “pride in Egypt and its past can even be seen in accounts of the most religiously pious Arab writers,” who continue an uninterrupted Egyptian historiography from its ancient era to its modern one.<sup>107</sup> Haarmann’s view is in fact closer to the former than the latter: despite his acknowledgement of Pharaonicism’s medieval reuptakes, his later work asserts that

Any continuity from ancient to Islamic Egypt was irretrievably and doubly cut off, first by the adoption of Christianity in Egypt in the 4th century and then, three centuries later, by the Islamic conquest. Memories of the world of the pharaohs had long since been forgotten by Egyptians who had been incorporated into the Greek, the Roman, the Byzantine, and, by the 7th century CE, the expanding Islamic world.<sup>108</sup>

Haarmann’s view implicitly locates national continuity within a framework appreciation; Medieval Egyptians are “cut off” from their past since did not *study* it (thus forgetting its true meaning) nor did they necessarily *like* it (as demonstrated when iconoclasts threw their shoes at the Sphinx or destroyed the Green Chapel of Memphis to quell its power).

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Michael Cook, “Pharaonic History in Medieval Egypt,” *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983): 102.

<sup>107</sup> Okasha El Daly, *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium*, *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 11, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315429779>.

Beyond El-Daly’s insights, notable recent work has been undertaken by other Egyptian scholars such as Monica Hanna (2021) and Heba Abd el-Gawad (2021) to close Egyptology’s perceived gap between modern and Ancient Egyptians. Abd el-Gawad’s *Egypt’s Dispersed Heritage* project, for instance, uses online comics written in colloquial Arabic to catalyze discussions of heritage, authority, and belonging in online Egyptian social media space.

<sup>108</sup> Ulrich Haarmann, “Islam and Ancient Egypt,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 196.

While I am convinced by Haarmann's historiography, I would challenge its epistemic grounds: national identity need not, I would argue, require an uninterrupted historical stream of 'objective' historical memory, language, or religion. If that were so, few existing nation-states would have a claim to *any* patrimony over several millennia in age, and Britons certainly would lack a claim to Stonehenge.

I posit that that the *hurma* of Pharaonic patrimony, despite its affective ambivalence, is a politically sufficient and morally equivalent valuative framework to that of appreciation. While Pharaonic things may not have been continuously studied, social value was still placed upon them in salient and productive ways. Furthermore, I would argue that this non-extractive mode of valuation has, in fact, been *necessary* for the preservation of those things during the intervening millennia between their production and their 'discovery' by Europeans. While the taboo of *hurma* prescribes circumspection (rather than positive affect *per se*), appreciation can better be understood as a mode of *consumption*. Returning again to the example of Stonehenge, David Lowenthal argues:

The best intentions prove lethal; *the more heritage is appreciated, the more it decays or turns to dross* [...] Stonehenge, Britain's heritage archetype and a major global site, typifies such dilemmas. First a fearsome pagan relic, Stonehenge has been ascribed to Satan, to Phoenicians, and to Druids, among others. Demonized by the medieval Church, fount of Tudor sovereign claims, and icon of Welsh nationalism, Stonehenge has served (and suffered for) myriad purposes. Locals took stones for fencing and building and rented tools to visitors to chip off bits of sarsen—one antiquary grumbled at being "Obliged with a Hammer to labour hard three Quarters of an Hour to get but one Ounce and a half."<sup>109</sup> [emphasis added]

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<sup>109</sup> Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, 27–28.

In Egypt's case, we can observe this same tension in Erasmus Wilson's 19th century account the Alexandrian Obelisks. Wilson bemoans the fact that "this neglected gift was only half buried; but, in 1869, it was so completely hidden, that not even the owner of the workshop, where it lies, could point out to me the exact spot of its sandy grave."<sup>110</sup> The obelisk had evidently been left alone, untouched for millennia. The British explorers identified this as evidence of a lack of *appreciation*, but assumed that the Egyptian non-extractive model was more destructive than their own. Despite the (arguably baseless) fear that "[the obelisk] might be converted into building materials ere long, if not looked after," it was the very fact of British interest that subjected it accelerated deterioration, a fact that was anticipated even at the time, even as preservation was being put forth as the reason for its removal.<sup>111</sup>

These discursive histories shed light on the ways that projects of collection, exhibition knowledge-production, and nation-building have produced and reproduced extractive epistemologies through sites of ambivalent valuation. Accordingly, this project does not aim to "indigenize Egyptology"<sup>112</sup> by seeking out epistemic echoes of the Egyptological method in the pre-colonial (but still imperial) Egyptian era as a means of proving that Egyptians also 'appreciated' Pharaonic things. Instead, this project asserts that frameworks such as that of *hurma* can entail non-extractive modes of valuation that

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<sup>110</sup> Wilson, *Cleopatra's Needle: With Brief Notes on Egypt and Egyptian Obelisks*, 18.

<sup>111</sup> Wilson asks: "But another and a graver trial is in waiting for our obelisk —How will it accommodate itself to the climate of the British metropolis? It will endure; of that we can have no doubt; neither will it fail in our respect and admiration even when it has lost some of its pristine loveliness, and has submitted to harmonise its tone with the dulness [*sic*] of its surroundings." See: Wilson, 18–25.

are legally and politically equivalent to that of Egyptology, ones that produce public relations to the past beyond those of study and positive affect, as are typically prescribed by hegemonic museologies.<sup>113</sup>

## 1.6 Rights of Return

A specter is haunting the museum: the spectre of repatriation. New strategies and old have been employed to exorcise this spectre, yet it remains an undaunted force, haunting major cultural institutions from within and without. Repatriative campaigns in France, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, Canada and beyond point to the power of the decades of social and political change that have contributed their success, as well as to the deep-rooted institutional anxieties such efforts continue to generate.<sup>114</sup> Official reactions to these campaigns and their outcomes range from the

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<sup>113</sup> *Hurma* is, of course, but one of numerous counter-hegemonic modes of relation to artifacts and human remains. Kokunre Agbontaen-Eghafona, for example, posits indigenous modes of care and conservation in the context of Benin. Additionally, work such as that by Ciraj Rassool expands on the possibilities of re-humanizing plundered cultural materials. See: K. A. Agbontaen-Eghafona, “Curatorship of Benin Cultural Materials : Towards Integrating Indigenous and Orthodox Methods,” *African Study Monographs* 25, no. 4 (2004): 195–213; Ciraj Rassool, “Re-Storing the Skeletons of Empire: Return, Reburial and Rehumanisation in Southern Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 41, no. 3 (2015): 653–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2015.1028002>.

<sup>114</sup> Recent UK media discourses have re-opened debates around the Parthenon Marbles and their accompanying controversies. See: Helena Smith, “Time Has Come for UK to Return Parthenon Marbles, Says Greek PM,” *Guardian*, January 10, 2022; Nick Lester, “Boris Johnson ‘in Final Days’ Should Arrange Return of Parthenon Marbles,” *Evening Standard*, February 8, 2022. French efforts have continued to grapple with the outcomes of the Sarr-Savoy report, discussed below (see: Alex Greenberger, “Landmark Repatriation Deal of African Objects from France Moves On,” *ARTnews*, December 17, 2022.).

The German and Dutch states have committed to the return of some portion of the objects seized during the colonization of Benin (see: BBC, “Benin Bronzes: Germany to Return Looted Artefacts to Nigeria,” *BBC News*, April 30, 2021; Daniel Boffey, “Dutch Museums Vow to Return Art Looted by Colonialists,” *Guardian*, October 9, 2020; Pierre John Felcenloben, “Returning Colonial-Era Artefacts Is Not as Easy as It Seems, Say Experts,” *DutchNews*, March 29, 2021.)

While legal and political efforts in North America and Australia have focused in recent years have focused to a greater extent on addressing local legacies of settler-colonialism as helmed by Indigenous communities — helmed in Canada by the outcomes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (see: Jodi Simkin, *Creating a New Reality: Repatriation, Reconciliation and Moving Forward* (Ottawa: UNESCO, 2020).),

laudatory to the tense, and the rhetoric against such efforts ranges from the nationalistic to the rigidly bureaucratic. “Everyone agrees it’s war booty” one researcher reveals, “but the Rijksmuseum [...] wants to do provenance research. They argue you need to present a good report to the government on its origin before any action can be taken.”<sup>115</sup> But despite the obstacles, repatriative action continues to gain credence in museal spheres.

But what does such repatriative action — and opposition to it — entail in practice? A recent example can be seen in the ongoing saga that is the French government’s stance concerning the African things held in its national collections.

In 2015, the Ministry Council of Benin voted to formally request the return of the nearly 5000 objects currently held in French national collections, which were plundered as part of General Dodds’ 1892 expedition in the then-named Kingdom of Dahomey.<sup>116</sup> This placed the French government — which had already responded favourably to the United Nations’ 2015 announcement of the Decade for People of African Descent — under pressure to return a careful response instead of the outright refusal to which repatriation campaigns are commonly subject. Partially for these reasons and partially due to the ongoing advocacy work of the Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires de France (CRAN), President Macron declared in a 2017 speech:

I cannot accept that a large share of several African countries’ cultural heritage be kept in France. There are historical explanations for it, but there is no valid, lasting and unconditional justification. African heritage cannot solely exist in

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Australia has also notably recently returned 14 objects of disputed provenance to the Indian state (Oscar Holland, “National Gallery of Australia to Return \$2.2M of ‘stolen’ Artworks to India,” *CNN*, July 29, 2021.)

<sup>115</sup> Felcenloben, “Returning colonial-era artefacts is not as easy as it seems, say experts.”

<sup>116</sup> Nicolas Michel, “Art Classique : Le Bénin Réclame à La France Des Pièces de Son Patrimoine,” *Jeune Afrique*, August 17, 2016.

private collections and European museums. African heritage must be showcased in Paris but also in Dakar, Lagos and Cotonou; this will be one of my priorities. Within five years I want the conditions to exist for temporary or permanent returns of African heritage to Africa.<sup>117</sup>

Following this impressive statement, the French government commissioned a study by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy to lay out a framework for the ethics and legalities of repatriating an undefined proportion of the 90,000 sub-Saharan African objects in French national collections, 70,000 of which are held in the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac. The study affirms the innumerable implications of the colonial history of museum collection, arguing that “The (historical, psychological, and political) responsibility of this past which indeed has not yet passed, remains one of Europe’s greatest challenges for the 21st century.”<sup>118</sup> Blocked for several years due to France’s (somewhat ironic) designation of such artifacts as the nation’s “inalienable” property, the study ultimately served as the impetus for a bill passed in November of 2020 permitting the return of cultural artifacts to Senegal and Benin specifically.

Hailed in headlines as an act of “restitution [,] friendship and love,”<sup>119</sup> the bill’s innumerable caveats nonetheless undermine its claim to restorative justice. Despite language of the headlines, the terms of Macron’s initial speech, and the very name of the bill,<sup>120</sup> the French Minister of Culture insisted that “there is no question here of

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<sup>117</sup> Emmanuel Macron, “Emmanuel Macron’s Speech at the University of Ouagadougou,” *L’Élysée*, November 28, 2017.

<sup>118</sup> Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, “The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics” (Paris: Ministère de la Culture, 2018), 2.

<sup>119</sup> Hannah McGivern, “French Senate Votes Unanimously for Restitution to Benin and Senegal in ‘Act of Friendship and Trust,’” *The Art Newspaper*, November 5, 2020.

<sup>120</sup> Projet de loi relatif à la restitution de biens culturels à la République du Bénin et à la République du Sénégal (MICX2004812L), 2020.

<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/dossierlegislatif/JORFDOLE000042118115/>.

repentance or reparation: it is the future of this partnership that interests us.”<sup>121</sup> Adding that the basic principle which holds that such objects are France’s inalienable property is “in no way called into question” by the bill, it ultimately only promised the return of approximately 26 items out of the Quai Branly museum’s 70,000. This number represents only a miniscule fraction of the 5,000 originally claimed by the government of Benin, the restitution of which had served as part of the bill’s original motivation, and the continued retention of which prompted Benin’s president to describe the bill as a “strict minimum”.<sup>122</sup>

The views of the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac’s directors – the museum at the heart of the French restitution debate – reflect the authorized boundaries of this discourse at large. On the one hand, Stéphane Martin, the museum’s president during the bill’s early legislative stages, took a dim view of Macron’s broad promise of restitution, arguing in an interview that “we must overcome this obsession with colonialism and neocolonialism to build projects on a professional basis.”<sup>123</sup> As in the previously discussed Egyptian examples, the affective relation to the historical things in question is moralized here too. Citing a collaboration with a museum in Bamako that resulted in an exhibition but no further co-operation, Martin argues that the director “lacked the urge” to dedicate the requisite resources that would elevate it to French standards. Asked why

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<sup>121</sup> Senat du France, “Restitution De Biens Culturels Au Bénin Et Au Sénégal” (Paris, 2020), [http://www.senat.fr/cra/s20201104/s20201104\\_8.html](http://www.senat.fr/cra/s20201104/s20201104_8.html).

<sup>122</sup> François Soudan, “Bénin – Patrice Talon : « J’ai Pris Le Risque d’être Impopulaire »,” *Jeune Afrique*, September 29, 2020.

<sup>123</sup> François de Labarre and François de Labarre, “Comment Restituer Le Patrimoine Africain?,” *Paris Match*, August 1, 2018.

he supported an earlier Maori claim while rejecting that of African nations, Martin argues:

The [current] claim was an initiative of the Representative Council of Black Associations in France (Le Cran) as part of an activist approach. [...] If Africa wants to regain a part of its heritage, I don't think the right way is to say, "You have committed crimes, give me back what you took." This is not a valid argument from a legal point of view. We are not going to ask the British to return the Isle of Man!<sup>124</sup>

Setting aside the fact that this is *precisely* the established procedure by which nations make legal claims for stolen cultural patrimony,<sup>125</sup> Martin's view may be understood as a still-common yet conservative approach to the museum's social function: one that supports 'representation' so long as it reinforces the pre-existing value system and its accompanying structures of positive affect. Le Cran's claim is not disputed here on legal terms: rather, it is discredited by Martin for its challenge to the extant systems of value-making and the "good feelings"<sup>126</sup> dependent on the denial of systemic wrong-doing. As the legislative argument for the bill made clear, it was in no way intended as an act of repentance, or to signal the beginnings of a long-term, good-faith effort towards reconciliation.

Martin, however, would leave his position as director as the bill passed its final approval, to be succeeded in 2020 by Emmanuel Kasarhérou, whose stance more fully represented that of Macron's administration.<sup>127</sup> Kasarhérou differentiates his exhibition

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> For an extensive account of some recent politico-legal repatriation efforts in Egypt, see: El-Achmawi, *Sariqat Mashrou'a*.

<sup>126</sup> I draw my use of this term from Sara Ahmed, "The Cultural Politics of Emotion, 2nd Edition," 2007.

<sup>127</sup> As can be seen in his extended interview: Farah Nayeri, "A New Museum Director's First Challenge: Which Exhibits to Give Back," *The New York Times*, June 5, 2020.

strategy from those of his predecessors: “The objects were shown in the context of colonial history, which was a complete departure from what had been the policy of the Quai Branly Museum until then — to ignore the colonial dimension altogether.”<sup>128</sup> Nonetheless, Kasarhérou insists that his aim is not to institute systemic change, but rather, to mollify “very militant” demands made of the Quai Branly by minimizing the definition of illegal acquisition: “What we’ve seen so far is that few objects match the definition. We’re not talking about wagonloads.”<sup>129</sup> And what few objects would be permitted to depart the collection would of course only be utilized — *appreciated* — in accordance with European normative frameworks: “I’m not in favor of objects being sent out into the world and left to rot.”<sup>130</sup>

Several interesting facts emerge from the public discursive framing of Kasarhérou’s replacement of Martin: first is the strategic leveraging of Kasarhérou’s Melanesian identity to signify a representational sea-change<sup>131</sup>, while simultaneously mitigating public fears of BIPOC authority by positing a ‘reasonable’ position of cultural hybridity. “I feel as much the descendant of people who were colonizers of a certain place as of people who were colonized” Kasarhérou says, linking his subject position to his curatorial method, and promising enough change to allay “militant” calls for

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This position is one that I would argue aligns closely with that of the ‘new museology’, discussed in greater depth in the following section.

<sup>128</sup> Nayeri, 2020.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> “Emmanuel Kasarhérou’s appointment is a very interesting symbol: the fact that he belongs to several worlds, and represents this complex and shared colonial and postcolonial history [...] He’s someone who can open doors and transform the way this museum works,” says Benoît de L’Estoile, author of *Le Goût des Autres*, which discusses the history of the Quai Branly Museum. Quoted in Nayeri, “A New Museum Director’s First Challenge : Which Exhibits to Give Back.”

repatriation without substantially altering the status quo; “Shaking things up,”<sup>132</sup> in his terms. Shaken things will, after all, land in a different pattern, one that may even be unrecognizable from the original, but the things shaken remain themselves unchanged, as are the terms through which their *thingness* (or lack thereof) defined.

Second is the dissonance between the public pronouncements of change and the institutional enactment thereof: Benin requests the return of 5,000 objects whose unethical acquisition is well-documented. Macron’s administration declares the “final and unconditional restitution of heritage objects on the African continent”<sup>133</sup> and is hailed for it, thereupon enacting a bill promising the return of twenty-six of the thousands of objects substantially proven to have been gained as plunder. Ultimately, only *one* is returned.<sup>134</sup> This dynamic is echoed by the discursive framing of the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac’s directorship; Kasarhérou is framed as a progressive antidote to Martin’s conservatism, while neither director professes a markedly different approach to enacting the recommendations of the Savoy and Sarr study, which is described by Martin and Kasarhérou respectively as “self-flagellation” and “very militant.”<sup>135</sup> Even Bénédicte Savoy, one of the authors of the ‘militant’ study, promises that “the aim is not to empty Western museums to fill up the African ones,” reassuring the French public that the

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Philippe Dagen and Guillaume Fraissard, “«Je Souhaite Que Le Quai Branly Se ‘Colorise’»,” *Le Monde*, January 15, 2020.

<sup>134</sup> Farah Nayeri, “France Vowed to Return Looted Treasures. But Few Are Heading Back. - The New York Times,” *The New York Times*, November 22, 2019.. Savoy and Sarr’s restitution study extensively discusses the histories of the various things in French collections gained as part of colonial missions. See: Sarr and Savoy, “The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics.”

<sup>135</sup>Respectively: Dagen & Fraissard, “Je Souhaite Que Le Quai Branly Se ‘Colorise’,” and Nayeri, “A New Museum Director’s First Challenge: Which Exhibits to Give Back.”

enactment of full-scale material decolonization ought not substantially reshape the museal form.<sup>136</sup>

Third and finally is the issue of lacunae; the way that gaps and absences are rhetorically utilized as part of the maintenance of institutional forms. How, for example, are ‘holes’ put to use when Savoy assures that “any ‘holes’ left in European collections would be filled by the tens of thousands of African objects currently in museum reserves”?<sup>137</sup> The ‘holes’ in this case serve to reinforce the whole: the construction of absence *as* absence legitimizes the space around it as one in which the hole belongs. If, as Savoy and Sarr argue, the French hold on African collections was never ethical or legitimate, then those objects were an *excess*, not a constituent part. Their return would leave a *whole*, not a hole.

This evocation of a ‘hole’ hides the underlying logic through which the whole is defined. Something similar can be said for the absence of Egypt in the construction of Africa within the scope of the Savoy and Sarr report. In it, Egypt and Algeria are *the only two nations* specifically noted for having been excluded by the survey’s focus on African artifacts in French collections with historical origins in the colonial era. The rationale for their respective exclusions from the study, however, differs: the case of Algeria “has been made the object of intensive negotiations since the 1960s and which has led to important movements of restitution or long-term deposits after independence,” most notably

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<sup>136</sup> Vincent Noce, “‘Give Africa Its Art Back’, Macron’s Report Says,” *The Art Newspaper*, November 20, 2018.

<sup>137</sup> Nayeri, “France Vowed to Return Looted Treasures. But Few Are Heading Back. - The New York Times.”

relating to the skulls of Algerian resistance fighters that have been held by France since the colonial period.<sup>138</sup> While the study's methodology largely excludes Algerian objects *per se*, the Algerian colonial *context* and its relevance as part of the broader African context and that of the Global South is noted through the text. The same cannot be said for Egypt: discussed in precisely two footnotes on one page, the rationale for its exclusion rests on the fact that the scale of its despoilation is not commensurate with that of sub-Saharan African nations. While "in Cairo, you have 63,000 items on show and almost 300,000 reserve objects," all sub-Saharan African museums are estimated to hold a combined 3,000-5,000 objects, meaning that some "90 percent to 95 percent of African heritage is to be found outside the continent in the major world museums."<sup>139</sup>

This, of course, speaks to the duration and the incredible brutality of the French colonial regimes of sub-Saharan Africa, the monstrous dehumanization with which colonial power methodically stripped the subcontinent of its patrimony and peoples. It also speaks to continued ambivalence with which Europe defines Egypt's geopolitical boundaries; as an African nation when its populace's capacity for self-governance is called into question,<sup>140</sup> but a separate one when its material redress is under consideration. Egypt's absence is notable too in that it speaks to the cynicism of coloniality's adherence to museal norms. Here, for example, Egypt's worthiness as a

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<sup>138</sup> Sarr and Savoy, "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics," 3,73.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>140</sup> Such as when Citizen Andreossy of the French Expedition tells us that "Egypt has always fixed the attention of the literary world, more than any other portion of Africa. A multitude of travellers have accordingly repaired thither to seek for the vestiges of its ancient splendor, but a wretched, and barbarous people, have constantly opposed their researches." Institut D'Égypte, *Memoirs Relative to Egypt*.

guardian of its own patrimony is evaluated in museal terms; that thousands of objects can be found in Egypt's museums (and not, say, in communities or homes) is part of the justification for excluding it from the repatriative campaign. In this way, the presence *and* absence of museums of the Global South is utilized as rationale against repatriation: the supposed *absence* of 'proper' museums in sub-Saharan Africa is part of Martin's argument against repatriation, but their *presence* in Egypt is used as rationale to deny Egypt its claims. If too few *and* too many museums are an argument against the postcolonies' repatriative claims, one begins to suspect that it is not, in fact, the underlying rationale for the anti-repatriative argument at all.

Political strategy may play a part in this positioning too: Egyptian objects (such as the obelisk in the Place de la Concorde, directly opposite the Louvre) are tied to the French national self-image in particular ways that render discussions of their wholesale repatriation particularly problematic. This, in turn, points to the complexity of Egypt's ontological relation to Africa. While Afrocentric discourses are often seen to define Egypt as an African nation, here, Egypt's omission from the CRAN's advocacy work supports the material redress of sub-Saharan Africa in its historical and material specificity. Egypt's absence from the Sarr-Savoy study and its accompanying public discourse can thus be understood as a hole that works to define a whole, a functional and strategic absence that produces meaning. This is all to say that Egypt is continuously discursively constructed so as to occupy a specific, complex, and unique place within museological discourse; even its absence is semiotically loaded as an Other against which the canonical Western museum functions.

I use the French case study here as an exemplar of the institutional delineation of discursive boundaries. By holding a monopoly over the authorized heritage discourse,<sup>141</sup> cultural institutions circumscribe that which is considered sayable and doable. By inscribing a ‘common-sense’ understanding of *things* (objectified so that their function is to be collected, displayed, and studied) and *places* (such as museums, where authorized forms of meaning-making and valuation occur),<sup>142</sup> the demand for legal restitution is framed as excessive, unreasonable. This is particularly the case if the thing in question is codified within two conflicting modes of value-production: as Kasarhérou suggests, the museum will not simply allow important artifacts out there to *rot*.

### 1.7 Museum Models

Museology’s normative historiography — the story that the museum profession tells about its own development — reflects this relationship between museological knowledge- and value-production. While critical writing about the museum can be traced to the same timeframe as the modern form of the museum itself in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the “current of thought principally concerned with exploring the social role of museums, along with new styles of expression and communication” finds its origins in the civil rights struggles and social upheavals of the 1960s, becoming more defined and

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<sup>141</sup> As it is defined by Laurajane Smith in *Uses of Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2006), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-0465-2\\_1937](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-0465-2_1937).

<sup>142</sup> This sense of ‘place’ overlaps but differs in important ways from that which is defined by Augé, and is “associated by Mauss and a whole ethnological tradition with the idea of a culture localized in time and space.” For more on that sense of the term ‘place’, see: Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 34.

established as a discipline by the 1980s.<sup>143</sup> Several competing terms emerge here, with ‘new museology’<sup>144</sup> being coined to describe new, socially-informed practices in the museum profession, and ‘critical museology’ gaining an association — sometimes pejorative — with a more academic approach to the theorization of museal spaces, informed by the ‘critical theory’ of Adorno, Habermas, Benjamin and others.<sup>145</sup> It is in this latter domain that a wealth of scholarship has been produced on the interrelationship between the museum and colonialism, as well as resistance and reparation in the context of museum collections. This includes but is not limited to work by Kwame Anthony Appiah, Marie-Jeanne Berger, Lonnie Bunch, Shelley Ruth Butler, James Clifford, Elliot Colla, Karen Coody Cooper, Christina Kreps, Janet Marstine, Donald Malcolm Reid, and Andrea Witcomb.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Jesús Pedro Lorente, “The Development of Museum Studies in Universities: From Technical Training to Critical Museology,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27, no. 3 (2012): 237–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2012.701995>.

<sup>144</sup> While this term was used before its publication, it tends to be most closely associated with Peter Vergo’s book of the same name. See: Vergo, *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989).

<sup>145</sup> Lorente, “The Development of Museum Studies in Universities: From Technical Training to Critical Museology,” 243.

<sup>146</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 2 (1991): 336–57, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448586>; Marie Jeanne Berger, “The Museum and the Object: Cultural Commodities in Flux at the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 32, no. 4 (2017): 395–414, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2017.1347807>; Lonnie Bunch, “Embracing Controversy: Museum Exhibitions and the Politics of Change,” *The Public Historian* 14, no. 3 (1992): 63–65; Shelley Ruth Butler, “The Politics of Exhibiting Culture: Legacies and Possibilities,” *Museum Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2000): 74–92, <https://doi.org/10.1525/mua.2000.23.3.74>; James Clifford, “Museums as Contact Zones,” in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1997), 188–219; Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Christina F Kreps, *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Heritage Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Marstine, *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*; Donald Malcolm Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to WWI* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002); Andrea Witcomb, “‘A Place for All of Us’? Museums and Communities,” in *Reimagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 133–56.

In this field, we see the formation of a new museum praxis, one that strives to define new modes of collection, exhibition, display, and study which not only *interrupt* the violence with which colonized nations and peoples are taxonomized, but also to *repair* some part of that harm through restorative, community-based practices.<sup>147</sup> This includes new models of curation with “the profound senses of obligation [...] to *deal with* the past where it impinges painfully on the present,” in opposition to the “mono-vocal, authoritative, objectivist, material-centric framework of exhibiting culture that has defined museology since its consolidation as a branch of science and a tool for refining the citizenry a century ago.”<sup>148</sup> As Christina Kreps argues, “the new museology is fundamentally concerned with the democratization of museum practices and bottom-up, participatory approaches. It stresses the importance of community or public participation in museums, not only as visitors, but also as participants in all aspects of museum work.”<sup>149</sup>

In keeping with the aims of the critical theory by which it is informed, this new museology strives to uncover and address the systemic violence with which museal spaces have controlled and contained the subject peoples of current and former colonies.

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<sup>147</sup> Lehrer, Milton, and Patterson, for example, bid us to reflect on the ways in which “we — as scholars, artists, curators — ‘activate,’ ‘re-activate,’ or perhaps ‘de-activate’ public sites of memory in ways that repair severed cultural continuities, enhance inter-group understanding, and destabilize problematic boundaries, especially when such sites have more often been employed in the reproduction of divisive notions of self and other.” In “Introduction,” *Curating Difficult Knowledge : Violent Pasts in Public Places*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, 2011, 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2013.834235>.

<sup>148</sup> Erica Lehrer and Cynthia E. Milton, “Introduction: Witnesses to Witnessing,” in Erica Lehrer, Cynthia Milton, and Monica Eileen Patterson, *Curating Difficult Knowledge : Violent Pasts in Public Places*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, 2011, 4–5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2013.834235>.

<sup>149</sup> Kreps, *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Heritage Preservation*, 10.

As implied by Kreps, this has necessitated a fundamental reorganization of the relationship between museums and visitors, ‘subject experts’ and marginalized communities, curators and the ‘source communities’ from which collections are enriched. The broadly defined aim of the museum professional, critic, or scholar working within this model is to push outwards from within the institution, expanding its scope, potentially beyond its definitional breaking point. Kreps articulates this aim, finding that

The liberation of culture is not only about giving back or restoring a people’s right to and control over the management of their cultural heritage. It is also about liberating our thinking from the Eurocentric of what constitutes a museum, artifact, and museological practice so that we might better recognize alternative forms.<sup>150</sup>

Nonetheless, the rise of the new museology has, not coincidentally, been accompanied by a series of highly publicized protests against normative museum practices. Notable examples in the U.S. context include an organized disruption at the American Association of Museums annual conference in 1970,<sup>151</sup> and Maria Pearson’s 1971 protests to protect and repatriate Indigenous<sup>152</sup> human remains.<sup>153</sup> These campaigns resulted in long-lasting, systemic change, with the former being referenced as a catalyst for a reappraisal of the

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<sup>150</sup> Kreps, 145.

<sup>151</sup> Lindauer, Margaret A. “Critical museum pedagogy and exhibition development: A conceptual first step” in Sheila Watson, Simon J Knell, and Suzanne Macleod, *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and Are Changed* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2007), 306.

<sup>152</sup> As discussed earlier, this text will capitalize ‘Indigenous’ when referring to communities in the Americas and Oceania that utilize this mode of identification in keeping with the grammatical norms accorded to other global nations (this is to say that ‘Indigenous’, ‘Cree’, and ‘Inuit’ are capitalized just as ‘Canadian’, ‘British’, and ‘Egyptian’ are).

<sup>153</sup> Sangita Chari and Jaime M. N. Lavalley, *Accomplishing NAGPRA : Perspectives on the Intent, Impact, and Future of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2013), 214.

museum's fundamental social role,<sup>154</sup> and the latter instigating a series of legislative changes resulting in the implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990, affecting the legal and political terms of ethnographic collection and exhibition practices thereafter.<sup>155</sup>

Organized grassroots protests in Canada have been no less influential, with two of the most oft-cited actions — the protests against the Glenbow Museum's *The Spirit Sings* and the Royal Ontario Museum's *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibitions in 1988 and 1989 respectively — having also shaped Canadian and international museum practices. The 1988 protest of *The Spirit Sings* by the Lubicon Lake Cree focused on the hypocrisy of the Calgary Olympic games' utilization of Indigenous imagery while under the sponsorship of Shell, a company responsible for drilling operations on unceded land.<sup>156</sup> The resulting call for boycotts drew international attention, resulting in the formation of the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples, the recommendations of which continue to inform international best practices for the display of Indigenous cultural production.<sup>157</sup> The following year, Black communities in Toronto led protests against the Royal Ontario Museum's *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibition, arguing that its ironic approach to violent colonial histories served to perpetuate, rather than critique the worldviews on display.<sup>158</sup> In addition to catalyzing a wide range of community-based responses (such as M.

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<sup>154</sup> Duncan F. Cameron, "The Museum: A Temple or the Forum," *Journal of World History* 14, no. 1 (1972): 196.

<sup>155</sup> Chari and Lavallee, *Accomplishing NAGPRA: Perspectives on the Intent, Impact, and Future of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act*, 214.

<sup>156</sup> Butler, "The Politics of Exhibiting Culture: Legacies and Possibilities," 87.

<sup>157</sup> Ruth B. Phillips, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2011).

<sup>158</sup> Butler, "The Politics of Exhibiting Culture: Legacies and Possibilities," 78.

NourbeSe Philip's influential *Frontiers*<sup>159</sup>), the protest also advanced dialogues on museums' ethical responsibility to local and international communities whose bodies and histories are placed on display.<sup>160</sup> Other influential examples can be found in Australia,<sup>161</sup> South Africa,<sup>162</sup> New Zealand,<sup>163</sup> and across the world's present and former colonies, and they continue to the present day with international debates on the very definition and function of a museum.<sup>164</sup>

In many of these cases, the protests and subsequent scholarship focused on the failures of consultation that resulted in harmful, dehumanizing misrepresentations, and the continuation of violent, colonial methods of collection and display. Driving the development of critical museology, these protests are sometimes characterized as a politically complex challenge, and other times, as an opportunity for institutionally beneficial dialogue. Christina Kreps notes, for example, "Although NAGPRA and the repatriation of objects often has been portrayed in terms of conflict [...] it is important to remember how both sides can benefit from repatriation."<sup>165</sup> Such engagements with the museum's relationship to its colonial legacy speak the new museology's commitment diversifying the museum's exhibitionary scope, reframing its understanding of

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<sup>159</sup> Marlene NourbeSe Philip, *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture* (Stratford, ON: Mercury Press, 1992).

<sup>160</sup> Shelley Ruth Butler, *Contested Representations*, 2008.

<sup>161</sup> Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, "Introduction" in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, 2005, 12, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203987834>.

<sup>162</sup> Butler, "The Politics of Exhibiting Culture: Legacies and Possibilities," 79–80.

<sup>163</sup> Paul Tapsell, "Afterword: Beyond the Frame" in Peers and Brown, *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, 247.

<sup>164</sup> For example, recent efforts at the International Council of Museums (ICOM) to expand the definition have resulted in a wave of resignations. See: Kate Brown, "What Defines a Museum? The Question Has Thrown the Art World's Leading Professional Organization Into Turmoil," *ARTnews*, August 20, 2020.

<sup>165</sup> Kreps, *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Heritage Preservation*, 89.

‘authority’, and democratizing its institutional processes — all important and laudable goals. Nonetheless, they entrench a particular misconception of the museum’s history, and a slippage in institutional historiographies that have come to be viewed as authoritative: that is, the view that anti-colonial action against the museum is a *new* phenomenon that arose at roughly the same time that the museum profession began to gain interest in systematically addressing it, and not as one that *predates* and underlies the modern museum’s existence, with continuous (though changing) presence until the present day.

This assumption of the novelty of decolonial museum contestation is widespread in the writing on the changing social role of the museum: for example, Duncan Cameron’s influential 1972 essay “The Museum: a Temple or the Forum” describes the shock of museum professionals at the protest of the American Association of Museums, attributing “the antimuseum protest movement” to the “alliance of artists with the intellectuals and with the radical student movements of protest in Europe” at the time.<sup>166</sup> George Stocking places the origin point of counter-museological discourse at an earlier point, stating that “since the late 1960s others — specifically, the non-European ‘others’ whose objects have traditionally filled exhibit halls and cases — have come forward as actors in the world of museum anthropology.”<sup>167</sup> In 1989, however, Peter Vergo continues to regard the challenge to the institution as a new one, defining the titular ‘new’ museology of his text as one that asks:

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<sup>166</sup> Cameron, “The Museum: A Temple or the Forum,” 18–19.

<sup>167</sup> George W. Stocking, *Objects and Others : Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 10–11.

What makes certain objects, rather than others, 'worth' preserving for posterity? When our museums acquire (or refuse to give back) objects or artefacts specific to cultures other than our own, how does the 'value' we place upon such objects differ from that assigned to them by the culture, the people or the tribe from whom they have been taken, and for whom they may have a quite specific religious or ritual or even therapeutic connotation? <sup>168</sup>

These are not new questions for the museum to ask of itself. As early as 1907, Rollin Lynde Hartt critiqued museology's normative prioritization of aristocratic audiences, noting that:

The so-called New Museology has not only won theoretical acceptance throughout America, but practical application in the regenerated Metropolitan under Sir Caspar Purdon Clark [*sic*] and in the admirable plans for re-housing the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Both institutions have of late experienced a radical change of heart, setting an example to museums far and wide and showing the Plain Man that his wail has been heard. A new spirit, armed with a new science, now controls their governing boards. <sup>169</sup>

Hartt explicitly refers here to Sir Caspar Purdon Clarke's 1905-1910 directorship of the Metropolitan Museum of Art as an exemplar of 'New Museology', directly echoing the framework most closely associated with Vergo's much later work. Hartt refers to it in 1907 as a new, but increasingly well-established practice, one that he appears *not* to be coining in this publication, but rather, referencing as part of a broader, existing discourse. He optimistically finds that this change has taken place at museums' highest echelons, explaining of the "councils and governing boards of the museums themselves," having been "aristocratic, hitherto [...] are rapidly becoming democratic."<sup>170</sup> Hartt reassures us that as of the time of his writing, those governing bodies

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<sup>168</sup> Vergo, *The New Museology*, 3.

<sup>169</sup> Rollin Lynde Hartt, "Art Galleries for the Plain Man," *The World's Work* XV, no. 1 (1907): 9567.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

Have attained a new point of view, no longer regarding a museum as a mere shelter for art objects, but thinking of it primarily as a place where art objects can be easily and comfortably seen, enjoyed, understood, and put to practical uses by the Plain Man.<sup>171</sup>

While the overarching conservatism of Hartt's other writings reveals the shortcomings of his definition of the 'Plain Man' to whom he hopes the museum will extend its services – the democratization in question here is evidently one of class rather than race, gender, or otherwise – but what Hartt's writing makes clear is that museums have been asking themselves self-reflexive questions about the meaning and value of their collections since the turn of the century.

Question: Should a museum be esthetic or didactic? In other words, should it arrange its collection so as to yield a maximum of beauty, or so as to yield a maximum of instruction? Should it aim to delight the eye and to cultivate artistic taste, or should it aim to inform the mind and teach the history of art? What if this means looting the "didactic" halls of their most magnificent possessions: their places can be taken there by photographs and reproductions, so as to leave the series unbroken.<sup>172</sup>

This is all, of course, not to say that museum practice truly achieved Hartt's democratic ideal, nor is it to disregard the real, significant changes that took place through the intervening decades. But it *is* to draw attention to the gulf of inaction that lies between rhetorical appeals to democracy and the material enactment of change. Hartt's proclamation of the dawn of a new and democratic era of museum practice just as it was beginning to perform its most anti-democratic manoeuvres to date reveals the productive

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 9568.

logic of that appeal: declaring that an institution is (or soon will be) democratic can be a means of keeping it *undemocratic*.

Diversified representation in governance structures and audiences has also evidently been described as a priority since Hartt's time, and by itself this does not appear to destabilize the museum's function as an ideological state apparatus. In fact, representation can also be consumed and objectified as a site of value-production: as Hartt explains, "the museum holds a foremost rank among educative forces," providing the 'Plain Man' with the means to improve his production of "manufactured things, in whose production we [Americans] ought to excel, and for whose masterly production a high degree of esthetic culture is indispensable."<sup>173</sup> This productive function of diversity in institutional representation can be seen again in Kasarhérou's deployment of his Melanesian identity as a means of quelling demands for material restitution. Diversifying the ideological state apparatus' audiences and leaders *can* productively expand and re-shape its processes, but such 'inclusion' will fail to destabilize its underlying means of value-production so long as it remains *productive*. Geoff Mann brings up a useful point here, reminding us that:

The ultimate goal of a Marxist and/or critical-political practice is not ultimately a fairer distribution of value to its 'producers' – although this is an important task – but the abolition, destruction, overcoming of the category of value itself. The aim is for a world in which value is not the organising principle.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 9570.

<sup>174</sup> Geoff Mann, "Value after Lehman," *Historical Materialism* 18, no. 4 (2010): 175, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156920610X550640>.

Mann identifies here the slippage in the semiotic function of ‘value’: as a mode of economic production *and* a broader form of social worth, its dual meanings are often deeply at odds.<sup>175</sup> Institutional representation certainly has value in that exclusion and erasure are some of White supremacy’s most violent and dehumanizing weapons,<sup>176</sup> but it also has value in that it can be consumed and re-purposed in service of the maintenance of those same violent structures. Thus, this study focuses on repatriation (and other modes of material claims-making) as an effective limit-case to the museum’s democratization: it is a concrete action with identifiable outcomes that challenges the valuative systems upon which the institution is established. Repatriation does not *produce* value for the museum but rather *robs* it, and is thus uniquely suitable as the object of this study on early museal modes of meaning- and value-production.

In relation to this project’s broader decolonial aims, there are strategic benefits and drawbacks to the temporal delineation between the ‘new’ and ‘old’ museologies: due to the successes of continued extra-institutional campaigns, the norms and practices of the museum profession did indeed begin to respond more favourably to the changing social structures of the 1960s and beyond. Systemic reforms on the legislative level (such as NAGPRA) have seismically shaped contemporary museum practice, and have been helmed by Indigenous peoples’ efforts. Marking the ‘new’ museology by this shift in

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<sup>175</sup> Huber explores this slippage at length, noting that “An anti-capitalist politics must seek to create different *cultural values* about how ‘social worth’ is determined. Value under capital not only compels us to be more productive but also implies that the only way we can recognize the ‘value’ [...] is through the value form of money.” In “Value, Nature, and Labor: A Defense of Marx,” *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 28, no. 1 (2017): 39–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455752.2016.1271817>.

<sup>176</sup> As can be seen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century museum context in fact that colonized peoples (including Egyptians) were largely not permitted to participate in their own nations’ heritage programmes.

institutional responses to decolonial pressure serves to acknowledge and highlight the momentous labour required to achieve these systemic changes.

On the other hand, unravelling the conflation between the new institutional *responses to* its contestation with the continuous *existence and impact of* said contestation is of critical significance to the decolonization of museum practice, as this conflation obscures the foundational investments that have shaped the museum and its history. My contention with the supposed newness of the ‘new’ museology is not to suggest that no reforms have taken place, or that they have been irrelevant. Rather, it is that the supposition of novelty erases the continuous, organized, global anti-colonial efforts that predate the more recent – and naturally, different – projects. There are few existing historiographies of pre-20<sup>th</sup> century repatriation campaigns in the Global South,<sup>177</sup> and the grassroots labour required to sustain such political pressure is currently all but absent from the museum’s historiography. Stocking’s claim, for example, that that non-European Others emerged only as ‘actors’ in the 1960s belies the foundational role that the indigenous modes of desire and valuation played in the formation of the canonical Western museum and its practice. For example: when Denon — who would go on to restructure the Louvre into its present-day form — exalts in laying claim to “the objects of which [the Turks] are most jealous,” bragging that “it may be considered as a very

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<sup>177</sup> In the Egyptian context, notable works on this topic include Achmawi (2012) and Khater, “Le Régime Juridique Des Fouilles et Des Antiquités En Égypte” (1960), as well as more recent work such as that by Monica Hanna (2021). In a more global context, additional analysis include: Barkan and Bush, *Claiming the Stones, Naming the Bones: Cultural Property and the Negotiation of National and Ethnic Identity*; Greenfield, *The Return of Cultural Treasures*; Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*; and Vrolijk, *International Law, Museums, and the Return of Cultural Objects*.

valuable antique, and as one of our most precious spoils in Egypt, with which it is to be wished that our national museum may be enriched,” is this not evidence of the foundational role of non-Western actants upon the museal structure?<sup>178</sup> After all, the Turks’ desire for the antique in question motivates Denon’s valuation of it as a museum-worthy trophy. And, given Denon’s work in the formation of the Louvre and in turn modern museology at large, the function of indigenous desire in his early texts demonstrates the productive function of the colonized Other in the museum’s value-making frameworks as a whole.

This is, however, not to claim that the museum has always *accepted* non-Western subjectivities as part of its hegemonic structure: rather, decolonial pressure has historically taken place from the outside-in, as a force *against which* the institution has defined itself. In this regard, the contestations that have shaped new museology can be understood as the most recent strategic salvo in the maintenance of a normative mode of value- and knowledge-production. As the recent French case study demonstrates, ‘repatriation’ and ‘restitution’ can be rhetorically deployed as superficially reparative moves that allay non-Western demands for concrete, materially grounded restructuring. ‘Representation’ can be utilized as a symbolic indicator of oncoming administrative sea-change, but the gravitational pull towards the institutional center makes it far easier for racialized indigenous bodies — themselves a site of institutional value-production — to move *with* rather than *against*. Colonized bodies have in fact been actors in the museum world *before* that world came into being in its modern form, but perhaps only in the sense

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<sup>178</sup> Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt, Volume I*, 1:50.

that actors are workers that produce valuable imaginaries, and workers are the site of value-production that the capitalist relation continuously subjugates. Writing a history of the museum without the originary impact of colonized peoples is like writing a history of capitalism that erases the role of the worker: it is not to suggest that capitalism graciously accepts the feedback of the working classes — it did not and it does not — but rather, that workers are the Other *against which* the means of value-production have continuously been defined. Returning to the opening lines of the Communist Manifesto, the museum's colonial relation might be understood as a *hauntological* one. The museum is haunted by the threat of wholesale material restructuring, and while the new museology's progressive aims have responded laudably in recent decades to the demands to begin this effort, this project concerns itself with the violent *beginnings* that still motivate the specter that stalks the museum's upper floors.

## **1.8 Working With/Against the Museum**

What work can be undertaken, then, to shed light on these still-relevant histories? And how might the social and political struggles of the past century be enfolded with those which are still ongoing, informing their strategies and potentialities? Here, historical objects are examined as loci of value and desire, heightened sites of meaning that entangle global networks of economy, affect, and geopolitical control. Looking to the histories of these value-laden objects, this project traces the implications of such networks of value and desire as they pertain to Ancient Egyptian antiquities, tracing the ways that grassroots efforts to retain and repatriate them have shaped modern museology's origins in the late 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, resonating through the 20<sup>th</sup> century to

the present day. By tracing object diasporas of three Pharaonic sites of meaning- and value-production, this project undertakes an archaeology of the museum itself. Its excavation strives to demonstrate how indigenous projects of contestation have served as the museum's functional Other, running counter to it and in so doing, shaping its aims, methods, and structures of valuation.

This project speaks too to its author's particular subject-position and ideological alignment: as a daughter and granddaughter of avowed Nasserists, I take my motivation from the work that was required of organizers to liberate archaeology and museology in Egypt from their colonial roots. My subject position as an Egyptian is of ideological consequence, as my father would have been well in his grade school years before the *very first Egyptian* was permitted to work in the National Antiquities Service.<sup>179</sup> And while it is only in the last half-century that Egyptians have gradually been allowed to study, speak to, and lead discourses on their nation's own history, my subject position as a light-skinned member of the Egypt's Arabic-speaking Muslim majority nonetheless places me in a relation of power with respect to the Black, Nubian, Coptic, and/or otherwise marginalized voices that have been organizing still for the continued liberation of this domain, and whose voices I highlight in the chapters to follow. Finally, as a researcher based in the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe nation and as a long-time activist committed to anti-hierarchical praxis, I consider this project a study of real,

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<sup>179</sup> My father was born in 1946, and Egyptians were permitted in the National Antiquities Service following the revolution following the revolution of 1952. One arguable exception may be Ahmad Pasha Kamal, whose ambivalent role is further discussed in **Chapters 1** and the **Conclusion**.

material, decolonial tactics first, and a theoretical meditation on museum history second. To these ends, the following chapters trace a loosely chronological trajectory as follows:

**Chapter One** maps the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century contestations that underlay the famed 1922 discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun and contributed significantly to its discursive framing thereafter. Due in part to the successes of anti-colonial organizing at the turn of the century Egypt, the retention of the tomb's contents can be seen as the first major win for the nation's antiquities service. This political context can be seen to underlie the media coverage of the discovery and the subsequent 'King Tut' craze, which in turn came to define the 'blockbuster' museum exhibit, in particular those of the 'treasures' genre.

**Chapter Two** reckons with the complex discursive overdetermination of The Bust of Nefertiti as an ambivalent national icon in deeply divergent German and Egyptian popular projects. Beyond the national modes of claims-making seen in the case of 'King Tut', The Bust of Nefertiti is re-appropriated here in a multitude of mass-media forms that contribute to its structures of valuation. The function of the museum and its collections are contested here through public campaigns with dramatically incommensurable ends, contributing to a deeply fraught legacy that reveals a political economy of desire in which artifacts are enmeshed.

**Chapter Three** traces the object-biography of the 'Paris Needle,' also named the Paris Obelisk or Cleopatra's Needle (of which, confusingly, there are three: one in Paris, London, and New York, respectively). Located in a public square that became a centre point of bloodshed during the French Revolution, it is symbolically linked too with democratic struggle in Egypt, as its meanings come to be shaped through local resistance

to the French efforts to obtain and transport it. Countering its perceptions as a ‘gift’ of the Ottoman viceregent, its history is interwoven with the outcry against its transport, highlighting the ways that its bequeathment galvanized Egyptian legal efforts to henceforth retain national patrimony. These forms of artifactual contestation are not enacted *through* but *against* the nation-state, thereby suggesting divergent means of public possession that resist the museum model.

Finally, the **Conclusion** re-examines these histories by looking to representations of Egyptian ‘tomb robbers,’ unpacking the ways that such ‘unauthorized,’ extra-institutional relations to heritage are abjected from the body politic. Resisting the ways that institutional models produce and reproduce disciplined relations to artifactual value and affect, this resistant reassessment of Gurna — a supposed ‘village of tomb robbers’ in Upper Egypt — uses oral histories to instead suggest a more expansive framework through which collection, curation, and representation can be envisioned.

## Chapter 1: Tutankhamun and Egyptian ‘Treasures’

### 1.1 The Anonymous Pharaoh

After thirty years of autocratic rule, in June of 2010 Egypt’s Mubarak regime was bolstering its power, having recently renewed the deeply unpopular ‘Emergency Law.’ Aimed ostensibly at deterring terrorist activity, this overwhelmingly broad framework “granted sweeping powers of arrest and detention,” limiting press freedom and severely curtailing the political activity of opposition parties and individuals alike.<sup>1</sup> Alexandria’s middle-class Cleopatra neighborhood – heretofore hardly a hotbed of radicalism – would see one of the key catalyzing events of what would later come to be known as the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution: a twenty-eight-year-old man, Khaled Said, brutally beaten to death by plainclothes police officers in an encounter reported to have been related to minor, seemingly baseless drug charges.<sup>2</sup> What would turn the tides around this particular case, however, were the leaked images of his brutally mangled body; his badly broken jaw, missing teeth and split lip, his one open eye, and the blood pooling beneath his head.<sup>3</sup>

This image might be seen as one of the first of many that would motivate a deeply image-driven revolution. Through online networks, protests would spread farther through

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<sup>1</sup> Ashraf Khalil, *Liberation Square: Inside the Egyptian Revolution and the Rebirth of a Nation* (St. Martin’s Press, 2012), 32.

Additional analyses of the political context of the January 25 revolution can be found in Mohamed El-Bendary, *Egyptian Revolution : Between Hope and Despair, Mubarak to Morsi, Text* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2013); Dan Tschirgi, Walid Kazziha, and Sean F. McMahon, *Egypt’s Tahrir Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reider, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.51-0497>.

<sup>2</sup> Tschirgi et. al., *Egypt’s Tahrir Revolution*, 99-100. See also Khalil, *Liberation Square*, 90-92.

<sup>3</sup> One of the earliest media publications of the image is archived below. Please be warned of its graphic nature. Ahmad Ahmad, “Ālḥaqiyqa Hya an Ḥāld Muḥamad Sa‘yd Šobḥi, 28 ... Māt Wašt ... [The Truth Is That Khaled Mohammed Said Sobhy, 28, Died Amidst...],” *Masrawy*, June 10, 2010.

Egypt, galvanized by events in Tunisia and beyond. By February of 2011, the scale of these protests had swelled to national proportions, posing a real, tangible threat to the Mubarak regime. On a mall across town from the Cleopatra neighborhood, the artist Marwan Shahin would surreptitiously stencil a mashup of Tutankhamun's iconic golden death mask with another mask that had recently gained traction as a symbol of resistance against tyrannical regimes everywhere: the Guy Fawkes mask, made popular by the 2005 film, *V for Vendetta*.<sup>4</sup> This mask — known also as the 'Anonymous' mask for its use by the eponymous hacker collective — shows a black-and-white mustachioed figure, against, in Shahin's version, a stylized red-and-gold pattern. Using the colours of the Egyptian flag, Shahin's image turns them on their head to represent a grassroots vision of national liberation, one that runs in direct opposition to the state hegemonies (**Figure 3**).

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<sup>4</sup> Wael Khairy speaks to the resonances in *V for Vendetta* that contributed to the popularization of its imagery in the Egyptian revolution. See: Wael Khairy, "V for Vendetta: Guy Fawkes in Egypt," *Roger Ebert .Com*, June 21, 2011. <https://www.rogerebert.com/far-flung-correspondents/v-for-vendetta-guy-fawkes-in-egypt>



**Figure 3: *The 2Vth (Anonymous Pharaoh)*, Marwan Shahin, spray paint on outdoor wall. Via [https://www.behance.net/gallery/1145719/The-2Vth-\(aka-Anonymous-Pharaoh\)](https://www.behance.net/gallery/1145719/The-2Vth-(aka-Anonymous-Pharaoh))**

The imagery is carefully chosen: for Shahin, “the Guy Fawkes mask holds so much power” having gained enormous popularity at the ongoing protests, resonating with the story of Tutankhamun “because he was a young pharaoh who died at the age of 19, just

like a lot of young Egyptian kids who sadly lost their lives too early in the events of the uprising in 2011.”<sup>5</sup>

Shahin’s original graffiti was painted in the upscale San Stefano neighborhood, amidst luxury hotels and malls. There, it would be photographed and its image would gain steam on social media, where it would be spotted by Don Karl and Basma Hamdy, who would repost it to their popular Facebook page, and ultimately choose it as the cover of their critically-acclaimed book documenting Egypt’s revolutionary graffiti, *Walls of Freedom: Street Art of The Egyptian Revolution*.<sup>6</sup> Here, reviews would praise the “startling” mashup,<sup>7</sup> but the book’s “antigovernment and pro-democracy” efforts would be cut short: upon entering Egypt via the ports of Alexandria, all copies would be seized on charges that “the contents of the book incite and call for revolution and means of confronting and resisting the police and army, [and] means of provoking riots.”<sup>8</sup>

But while the censorship of Shahin’s artwork and *Walls of Freedom* came to stand for the kinds of broad state overreach and suppression of critique which had initially motivated the revolution, his was far from the only work of pro-revolutionary street art featuring the long-dead boy-king: in one, his death mask is transformed into a gas mask, like those of so many other protestors. In another, he is remixed with Da Vinci’s

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<sup>5</sup> Design Museum, “Q&A with Marwan Shahin,” The Design Museum, accessed May 12, 2022, <https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/hope-to-nope-graphics-and-politics-2008-18/qa-with-marwan-shahin#>.

<sup>6</sup> Marwan Shahin, “The 2Vth (Aka Anonymous Pharaoh),” Behance, 2011, [https://www.behance.net/gallery/1145719/The-2Vth-\(aka-Anonymous-Pharaoh\)](https://www.behance.net/gallery/1145719/The-2Vth-(aka-Anonymous-Pharaoh)). The Facebook page remains accessible here: <https://www.facebook.com/WallsOfFreedom/>

<sup>7</sup> New York Times, “Art and Outrage,” *New York Times*, 2012. New York Times.

<sup>8</sup> Mohsen Abd El-Razek, “Ālġamārik: Dabaṭnā 400 Nuṣḥa Min Kitāb Ālmāny Yuḥarid ‘ala Āltwrah Wālṣaġab [Customs: We Have Confiscated 400 Copies of a German Book Which Incites Revolution and Riots],” *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, February 18, 2015. <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1665940>

Vitruvian Man, albeit with a broken leg, eyepatch, and shackles. His iconic golden beard is combined with Che Guevara’s iconic photograph, among other variations.



Figure 4, left to right: Graffiti by an unknown artist, via Mia Gröndahl, *Revolution Graffiti: Street Art of the New Egypt*. Cairo: AUC Press, 2013. Artwork by unknown artist, via Cairo Scene: <https://cairoscene.com/ArtsAndCulture/Walls-of-Freedom-Banned-From-Egypt> Artwork by Keizer, via Al Jazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2021/2/11/in-pictures-graffiti-tells-the-story-of-egypts-revolution>

It is, however, through the controversy around the censorship and confiscation of *Walls of Freedom* that Shahin’s *Anonymous Pharaoh* would likely become the most well-travelled image of them all, as photographs of boxes filled with the contraband books — all with the inflammatory image on the cover — began to circulate in the Western and English-language Egyptian press, ironically increasing its reach and impact than if it had quietly slipped under the official radar.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Staff Writer, “Walls of Freedom Banned From Egypt,” *Cairo Scene*, February 19, 2015, <https://cairoscene.com/ArtsAndCulture/Walls-of-Freedom-Banned-From-Egypt>; Rowan El Shimi, “Graffiti Book Seized Pending Police Enquiry despite Censors’ Approval,” *MadaMasr*, February 22, 2015, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2015/02/22/news/culture/graffiti-book-seized-pending-police-enquiry-despite-censors-approval/>; Andrew Gale, “Egypt Seizes Graffiti Book for ‘Inciting Revolution,’” *Dazed*, February 15, 2015, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/photography/article/23704/1/egypt-seizes-graffiti-book-for-inciting-revolution>; Benjamin Sutton, “Egypt Customs Officials Seize Street Art Books for ‘Instigating

Accordingly, Shahin's image on the cover of the banned book becomes one of the most globally recognizable artworks to emerge from the 2011 revolution, which marked, as Samuli Schielke notes, "the beginning of an intensive and highly-politicized period of wall-writing that tells a story of the struggles and shifts of mood [...] during and after the failed revolution."<sup>10</sup> And so while Shahin would exhibit his artwork broadly in gallery spaces and reproduce his design in more merchandisable forms such as t-shirts and posters,<sup>11</sup> it is in its most ephemeral forms that it did the most concrete work: in public forums, tangible and intangible, on 'walls' both physical and online, where inter- and intra-national contestations shaped it and were shaped by it in turn.

Along these lines, this chapter unpacks the ways in which highly-public Egyptian claims for the 'Treasures of Tutankhamun' — that is, the grave goods of the final pharaoh of the 25<sup>th</sup> dynasty, Tutankhamun — have contributed to their public understandings, and of the 'King Tut' phenomenon more broadly. Here, I examine two historical periods and relevant media coverage therein: first, the decade following the tomb's discovery by Howard Carter in 1922, and then through the 1970s, coinciding with the record-breaking 'Treasures of Tutankhamun' exhibition. These press-based

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Revolt," *Hyperallergic*, February 20, 2015, <https://hyperallergic.com/184620/egypt-customs-officials-seize-street-art-books-for-instigating-revolt/>; Francesca Caferri, "Egitto, Censura Sulla Primavera Dei Graffiti," 2015, February, [https://web.archive.org/web/20150327121804/https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2015/02/27/news/egitto\\_libro\\_murales-108342295/](https://web.archive.org/web/20150327121804/https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2015/02/27/news/egitto_libro_murales-108342295/).

By means of comparison, Mia Gröndahl's thematically similar book passed censor review, and received nearly negligible global press attention despite its incisive political critiques. See: Mia Gröndahl, *Revolution Graffiti: Street Art of the New Egypt* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Samuli Schielke, *A City of Walls. A Photo Essay on Writing on Walls in Alexandria, 2011-2017 / Une Ville de Murs : Essai Photographique Sur Les Écrits Des Murs d'Alexandrie (2011-2017)*, *Égypte/Monde Arabe*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.4000/ema.3858>.

<sup>11</sup> See: Shahin, "The 2Vth (Aka Anonymous Pharaoh)," Behance.

contestations highlight the struggle for material and epistemic control of the ‘Treasures’, working through multiple (and occasionally deeply incommensurable) understandings of their social, political, economic, and historical value. These mediagenic debates would not only deeply impact lay public understandings of ‘King Tut’ in ways that continue to resonate to the present day, but would also contribute directly to lasting changes in Egyptian antiquities law, as well as to the structures which still shape museal and archaeological professional practices worldwide.

## 1.2 “Revoltimg imagery”

For Saphinaz Naguib, the *translatability* of the image is a key factor in its social and political power, especially in the realm of guerilla street art.<sup>12</sup> For images like those discussed above, which mediate between the inter- and intra-national contexts, ‘translation’ takes on multiple meanings: this includes “the philological perspective, the linguistic perspective, and—more relevant for the study of street art, graffiti, and calligraffiti—the communicative and sociosemiotic perspectives.”<sup>13</sup> Here, the sociosemiotics of translatability are communicated through the overlay of “different languages and scripts, such as Arabic and Arabizi, or Arabic for the Internet, English and its Latin alphabet, and, in some cases, ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs,” such that images are made legible — albeit differently — for Egyptian and international audiences, and for

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<sup>12</sup> Saphinaz Amal Naguib, “Engaged Ephemeral Art: Street Art and the Egyptian Arab Spring,” *Transcultural Studies* 2016, no. 2 (2016): 53–88, <https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.ts.2016.2.23590>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

the heterogenous publics within those already diverse spheres.<sup>14</sup> Translation in this sense becomes a mode of *transculturation*; less of a direct transposition of meaning and more of a dialogic practice through which *iterations* of meaning are collaboratively or oppositionally added, erased, overlaid, and manipulated to map out an image's discursive potential (such as in the artworks in **Figure 4**). Through such modes of public collaboration, the contested image comes to be deeply overdetermined, its contestations transforming it into a site of ephemeral and deeply situated sociosemiotic translation.

Through this view of collective meaning-production, *mis*-translation also becomes a site through which contestation may be made visible, contributing to an image's sociosemiotic potential. For example, while the officially-available rationale *Walls of Freedom's* confiscation was that it “incites revolution and riots” (“*yuḥariḍ ‘alā āltwrah wā-alsāḡab*”), Marwan Shahin's project description (*mis*-) translates it slightly differently: that “The Book is now Banned and confiscated if found in Egypt because it contains ‘Revolting Imagery’ against the military and The police.”<sup>15</sup> Shahin's turn of phrase<sup>16</sup> elegantly captures a broad swath of the cultural contestations of the 2011 revolution, over which images are deemed ‘revolting’ and accordingly abjected from — or embraced by — the public sphere. The revolution began over such an instance of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>15</sup> Abd El-Razek, “Ālḡamārik: Ḍabaṭnā 400 Nuṣḡa Min Kitāb Ālmāny Yuḥariḍ ‘ala Āltwrah Wālsāḡab [Customs: We Have Confiscated 400 Copies of a German Book Which Incites Revolution and Riots].” <https://www.almasyalyoum.com/news/details/1665940>, Shahin, “The 2Vth (Aka Anonymous Pharaoh)”. [https://www.behance.net/gallery/1145719/The-2Vth-\(aka-Anonymous-Pharaoh\)](https://www.behance.net/gallery/1145719/The-2Vth-(aka-Anonymous-Pharaoh))

<sup>16</sup> Shahin uses ‘revolting’ in a grammatically similar denotation in his interview with The Design Museum, that the Guy Fawkes mask “its the perfect imagery for revolting.” See: Design Museum, “Q&A with Marwan Shahin.” <https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/hope-to-nope-graphics-and-politics-2008-18/qa-with-marwan-shahin#>

‘revolting imagery’; a grainy, surreptitious photograph of the brutally murdered body of a young man. This image is officially censored through “a routine cover-up and that seemed to enrage people all the more because of its dreary familiarity,”<sup>17</sup> yet it still rapidly permeated through unofficial social networks, where its stark representation of the daily violence faced by Egyptians at the hands of the police provokes revolt; that is, the visceral *revulsion* of a populace, sick of these commonplace brutalities, organizing towards mass *revolution* against an autocratic regime. This revolutionary revulsion motivates Shahin, who find poetic resonances between the fate of the boy-king and that of the “young Egyptian kids who sadly lost their lives too early in the events of the uprising in 2011,” yet this image is also deemed ‘revolting.’ In this sense, revulsion become a performance of state-sanctioned affect, an authorized mode of visceral response to viscerally disturbing imagery. It is not the sight of viscera which is deemed revolting here, but rather, images which are revolting in that they instigate and facilitate revolt, as in images that inform the public on “how to confront and resist the police and army, and how to provoke riots.”<sup>18</sup>

As I will argue, similar forms of affective control *as well as* more tangible media control have played a central role in popular contestations for the ‘value’, broadly defined, of Egyptian cultural heritage in general and ‘King Tut’ in particular. In this case and others, the network of meanings that comes to be bound up with this particularly

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<sup>17</sup> Khalil, *Liberation Square: Inside the Egyptian Revolution and the Rebirth of a Nation*, chaps. 90–92.

<sup>18</sup> Abd El-Razek, “Ālġamārik: Ḍabaṭnā 400 Nuṣḥa Mīn Kitāb Ālmāny Yuḥarīd ‘ala Ālṭwrah Wālšagab [Customs: We Have Confiscated 400 Copies of a German Book Which Incites Revolution and Riots].” <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1665940>

fraught set of images is shaped by public contestations for discursive control. This process is amplified by the tension between material objects with a highly visible *economic* value and associated images with such deeply overdetermined *semiotic* value, each with conflicting associated *social* values. Such is the case of the ‘Treasures of Tutankhamun’; Tutankhamun’s iconic solid-gold death mask — referenced by Shahin as part of his ‘Anonymous Pharaoh’ design<sup>19</sup> — is an appropriate choice for his liberatory statement: in the past century, ‘King Tut’ has been ubiquitously controlled *and* reproduced as a complex metonym for the Egyptian body public in the global press and by the cultural institutions which sought control of his associated ‘treasures’.

The mediation between intangible images and material objects lies at the heart of the ‘King Tut’ phenomenon, and, for its power to translate objects into ‘exhibitions’ and ‘displays’, the museum plays a critical role in this process. It is through museal processes of collection, exhibition, preservation, study, and display — and through public debates around the value of such museal processes — that the ‘Treasures of Tutankhamun’ came to occupy such a prominent place in global public imaginations. Yet normative museology’s epistemic confines have, simultaneously, obscured and rendered illegible the contestations which have played such an outsized role in the value of the very things whose value the institution ostensibly preserves.

In so doing, the post-discovery history of these deeply fraught objects demonstrates the ways that institutions mandated to historical preservation can consume

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<sup>19</sup> Minus the cobra-and-vulture royal insignia, so that the figure could “represent the people not the king.” (Shahin, “The 2Vth (Aka Anonymous Pharaoh)”).

the very histories upon which they build their foundations. Accordingly, the museum might be understood as an ‘archive’ in the Derridean sense. As Riggs writes:

The archive begins at the breakdown of living memory (anamnesis, in Platonic terms): it is hypomnesic, a form of memory requiring ‘documentary or monumental apparatus ... auxiliary or memorandum’ and, in consequence, not a ‘real’ memory at all. Instead, forgetfulness is built into the archive, like a Freudian death drive. It is in, not despite, its drive for recording, for completeness, and for perfect order (hence, perfect knowledge) that the archive works against itself.<sup>20</sup>

For Riggs, the museum’s foundational function can be understood through the framework of the Derridean archive, as “institutional practices of archiving—collections management, as it is now known—shaped the discursive trajectories of museum objects in such a way that, even if now forgotten or erased, they threaten to deny or disturb the set of meanings formulated in the present.”<sup>21</sup> This is to say that while ‘archiving’ purports to *retain* memory, it in fact *ipso facto* presumes its destruction; *things* are translated into *objects* such that they may be catalogued, but that very act destroys the same thingness that prompted their acquisition. If this moment of translation can be understood as a form of traumatic rupture, then the museum-as-archive revisits, replays, and reappropriates that moment as part of its desired “restoration of an earlier state of things,” that of the state of stasis.<sup>22</sup> This process is bound up with the museum’s coloniality in both in its cause and its effect. As Aimé Césaire argues,

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<sup>20</sup> Christina Riggs, “The Body in the Box: Archiving the Egyptian Mummy,” *Archival Science* 17, no. 2 (2017): 133, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-016-9266-8>.

Jacques Derrida describes this archival framework in “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995): 9–63.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. James Strachey (New York and London: Co., W.W. Norton &, 1961), 31.

And the museums of which M. Caillois is so proud, not for one minute does it cross his mind that, all things considered, it would have been better not to have needed them; that Europe would have done better to tolerate the non-European civilizations at its side, leaving them alive, dynamic and prosperous, whole and not mutilated; that it would have been better to let them develop and fulfill themselves than to present for our admiration, duly labelled, their dead and scattered parts.<sup>23</sup>

Césaire’s scathing *Discourse on Colonialism* associates the museum’s consumptive tendency with that of the colonial project more broadly. The museum’s imperative to catalogue, to preserve, to archive, and to economically value is motivated by the same “relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production.”<sup>24</sup> This same imperative is examined by Achille Mbembe as a manifestation of ‘necropolitics,’ finding that “one of the museum’s functions has also been the production of statues, mummies, and fetishes—indeed objects deprived of their breath and returned to the inertia of matter.”<sup>25</sup> For Mbembe,

Mummification, statue-fication, and fetishization all correspond perfectly to the aforementioned logic of separation. [...] In order to acquire a right to the city in the museum as it exists today, the slave necessarily had to be emptied—as did all the primitive objects that had gone before—of all force and primary energy.<sup>26</sup>

Césaire’s summary of this process is apt: “colonization = ‘thingification.’”<sup>27</sup>

The mass ‘thingification’ of the tomb of Tutankhamun is a sub-genre of its own, an ongoing by-product of the Tut-manias of the 1920s and 70s. The Tutankhamun

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<sup>23</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1955), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 2022, 171.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Césaire, 42.

phenomenon has been used to sell home goods and cosmetics, food, fashion, and much more. In media, too, the boy-king affectionately dubbed ‘Tut’ has been the subject of songs and popular imagery, including a popular Saturday Night Live performance by Steve Martin, and more recently, a Coachella performance by Beyoncé. These reappropriations and reimaginings of the already-familiar imagery of the iconic golden death mask contribute to the discursive framing of not only the Tutankhamun phenomenon but to Egyptology as a whole; it is difficult to imagine or discuss the ways in which Egypt is broadly understood and represented without King Tut’s influence. For Allegra Fryxell, the “meteoric rise” of the Tutankhamun phenomenon can be understood through the lens of British temporal anxieties of the Modern era,<sup>28</sup> while for Donald Malcolm Reid, the phenomenon is attributed to the fact that “[the tomb’s] treasures were intact, not looted in antiquity, and rumors of a ‘curse’ seized the imagination of a credulous public and film industry.”<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, what is evident is that King Tut’s popularity worked on a particularly emotive level, one interlinked with its social and political value.

But while enthusiasm for the discovery reached a frantic scale in the interwar years, actual access to the objects remained limited in the West, as the Egyptian government claimed and retained control to the entire find in an unprecedented move. Accordingly, demand for replicas and reproductions of all kind skyrocketed in this period

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<sup>28</sup> Allegra Fryxell, “Tutankhamen, Egyptomania, and Temporal Enchantment in Interwar Britain,” *Twentieth Century British History* 28, no. 4 (2017): 521, <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwx056>.

<sup>29</sup> Donald Malcolm Reid, “Pharaonic Heritage in Modern Egypt,” in *A Companion the Ancient Near East*, ed. Daniel C. Snell, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020), 426.

in the museum world as well, largely in the form of replica tombs, and exhibitions of replica objects. As early as 1924, while English- and Arabic-language press was engaged in a continuing furor over the Egyptian government's claim to the tomb, a detailed replica was built for the English public at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley.<sup>30</sup> These exhibitions of replicas have proliferated since, with iterations in Dorchester, Oxford, Las Vegas, and Luxor where demand to access the original objects has exceeded their availability, be it for reasons of geography, conservation, or international diplomacy. Nonetheless, presence and absence both use the familiarity of the imagery on display to evoke affective responses, which come to be utilized as part of the West's ongoing claim for the objects. At the same time, the image of Tutankhamun has proliferated in Egyptian art from the Modern era onwards, as part of the Pharaonicism which had been used in service of national projects since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> Here, these representations function as part of broader anti-imperial critiques, particularly in light of the state's efforts to retain control over the artifacts — and, indeed, to define the terms through which they ought to be made known. It is through these contexts that Shahin and a multitude of other graffiti artists utilized the image of the boy-king to speak to the excesses of state power, contributing, again, to the already continuously-contested public image of Tutankhamun.

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<sup>30</sup> The Sphere, "Where London Amuses Itself At Wembley: The Great Amusements Park in the British Empire Exhibition," *The Sphere*, May 24, 1924.

<sup>31</sup> See: Alex Dika Seggerman, *Modernism on the Nile: Art in Egypt between the Islamic and the Contemporary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

### 1.3 Origins, Claims-making, and Renaissance

'King Tut' can be seen here as a culmination of a cultural phenomenon more than a century in the making, with its origins in Egypt's colonial era some decades before the Carters' famed discovery of Tutankhamun's still-sealed tomb. This chapter examines the social and political forces that underlay the development of this phenomenon, focusing on the impacts of Egyptian patrimonial claims on representations of 'King Tut', and on museology more broadly.

But to understand how this particular Pharaoh came to be so deeply fraught with incommensurable cultural significations, we must return to the foundations upon which Egyptology and the modern museum have been built. As previously discussed, contemporary modes of meaning- and value-production through which Egyptological objects are understood are bound up with the coloniality of museological processes. Donald Malcolm Reid outlines this history, noting that "by the time Howard Carter dug up Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922 – precisely one hundred years after Champollion [translated the Rosetta Stone] – Egypt had produced only one Egyptologist of note." This Egyptian was Ahmad Kamal, the sole Egyptian permitted to practice Egyptology within established Western institutions until after the 1952 revolution, and even his appointment remained deeply precarious despite his lasting contributions to the field. This exclusion entrenched the field's foundational Eurocentricity, providing a rationale for the continuation of its tacit status quo:

In 1923 Ahmad Kamal proposed that Egyptians be trained to understand, work in, and ultimately administer the archeology of their own land. The Director-general of the Service of Antiquities caustically remarked that with the exception of Ahmad Bey himself, few Egyptians had shown any interest in antiquity. Ahmad

Kamal responded: “Ah, M. Lacau, in the sixty-five years you French have directed the Service, what opportunities have you given us?”<sup>32</sup>

The systemic barriers faced by Kamal and his Egyptian contemporaries would continue until past his retirement: up until the revolution of 1952, the Antiquities Service was uniformly helmed by French nationals. This absence was not for lack of interest or ability; as Kamal’s retort suggests, it was the result of deliberate and systemic exclusion. The very foundations of Egyptology’s modern form can be traced to the structures of coloniality: while European interest in Egypt begins long before, Egypt’s systematic appraisal as an object of scientific study originates with Napoleon’s failed conquest in 1798, which is described by Edward Said as “an invasion which was in many ways the very model of a truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another, apparently stronger one.”<sup>33</sup> While the Napoleonic Expedition’s military aims ultimately failed, its scientific efforts were long-lasting and politically significant; *connaissance* and *reconnaissance* came to be inextricably tied in Europe’s 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial ventures as grasping a nation’s history was seen to justify its political control as well. Just as in other Orientalizing colonial ventures, the imbrication between epistemic and geopolitical control would frame the Expedition as an effort to “interpret ethnographic exploration and military re-*connaissance* as two sides of the same coin,”<sup>34</sup> working in the Foucauldian vein of *connaissance* as a “relation of the subject to the object and the

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<sup>32</sup> John A. Wilson, *Signs and Wonders Upon Pharaoh* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 92–93.

<sup>33</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 42.

<sup>34</sup> Frances Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900-1942* (Equinox, 2008), 45.

formal rules that govern it.”<sup>35</sup> This dynamic is epitomized by the competing French and British state claims to the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone, a project which came to stand in the Franco-British rivalry to claim control of Egyptian resources, antiquities, and means of historical knowledge-production more broadly.<sup>36</sup>

The Egyptian Antiquities Service in particular — the site of Kamal's lifelong professional struggle — is symptomatic of Egyptology's colonial-era structures more broadly. It held an esteemed place within global Egyptological study. It served as an important gatekeeper to archaeological work in Egypt, and a major site of publication, employment, and professional recognition. Along with several other cultural institutions, professional organizations, and learned societies — chief among which were the Institut d'Égypte and the Egyptian Museum — these Egyptological bodies served as a political battlefield for intra-European political animosities as well as a means of continued cultural domination. Reid describes the context in which these bodies were founded as being part of the complex geopolitics of the reign of Said in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, a period which saw an increased European presence as a result of intensified Western imperial aggression and weakening Ottoman support for Egypt, one of its largest and most politically fraught *eyalet*, or administrative regions. However, while the numerous European-led Egyptological societies vied for esteem and control within Egypt's complex 19<sup>th</sup>-century political structure, the Antiquities Service served as Egypt's *official*

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<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Tavistock, 1972), 15, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139048095.027>.

<sup>36</sup> Sally Macdonald and Michael Rice, eds., *Consuming Ancient Egypt* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2003), 105.

Egyptological body, reporting directly to the ministries and to the nation's de facto Ottoman ruler. This made the Antiquities Service an important site of European access and control within the Egyptian court. As Wilson argues,

Mohammed Ali's cordiality to Westerners was beginning to stir up a regrettable situation for the antiquities of Egypt — or a splendid opportunity, if one is inclined to think of it in that way. Almost any foreigner of influence might obtain a *firman* [royal decree] to study the monuments, which meant to carry them off.<sup>37</sup>

Muhammad Ali's role within 19<sup>th</sup> century Egyptology is a complex one; while he and Rifa'a Al-Tahtawi are credited with founding the political precursor to the Antiquities Service, Egyptian Museum, and heritage conservation laws, at the same time, European political pressure threatened to destabilize Ali's regime, which was thus dependent on these gestures of cordiality and geopolitical compromise.<sup>38</sup> This form of antiquities diplomacy can be traced, for example, in the Pasha's gift of an obelisk to England in exchange for their loan of a warship, and later, another obelisk to the French to stem any perception of a slight.<sup>39</sup> This was later followed by an Egyptian outcry when the court of one of Ali's successors, Ismail, acquiesced to an American demand for an additional obelisk, ultimately prompting the cabinet to pass a resolution explicitly forbidding the

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<sup>37</sup> Wilson, *Signs and Wonders Upon Pharaoh*, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Reid discusses these historical developments in *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to WWI*. Interestingly, although it is often erased from heritage conservation's historiography, Ali's 1835 decree banning the export of Egyptian antiquities predates the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century institution of European heritage conservation laws. For further engagements with al-Tahtawi's legacy and the development of Egyptian antiquities laws, see **Chapter 3**.

<sup>39</sup> See: Bob Brier, "The Secret Life of the Paris Obelisk," *Aegyptiaca: Journal of the History of Reception of Ancient Egypt* 2, no. 1 (2018): 79, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.11588/aegyp.2018.2.>, and Erasmus Wilson, *Cleopatra's Needle: With Brief Notes on Egypt and Egyptian Obelisks* (London: Brain & Company, 1877).

removal of further monuments.<sup>40</sup> Egypt's imperial Ottoman rulers thus worked in a complex and multi-faceted relation to the European colonial efforts of the day; while it may be argued that "Muhammad Ali [...] gave Egyptians a sense of identity and a stake in the state by dragooning them into government," at the same time, "these pashas were autocrats in their own right and acted as such towards their peasantry."<sup>41</sup>

This is to say that while the role of 19<sup>th</sup> century Egyptology within global imperialism is most often viewed through the lens of European dominance over the Global South, in the Egyptian context, control of the nation's antiquities (and its sovereignty more broadly) must be understood within the context of the competing European, Ottoman, and intra-national Egyptian interests and efforts. This is also to say that pre-revolutionary Egyptology could be understood as an Orientalizing enterprise insofar as its mode of knowledge-production served in the production of an Orient that was graspable, and by extension, governable; the competing national claims to the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone, for example, can be understood as part of a broader claims-making process contingent upon a superior grasp of Egyptian national history. Europeans maintained a firm hold on Egyptian antiquities by monopolizing the means of knowledge-production: not only were Egyptians barred from the credentialing institutions with the ostensible power to legitimize Egyptological expertise, additionally, Egyptians

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<sup>40</sup> Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to WWI*, 102.

<sup>41</sup> Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot, *A History of Egypt From the Arab Conquest to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 72–85.

were barred from challenging the *epistemic boundaries* of their national heritage which unilaterally declared archaeology as the only valid means of patrimonial authority.

Nonetheless, this period also saw popularizations and re-appraisals of the Pharaonic legacy within Egyptian public spheres, partially due to the establishment of Arabic-language presses and periodicals — such as the Bulaq press and the — which published Egyptian national histories such as al-Jabarti's influential '*Aja'ib al-athar fi'l-tarajim wa'l-akhbar*'.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, the 19<sup>th</sup> century's growing nationalist sentiments resisted European antiquarian extraction via gradually-strengthening legal structures, which built new institutions to retain and preserve antiquities within Egypt, as well as retaining them *in-situ*.<sup>43</sup> It was in these contexts that the rapid post-WWI changes took place in Egypt, and in which Tutankhamun's tomb was discovered then framed in the press through the lens of these patrimonial contestations.

Following the turn of the century, a rising tide of anti-imperial nationalism was sweeping Egypt. Gradual reforms had taken place permitting an increasing number of Egyptians access to their nation's governmental systems; yet, Egypt had not been ruled by Egyptians for close to two millennia. Between the upheaval of World War I and that of 1952 revolution, Egypt would see the formation of several significant political bodies, primary among which was the *Wafd* party, which came to be instituted following the

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<sup>42</sup> Mario M. Ruiz, "Orientalist and Revisionist Histories of 'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Jabarti," *Middle East Critique* 18, no. 3 (2009): 264, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19436140903237061>. A

<sup>43</sup> The influence of Egyptians such as Rifa'a al-Tahtawi on the development of antiquities law is discussed in **Chapter 3**, as well as by Reid in *Whose Pharaohs*, 102. A comprehensive analysis of the development of Egyptian antiquities law is provided by Khater, *Le Régime Juridique Des Fouilles et Des Antiquités En Égypte*.

British refusal to entertain a demand for national independence by an Egyptian delegation. Led by Saa'd Pasha Zaghlul, the *Wafd* agitated the Egyptian populace in opposition to the Turko-Circassian monarchy and the British colonial structure that supported it, in favour of liberal constitutionalist reforms. Ultimately, the *Wafd* would gain mass popular support, leading to demonstrations and riots in 1918-1919, and later, the termination of the British protectorate system in Egypt in 1922.<sup>44</sup> The end of the protectorate would not, however, spell the end of British or monarchic control: King Fuad's opposition to the *Wafd* and would undermine its efforts, while the British presence remained entrenched in many major governmental functions.<sup>45</sup>

Thus it was that in the 1920s and 1930s — the period of the 'Veiled Protectorate' and nascent independence — the Egyptian anti-imperialist popular movement both motivated *and* was motivated by the increase in Pharaonic imagery in Egyptian arts and literature, including the early writings of popular writer Naguib Mahfouz, or in the “architectural mausoleum of nationalist prime minister Sa‘d Zaghloul, which resembles an ancient Egyptian temple.”<sup>46</sup> Jessica Winegar finds that the motivation for this artistic movement stems directly from a re-conceptualization of the Egyptian nation, as “prominent nationalist thinkers such as Salama Musa and Muhammad Husayn Haykal argued that contemporary Egyptians were the direct descendants of ancient Egyptians, and that this spiritual and cultural link should be explored.”<sup>47</sup> Pharaonicism's popularity

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<sup>44</sup> M.W. Daly, ed., *The Cambridge History of Egypt Volume Two, Online* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 248–50.

<sup>45</sup> Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid, *Egypt and Cromer: A Study in Anglo-Egyptian Relations* (Praeger, 1968), 206.

<sup>46</sup> Seggerman, *Modernism on the Nile: Art in Egypt between the Islamic and the Contemporary*, 84.

<sup>47</sup> Winegar, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt*, 97.

would ebb and want through the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, tracking popular Egyptian discourses around national identity; rising through the independence movement of the 1930s, falling in favour of the socialist art of the independence era, then rising again following the political upheaval of the Six-Day War of 1967 until the present day.<sup>48</sup>

As Alex Seggerman argues, the artistic re-deployments of Egypt's pharaonic past in the Veiled Protectorate era was a means of addressing the core questions of the Arab Renaissance or 'nahda'; that is, "how to modernize local society, whether it be defined as Islamic, Arab, Egyptian, or Alexandrian, while still remaining true to its identity."<sup>49</sup> Writers such as Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (examined in greater depth in **Chapter 3**) and artists such as Mahmoud Mukhtar engaged in the translation and transculturation of French art, philosophy, and politics, prodding European cultural production for its utility in service of

Egyptian autonomy. The result, as Seggerman notes,

Both in the work of Tahtawi and among following Nahda intellectuals, centered on the question of what to appropriate from these cultures and what to retain from local history. This tension is replicated in the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar's archives, when the wealthy prince who sent him to Paris implored him (in

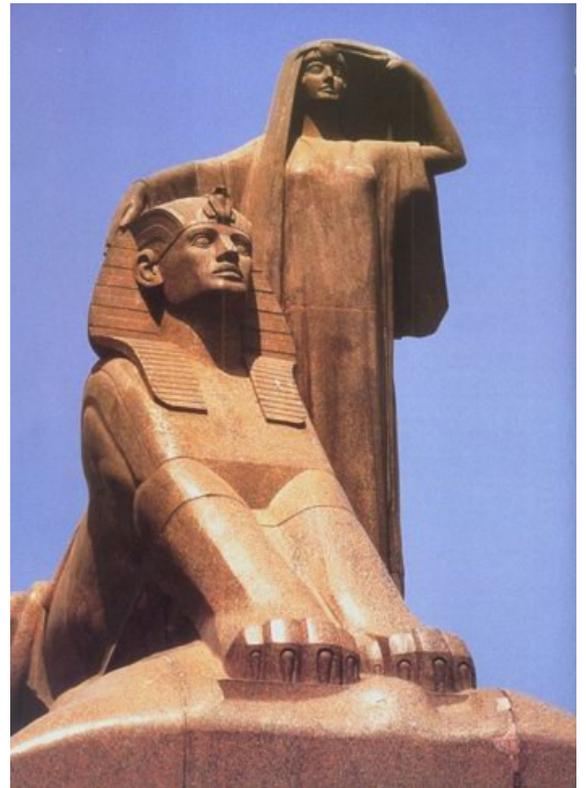


Figure 5: *Nahdat Misr (Egypt's Renaissance)*, Mahmoud Mukhtar, 1920–28, pink granite, Giza, Egypt. Via [Zerida](#) under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 35

French!) to make sure to return “Egyptian.” However, the definition of what constituted “Egyptian” was actively in the process of being formulated.<sup>50</sup>

Influencing Egyptian mass media, literature, visual art, and music in this era, pharaonic imagery came to define more than just the aesthetic of Egypt’s *nahda*; the same extended to the popular rhetoric in support of its sovereignty. Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski find that Egypt’s *nahda* nationalism was inextricable from Pharaonicism, arguing that:

It was the Pharaonic heritage of Egypt that provided Egyptian nationalist intellectuals with the conclusive proof that Egypt was not, and could never be, Arab. Egypt's true national personality, they posited, had to be based on the unique "golden age" of Egypt represented by the Pharaonic era. The revolutionary new Egypt that was rediscovering its glorious legacy and drawing the inspiration for its contemporary renaissance from its ancient past could not be Arab. An Egypt marked by Arab traits would be denying its own unique heritage. In order to revive authentic Egyptian truths and values in the modern age, Egypt had to purge itself of the alien Arab characteristics found in it.<sup>51</sup>

This political tendency is articulated by Hafiz Mahmud, a leader of the Young Egypt Party in the 1930s, who would declare that “it is our destiny that our collective consciousness, as it expresses itself genuinely, shall be influenced far more by the history of the Pharaohs than by the history of the Arabs.”<sup>52</sup> Antiquities and archaeology played a critical role in solidifying this political tendency by providing a material basis that could act as a locus of a more abstract ideology. Egyptian reporters for *al-Ahram*, for example, would be struck by two aspects of a press tour of Luxor’s antiquities: “the greatness of

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<sup>50</sup> Seggerman, 35.

<sup>51</sup> Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1986), 99.

<sup>52</sup> Hafiz Mahmud, "Misr bi-Majdiha Ula [Egypt's Highest Glory]," *Al-Majalla al-Jadida [The New Magazine]*, Feb. 1931, 474-475. Quoted in Gershoni and Jankowski, 99.

ancient Egypt, and the fathers of modern Egypt.”<sup>53</sup> The physical presence of ancient monuments serves here as a link between Egyptians past and present, a tangible representation of the social continuity between two eras.

But such nationalist utilization of Pharaonic imagery was not limited to the political sphere, flourishing as well in the literary world in the writings of Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi, Ahmad Shawqi, and Khalil Mutran, in Mohamed Naghi’s visual art, in Muhammad Husayn Haykal’s journalism, and in numerous other spheres.<sup>54</sup> Its influence would extend as well beyond the elite social sphere of the *effendiyya* (the largely literate landowning class) to the *fellahin* (the peasantry) and the urban working classes through music such as the still-beloved compositions of Sayyed Darwish, and in the political songs such as the following, as documented by a contemporary:

Pardon us, Wingate! But our country has had enough!  
You took our camels, donkeys, barley, and wheat aplenty. Now leave us alone!  
[...] We are the sons of the Pharaohs, which no one can dispute.  
When necessary we can fight with clubs, sticks, and even head butts.<sup>55</sup>

In the tradition of Egyptian popular song practices, allusions to social and political struggles accompany cheeky taunts and folksy references. Nonetheless, protest songs such as this served as a rallying cry during the 1919 revolution, leveraging a sense of

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<sup>53</sup> “Fi wādy almuluk: Faṭḥ ālmaḍfan lilmadu‘uwn [In the Valley of the Kings: Tomb opened to invitees],” *al-Ahram*, March 7, 1924.

<sup>54</sup> Nadia Radwan, “Between Diana and Isis: Egypt’s ‘Renaissance’ and the Neo-Pharaonic Style (1920s – 1930s),” *Dialogues Artistiques Avec Les Passés de l’Égypte*, no. January (2017).

<sup>55</sup> Originally transcribed by Mustafa Amin, *Min Wahid li-‘Asharah [From One to Ten]*, 187. Translated by Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 134, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2013.0009>.

Egyptian solidarity with the Pharaonic past in service of unprecedented mass mobilization against colonial rule.<sup>56</sup>

It is in this period of the Veiled Protectorate and its nationalist contestations that Tutankhamun's tomb was discovered. It could hardly have come at a worse time for Howard Carter and his expedition's funder, Lord Carnarvon: had the discovery come only a few years earlier, it would have fallen under the edict of the *partage* system, which, through the French-led Antiquities Service, would have provided the discoverers their pick of half the find. As it were, when Carter uncovered the practically-untouched tomb in 1922, the discovery immediately skyrocketed to the forefront of the Egyptian imagination as *the* case study for political independence and national identity:

To Egyptians, Tutankhamun's treasures offered — at a critical moment — a ringing affirmation of past glory and a spur to modern revival. Perhaps to their surprise, their newly declared independence movement proved to have teeth enough to enable Egypt, after sharp dispute, to keep the entire find as the glory of the Cairo Museum.<sup>57</sup>

Not only would Egypt's success in this dispute galvanize the nation's anti-imperial efforts, but the *dispute itself*, in marking the objects as a site of contestation, would come to shape the discovery's discursive framing in ways that would continue to reverberate for decades to come.

This was due to a confluence of several factors: First, the sheer dazzling materiality of the tomb's glittering contents and Howard Carter's perceived attitude of patronizing entitlement acted as a powerful distillation of the colonial relation more

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<sup>56</sup> Fahmy, 135.

<sup>57</sup> Donald Malcolm Reid, *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from WWI to Nasser* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2015), 72.

broadly. Even Carter's apologists make note of the undiplomatic stubbornness with which he disregarded the extant national feeling in Egypt. One such incident catalyzed the media furor to come:

In 1923-24 Carter had the delicate and difficult task of dismantling the golden shrines around the sarcophagus, lifting the granite lid, and finally viewing the burial within the sarcophagus on February 12, 1924. Carter was exhausted and on edge when he received a brusque telegram the next day from the Minister of Public Works forbidding him to show the tomb to the wives and families of his collaborating experts and stating that the police had been instructed to prevent their entry, by force if necessary. Carter blew up and posted a notice saying that the tomb was closed "owing to the impossible restrictions and discourtesies on the part of the Public Works Department and its Antiquity Service." The government thereupon forbade him to enter the tomb again and formally seized possession of it.<sup>58</sup>

But Carter, "a man completely insensitive to the exigencies of petty politics and apparently blind to the subtle demands of human and public relations," did not work alone to stoke the Egyptian public uproar. This was also partially due to his lawyer's defence of Carter's claim to the tomb, in which he described the Egyptian government as being "like a pack of *bandits*."<sup>59</sup> The galling hypocrisy of this statement stoked the Egyptian public's anger, mobilized mass public support for the anti-imperial movement, and definitively prioritized antiquities as a nationalist point of contention. As Thomas Hoving writes,

That did it. In Arabic the word for "bandit"—or thief—is one of the vilest things one can call anyone. The Egyptian press made the most of it, suggesting that not only Maxwell but Carter and everyone involved with him had called the Cabinet Minister a thief and by extension had insulted all Egyptians. The public reaction to the newspaper headlines was wild. Riots erupted in Cairo in which a number of

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<sup>58</sup> Wilson, *Signs and Wonders Upon Pharaoh*, 165.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Hoving, *Tutankhamun: The Untold Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 28, 306.

people were injured. It took the police hours to calm down the crowds, and for a while it looked as if military troops would have to be called in.<sup>60</sup>

This mass outcry resulting from Carter and his team's colonial assumptions is directly linked to the second reason for Tutankhamun's central place in the anti-imperial organizing of the Veiled Protectorate era: namely, that it came at a very convenient time. Gershoni and Jankowski note that "its timing coincided almost perfectly with the culmination of the Revolution of 1919 in the establishment of a formally independent Egyptian nation-state during the years 1922-1923," leaving a space of political potential in which the anti-imperial popular movement could assert its newfound agency.<sup>61</sup> I underscore here the *agency* of this political utilization, however, in opposition to its portrayal by Gershoni, Jankowski, and Reid: Gershoni and Jankowski for example characterize it as a "mood", one with an "emotional and often irrational aura," and Reid describes it as an "Egyptian Egyptomania", likening it to the European enlistment of such imagery in service of colonial violence.<sup>62</sup> Egyptian utilizations of Pharaonic imagery during this period differ, however, in their relation to geopolitical power: whereas Western Egyptomania served to expand Europe's epistemic dominion further and further beyond its own borders, Egyptian Pharaonicism in this era worked in service of Egyptians' autonomy over *themselves* and the land upon which they lived, in *opposition* to the grinding degradation of colonial rule. This tendency is articulated by notable journalist, lawyer, and political activist Fikry Abaza, who leverages Egyptian public furor

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<sup>60</sup> Hoving, 306.

<sup>61</sup> Gershoni and Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs*, 187. Gershoni and Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930*, 187.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

about the tomb and media speculation about a pharaonic curse to poetically address the nation's broader political situation:

My lord the buried king: I addressed the living and they did not hear my speech. And if I address the dead, then it would be to complain to you of your children, and the enemies of your children. It has been said that your secrets are wonderful. And that just as you were able to annihilate your disinterrers, you might also evacuate your nation's usurpers!!<sup>63</sup>

Here, Abaza literally and figuratively links the growing anti-imperial project with that of the tomb's epistemic contestation: the indignity of violation of the tomb's *hurma* — its intrinsic autonomy — is likened to that of Egypt's broader subjugation. Tutankhamun becomes a liberatory figure whose supposed curse is transformed into a mode of self-defence against colonial incursion,

one that might empower and inspire his descendants as part of a broader liberatory campaign. Thus, the historical and political potential engendered by the tomb's discovery is harnessed in service of a people deprived of their right to sovereignty by those who would compare them to bandits for the seizure of their own history. These words were not published in a void: the publication in which Abaza writes this, *al-Ahram* ("The

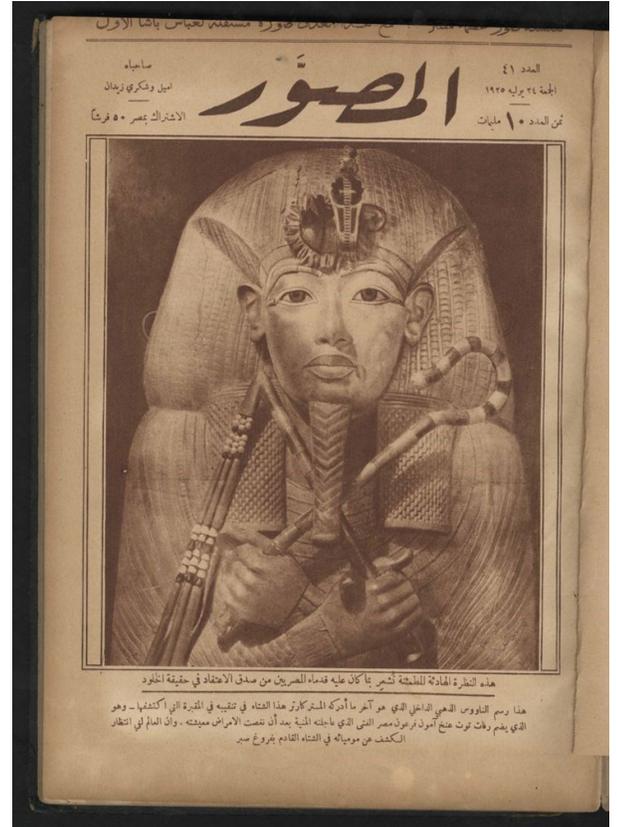


Figure 6: Tutankhamun's newly-excavated sarcophagus on the cover of *Al-Muṣawwar* in 1925. Via the American University of Cairo Archives.

<sup>63</sup> Fikri Abaza, "Ila Tut'anḥ Amun [To Tutankhamun]," *Al-Ahram*, February 20, 1924.

Pyramids”), one of Egypt’s oldest and most widely distributed newspapers, became a pillar of the *nahda*, serving as a forum in which the nation’s leading Egyptian intellectuals would shape the postcolonial era’s founding ideals — notably, in Arabic rather than Turkish, French, or English, thus broadening its reach among the Egyptian lay public.<sup>64</sup>

This Pharaonicist strategy to national mobilization hinged on the articulation of a social and cultural continuity between Egypt’s contemporary and ancient populace, creating a uniquely *Egyptian* sense of identity in relation to the various foreign powers with political control of the nation. *Al-Ahram* speaks to this strategy when it identifies “a real political danger in the conflict between Mr. Carter and the Egyptian government,” since Zaghoul Pasha, Egypt’s prime minister and the leader of Egypt’s nationalist *Wafd* party, “is not Turkish, but rather a genuine Egyptian [*maṣri ṣamim*]. The Turks look at the tombs of the pharaohs the way we look at the tomb of Edward the Righteous (a twelfth century English king). However, it is reasonable that Zaghoul Pasha, the Egyptian, looks differently at this situation.”<sup>65</sup> The widely-read daily newspaper’s political analysis here is accurate and incisive: critical to the *Wafd* party’s position was a belief that “sovereignty was something ancient to Egypt; that Egypt possessed an eternal national spirit that deserved the right to be reborn and the right to express itself; that

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<sup>64</sup> Helen A Kitchen, “‘Al-Ahram’: The ‘Times’ of the Arab World,” *Middle East Journal* 4, no. 2 (1950): 155–69.

<sup>65</sup> “Law kān tut inġilyiziyān [If Tut was English],” *al-Ahram*, February 20, 1924.

Egyptian national identity predated and transcended the religious, class, and regional differences of modern Egyptians”<sup>66</sup>

This popular public focus on Pharaonicism waned as the political energies of the 1940s shifted toward building a broader pan-Arab anti-imperial movement with the potential of uniting the entire Islamic *ummah*.<sup>67</sup> This is to say that the Pharaonicism of this era was less a “mood,” or an “irrational aura” as Gershoni and Jankowski describe it, but rather, an expression of “national culture” in Fanon’s sense, a “whole body of efforts made by a people [...] to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence.” Deeply intertwined with legal and political efforts at Egyptian sovereignty, it becomes a well-timed, organized effort, purposefully put to work by its practitioners towards the broader goal of national liberation.<sup>68</sup>

Nonetheless, Abaza’s utilization of Tutankhamun as a symbol of national autonomy points to the final reason for Tut’s singular place in the post-World War I Egyptian independence movement: due to his association with the Amarna era’s monotheistic reforms, ‘King Tut’ was unusually well-suited for reappropriation within Egyptians’ otherwise fraught relationship with their nation’s ancient religion.<sup>69</sup> While the

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<sup>66</sup> Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, 177.

<sup>67</sup> Michael Wood, “The Use of the Pharaonic Past in Modern Egyptian Nationalism,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 35, no. 1998 (1998): 1985, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40000469>.

<sup>68</sup> Reid rightfully points out that the terms ‘Pharaonicism’ or ‘Pharaonism’ may be negatively associated with the Biblical/Quranic figure of the Pharaoh, as discussed below. I, however, use this term here to describe this trend as it was the term (in Arabic: *al-fir'awniyya*) utilized by the Egyptians in this era, perhaps as an intentional effort to reclaim the term and re-align it with more positive associations.

<sup>69</sup> Haarmann and El-Daly trace the historical complexity of this relationship: while Coptic and Muslim associations with paganism and the figure of the Pharaoh have tended towards the negative, a sense of awe and reverence of the ancients’ achievements underlies historical Egyptian writing on the subject.

Biblical and Quranic image of the Pharaoh was associated with tyranny and oppression, Tutankhamun, by contrast — the teenage son of the rebelliously monotheistic Akhenaten — was an apt mascot for the dream of a new, authentically Egyptian era.<sup>70</sup>

This reappropriation took place in the rapidly expanding public sphere of Arabic-language Egyptian media: the first full-length film produced in Egypt (*In Tutankhamun's Lands/Fi bilad Tut 'Ankh Amun* by Victor Rositto, 1923) covered the discovery of the tomb;<sup>71</sup> Mahmud Murad's play *Tutankhamun* was set to music by the enormously popular Sayyid Darwish; and a wealth of musicians, visual artists, poets, and novelists would take part in the Pharaonicist movement to “create an indigenous style that would serve as the aesthetic counterpart to nationalist politics.”<sup>72</sup> Print media too, as discussed earlier, served as the *agora* in which the political philosophy of the Nahda was honed.<sup>73</sup>

Evoking this political popularity, Fikri Abaza would plea:

They will transport you [Tutankhamun] to a museum by the barracks of Qasr El-  
Nil. Intentional in their efforts to insult you, going to extremes to harm you in  
order to reach there, o independent king. And your occupied country? There you  
will witness it, o free king. Your enslaved people? There you will know that it  
was them who looted your grave. And even now, they dig the grave of your  
nation!<sup>74</sup>

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Elaborations on the subject can be found in: Ulrich Haarmann, “Medieval Muslim Perceptions of Ancient Egypt,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, ed. Antonio Loprieno (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 605–26; Okasha El Daly, *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium, Egyptology: The Missing Millennium* (New York: Routledge, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315429779>.

<sup>70</sup> Gershoni and Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs*, 187. Gershoni and Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930*, 187.

<sup>71</sup> Viola Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class, and Nation* (Cairo, New York: AUC Press, 2007), 19.

<sup>72</sup> Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, 215.

<sup>73</sup> This is to say that like the Greek agora and the Roman forum, Egyptian print media of this era was primarily the domain of the landowning, formally educated classes.

<sup>74</sup> Abaza, “Ila Tut ‘anh Amun [To Tutankhamun].”

Tutankhamun's utility for the nationalist cause extended beyond the debate around its physical ownership: Egyptian Arabic-language newspapers would publish a wealth of headlines covering the ongoing controversy over the ownership of Tutankhamun's tomb, in part because the controversy was about the media *itself*. Reid notes that "In a revealing act of imperial privilege, Lord Carnarvon ignored the press of the country in which he was digging and invited only *London Times* correspondent Arthur Merton to the opening."<sup>75</sup> In the context of the nationalist movement's increasing strength and Carter's already-tense relationship with the Egyptian government and press, this additional insult proved one too many for the Egyptian public. One such extended editorial scathingly summarizes the perspective of the Egyptian press as follows:

[Carnarvon] sold the rights to publish the news of the tomb without ever having considered the storm that he would be instigating. And after that, he began over the mummy — within the sight and hearing of the world — a boorish dispute in order to obtain information, and so encountered constant criticisms and unfortunate quarrels which led to misunderstandings.

The Egyptian government that owns the tomb in its entirety — and by whose permission the archaeologists are working and by whose grace they have received courtesy and facilitation — has taken umbrage with the agreement that has been contracted by Lord Carnarvon. Part of the archaeologist's duty is to inform the world by publishing the results of his discovery, meaning that Egyptian newspapers are compelled to rely on English newspapers to receive information on what has been discovered in Thebes. Yes, Lord Carnarvon was avoiding the appearances of succession and discord, but he held fast to the agreement he made and tried to maintain the news monopoly. But he failed in what he tried.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Reid, *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from WWI to Nasser*, 85.

<sup>76</sup> "Iḥtikār Anbā' tut 'anḥ amun [The monopoly of the Tutankhamun news]," *al-Ahram*, February 15, 1924.

This editorial highlights one of the consistent threads of the Egyptian press coverage of the Tutankhamun discovery: without access to the tomb and information about it, the focus quickly shifted to critique of the *absence itself*. The press monopoly came to stand for the broader British economic monopoly of Egypt, but with the additionally galling factor of channeling Egyptian historical self-knowledge through a Western institutional and epistemic lens. Public consumption of the Tutankhamun discovery thus came to catalyze calls for both material and ideological reform, ironically, as a result of Carnarvon's efforts to control both. As Elliot Colla argues, this exclusion became a rallying point, encouraging anti-imperial cause to broaden the stakes of the battle from merely the *objects to the means of knowledge-production itself*:

Egyptian agencies complained vociferously about the arrangement, charging that the Egyptian public deserved unfettered access to an archaeological find that should, by all rights, be under the jurisdiction of its proper Egyptian state agency. In a rare moment of national unity, Egypt's biggest news outlets—*al-Ahram*, *al-Balagh*, *al-Jumhur*, *al-Akhbar*, and others—jointly petitioned the government on the issue. One can see two points within the complaint: first, that the *Times* arrangement amounted to a monopoly (*ihthikar*) over information that was vital to the Egyptian public; and second, that it was unconscionable, following independence, that a foreign news agency would exclude Egyptians from reporting events in their own country.<sup>77</sup>

The exclusion of the Egyptian press caused a furor as it demonstrated yet again that Egyptians were expected to learn about their own nation — its history *and* its present — from its European colonizers. This — as was noted earlier in this chapter in the case of Ahmad Pasha Kamal — was the mechanism through which the European hold over Egyptian patrimony was continuously re-inscribed: Egyptians were not permitted to

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<sup>77</sup> Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, 203–4.

access the institutions that granted Egyptological authority.<sup>78</sup> Since only such qualified professionals could be trusted with the care of antiquities, it naturally followed that no Egyptians could be permitted access to the domains of field archaeology, academic research, the museum profession and so forth. Thus, the monopolization of the means of knowledge production would directly contribute to the European grasp over material wealth, underscoring *al-Ahram*'s call to radically emancipate access not only to information about the tomb and the controversy surrounding it, but to the institutions of social and political rule that under which Egyptians were subjugated:

And if reconciliation [about the matter of the press monopoly] is not possible, then it is hoped that the Egyptian government with oversight over the violations that took place in these two years will open the door wide to all kinds of information, so that the whole world can hear in the ways it can understand this epic tale that concerns no single generation but time itself, and no one nation but the whole world that has no homeland.<sup>79</sup>

In any case, this perceived insult to the Egyptian public, as well as that in which his legal team likened the newly-formed Egyptian government to 'bandits', would stoke the flame that ultimately ended the *partage* system that had been in place for the better part of a century, in which archaeologists would retain ownership of half of what they discover under Egyptian soil. Tutankhamun was already working as more than just a *symbol* of liberation, and rather, as a catalyst for its tangible, material enactment. Reid and Colla discuss the finer points of the legal case in which the Egyptian government lay claim to the entirety of the find, setting this a precedent for all subsequent archaeology in Egypt:

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<sup>78</sup> As part of what Laurajane Smith might title the Authorized Heritage Discourse. See: *Uses of Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 29, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-0465-2\\_1937](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-0465-2_1937).

<sup>79</sup> "Iḥtikār Anbā' Tut 'Anḥ Amun [The monopoly of the Tutankhamun news]," *al-Ahram*, February 15, 1924.

much can be said about whether the extant jurisprudence truly permitted the Egyptian government to claim rights to this seizure, but, as a century of colonial rule had heretofore demonstrated, claims-making processes are enacted through *de facto* direct action first, and *de jure* legal mechanisms second.<sup>80</sup>

Needless to say, the political drama surrounding the discovery shaped its Western media coverage from the very beginning. A 1922 *New York Times* article, for example, exclaims: “TUTANKHAMEN TOMB IS BARRED TO PRESS: Egyptian Government’s order excludes them from view of objects bring removed,” adding with a distinct tone of disdain: “American excavators declare it would mean they would be working for the Cairo Museum.”<sup>81</sup> This article reveals how deeply the enmeshed Egyptology was with the colonial legal system, and how deeply impactful the Egyptian public outcry and its associated reforms had been:

The American excavators engaged at Thebes are discussing the Egyptian Government’s proposal to modify the antiquities law so that from the beginning of next Winter any excavators in any part of Egypt will not be allowed to retain a single object unearthed except as the gift of the Egyptian Government. They declare candidly that if this proposal becomes law it practically means that private museum excavation in Egypt will cease [...] This law would mean that the American museums would simply be working to enrich the Cairo Museum, which is absurd.<sup>82</sup>

As is often the case, it is only when a system is threatened that its underlying logics are revealed: here, the talk of historical pricelessness and the necessity of preservation is

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<sup>80</sup> Colla and Reid’s analyses can be found, respectively, in: *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, 208–9. *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from WWI to Nasser*, 87.

<sup>81</sup> See also, for example: *New York Times*, “TUTANKHAMEN TOMB IS BARRED TO PRESS : Egyptian Government’s Order ...,” *The New York Times*, December 29, 1922.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

stripped away, revealing that Western museums ultimately funded Egyptology so as to benefit materially from its spoils. But while decolonization and the end of the *partage* system ultimately did not prove to be the death-knell the media heralded it to be, the apocalyptic tone of the coverage spurred the manic Western interest in all things King Tut. The *Chicago Tribune*, for example, declares in the emphatic style typical of the time that the plan to hold antiquities “WOULD END ALL EXCAVATING”, revealing further the lengths to which the (ostensibly limited) British governance structure would go to maintain its material access. With a threat thinly-veiled behind the guise of concern,

[Herbert E. Winlock of the Metropolitan Museum] says that his expedition alone is spending \$25,000 annually and that some others are spending much more. All this money goes to the miserable Nile villages which for a decade have been growing rich through trade with excavating parties. In the long run, Mr. Winlock declares, Egypt will suffer considerable [sic] financially, but the world of science will suffer more if the incentive for further exploration is removed.<sup>83</sup>

Countless such statements would run in newspapers around the world, shaping the media landscape in which Tutankhamun’s treasures would henceforth be received.<sup>84</sup> British newspapers tended to focus on the implications of these political developments on their position as an imperial superpower, while American newspapers relished in the interpersonal conflicts and the larger-than-life personalities involved; Carter, the various Egyptian dignitaries with whom he feuded, and of course, the figure of King Tut himself. In fact, central to this new, dramatic and politically-charged take on archaeology was

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<sup>83</sup> Chicago Tribune, “SCORES EGYPT’S PLAN TO HOLD ANTIQUITIES : American Archaeologist ....,” *The Chicago Tribune*, December 27, 1922.

<sup>84</sup> New York Times, “EGYPT WILL SEIZE TUTANKHAMEN TOMB : Decides It Is Royal and Untouched ...,” *New York Times*, December 23, 1922.

Thomas Hoving, who would eventually be responsible for the lasting creative direction of the landmark *Treasures of Tutankhamun* exhibition.

#### 1.4 Tutankhamun: The Untold Story

It would be some time, however, before Hoving or any Westerner would be permitted to see Tutankhamun's treasures outside of Egypt. The totality of the find would remain in Egypt through WWII, past the revolution of 1952, until the 1960s when some of the objects would be permitted to tour internationally to raise awareness and funds for the campaign to save the Nubian monuments from the encroaching waters of the Aswan Dam.<sup>85</sup> In the intervening decades since the tomb's discovery, Egypt had successfully rid itself of the last vestiges of British and Ottoman political control, saw the establishment of its first constitution and its first Egyptian head of state in close to two millennia. Under Gamal Abdel Nasser's socialist single-party system, Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal and all major European industries and assets, initiating what would become an extended period of ideological and military conflict with Israel and the United States. Nasser would develop closer ties with the Soviet Union and strengthen Egypt's relations to the 'Three Circles' to which he felt it was most closely allied: those of the Arab, African, and Islamic world.<sup>86</sup> Suffice it to say, the period until Anwar Sadat's succession in 1970 is one of "strident anti-US policy,"<sup>87</sup> and accordingly, international loans of Egyptian antiquities to the West were extremely limited.

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<sup>85</sup> Paul Betts, "The Warden of World Heritage: UNESCO and the Rescue of the Nubian Monuments," *Past and Present* 226 (2015): 100–125, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtu017>.

<sup>86</sup> Maytha Alhassen, "The ' Three Circles ' Construction: Reading Black Atlantic Islam through Malcolm X's Words and Friendships," *Journal of Africana Religions* 3, no. 1 (2015): 1–17.

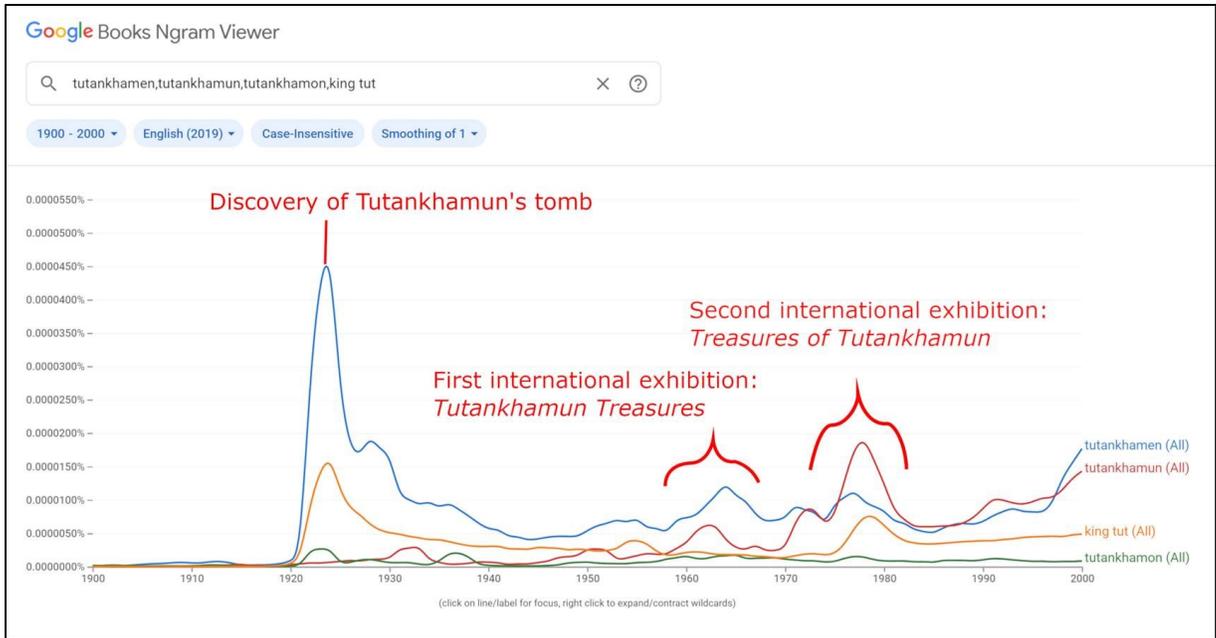
<sup>87</sup> P. J. Vatikiotis, *Nasser and His Generation* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 9.

The notable exception to this policy was the *Tutankhamun Treasures* exhibition, which would, like all the exhibitions in its genre, serve a diplomatic function as well as an artistic one. Featuring 34 small objects and making 15 stops on its tour, it was accompanied by an extensive media and lobbying campaign to draw awareness to the plight of the Nubian monuments threatened by the rising waters of the Aswan Dam.<sup>88</sup> The campaign had been a success: bringing logistical and financial support from around the globe, the “project seemed like a UNESCO dream come true of overcoming Cold War antagonism in the name of common purpose and cooperation.”<sup>89</sup> But the exhibition’s small scale meant that it would ultimately be overshadowed by the *Treasures of Tutankhamun* tour of the 1970s that would come to define the way the global public would think of King Tut, irrevocably changing the stakes and possibilities of museum exhibitions in general.

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<sup>88</sup> National Gallery of Art, “Tutankhamun Treasures,” accessed February 19, 2021, <https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/1961/tutankhamun.html>.

<sup>89</sup> Betts, “The Warden of World Heritage: UNESCO and the Rescue of the Nubian Monuments.”



**Figure 7: An n-gram analysis of references to Tutankhamun in English-language corpora in the twentieth century. Via Google N-Gram Viewer.**

*Treasures of Tutankhamun* was a much larger exhibition. Boasting fifty-five pieces instead of the earlier tour's thirty-four, it brought a number of works to the international audience for the first time. The scale and substance of the pieces differed, too: the works in *Tutankhamun Treasures* were all relatively minute — mostly consisting of jewelry and small, intimate handicrafts — while *Treasures of Tutankhamun* brought some of the largest, the most iconic pieces from the tomb, chief among which was the solid gold, bejewelled funerary mask bearing a stylized likeness of the boy-king himself. These new works would bring the public out in droves because of how *already* notorious they were: during the extended media drama surrounding the tomb's discovery, stories were primarily illustrated by Harry Burton's black-and-white photographs, which would become the most recognizable documentations of Howard Carter's expedition in the

public eye.<sup>90</sup> Burton, working for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was permitted exclusive access to the tomb in a context in which *access itself* was a source of deep contention. The demarcation of that which was *accessible* and *visible* to the Western public was a site of scandal, drama, and media interest; factors which Hoving eagerly leveraged to his exhibition's benefit. This was Hoving's most lasting intervention: by utilizing political contention as a site of public interest, *Treasures of Tutankhamun* became the first museum 'blockbuster', defining a new genre of museum exhibit with a heretofore unprecedented scale and public reach.<sup>91</sup> The public found *Treasures* to be "considerably more spectacular than the last American showing," especially in comparison to the "relatively minor objects" which were previously exhibited.<sup>92</sup>

This level of impact is reflected in the visitorship numbers. While the *Tutankhamun Treasures* tour of the 1960s saw close to a quarter million visitors during its time at the National Gallery of Art — no insignificant feat in its day — by comparison, *Treasures of Tutankhamun* quadrupled that reach in that one stop alone:

When the fifty-five masterpieces were at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., nearly a million visitors viewed them in sixteen weeks. At the Field Museum in Chicago the million mark had been reached in just ten weeks. No doubt over seven million individuals will have paid homage to the youthful

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<sup>90</sup> Hoving extensively discusses the utilization of Burton's photography in *Tutankhamun: The Untold Story*.

<sup>91</sup> Melani McAlister traces the origins of the museum blockbuster to the *Treasures* exhibition, as does the Smithsonian. This is, to some extent, likely an echo of Hoving's own characterization of this exhibition as put forth in this autobiography. See: Melani McAlister, "King Tut, Commodity Nationalism, and the Politics of Oil," in *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 125–54; Smithsonian Institution, "Audience Building: Marketing Art Museums," *Office of Policy and Analysis*, no. October (2002): 4. Thomas Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 413, <https://doi.org/10.2307/430992>.

<sup>92</sup> News Dispatches, "Egypt and U.S.: Tut for Tat," *The Washington Post*, June 15, 1974.

Pharaoh by the end of the three-year tour that was sent to the United States in honor of the Bicentennial by the government of Egypt.<sup>93</sup>

The unprecedented popularity of the *Treasures* exhibition stemmed in part from Hoving's deft utilization of the politics that underlay the media furor when the find had first been discovered in 1924. In *Tutankhamun: The Untold Story* — a tell-all style history of the discovery published in 1978 as part of the publicity for *Treasures* — Hoving would define the discovery by its political context, writing that:

Some of the most important facts regarding the discovery and its aftermath were not revealed, deliberately on the part of some, unconsciously by others. These facts, overlooked or suppressed, substantially change the official and up to now unquestioned story and impart to it a human interest far beyond simply the obvious nature of its archaeological significance [...] the full story is not altogether the noble, waxen, proper and triumphant tale so familiar to us. The truth is also full of intrigue, secret deals and private arrangements, covert political activities, skullduggery, self-interest, arrogance, lies, dashed hopes, poignance and sorrow—a series of events disfigured by human frailties that led to a fundamental and enduring change in the conduct of archaeology in Egypt.<sup>94</sup>

Hoving's representation here contributes to a genre of archaeological historiography emphasizing the interpersonal and political.<sup>95</sup> For Hoving — writing here with the showmanship for which he is renowned — the lasting appeal of the Tutankhamun legacy lay in the intersection between the interpersonal and political drama of its discovery, wherein Carter, cast as a misanthropic genius, would stumble across a magnificent discovery in a political climate he was totally incapable of negotiating. Carter's impolitic

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<sup>93</sup> Hoving, *Tutankhamun*, 12.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-16.

<sup>95</sup> A noteworthy example of this might be seen in the archaeological 'Bone Wars' of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. An extensive account of this conflict, its public representations, and its political implications (especially with regards to the ongoing settler-colonialism of the relevant lands), see Keith Stewart Thomson, *The Legacy of the Mastodon: The Golden Age of Fossils in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

outbursts would inflame anti-imperial sentiment in Egypt, leading to the dismantling of the colonial *partage* system upon which archaeologists and museums materially depended, thereby contributing to “a fundamental and enduring change in the conduct of archaeology in Egypt.”

While Hoving’s contextualization of the objects on display emphasizes the drama of the 1920s anti-imperial contestation, this is not to say that Hoving’s aims were aligned with those of Egyptian social movements. Rather, Hoving leveraged this political context to lend the exhibition an emotional charge, encouraging the viewer to relive the moment of discovery — from the colonial perspective — with all its associated controversy. As he would explain,

The basis of our design would be to place the pieces in the exact order in which the English archaeologist Howard Carter had discovered them. Once Carter had found the treasures, the Met had sent the brilliant photographer Harry Burton, who captured the drama of each day’s discoveries in hundreds of glass-plate photos, all of which the Met owned. We planned to intersperse Burton’s photographs with the objects and thereby recreate for the public the sensation of ‘finding’ each one of four chambers and their stunning array of works.<sup>96</sup>

For Hoving, “the drama of each day’s discoveries” is deeply bound up with its media framing; the exhibition deliberately pairs the objects with their representations and contestations in mass media, demonstrating their value as particularly iconic works, bringing audiences back to the of the Tut-mania of the 1920s. Those media representations, however, had been deeply bound up with colonial epistemologies and the fortification of Western geopolitical interests at both the time of their production *and* that

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<sup>96</sup> Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 405–6.

of their display: Carnarvon's *Times* monopoly shaped not only the *content* of the available news (through the exclusion of dissenting voices), but also the very *terms* of its production (exclusively via a hegemonic British press institution). Accordingly, the heavy re-deployment of the 1920s press coverage as part of the *Treasures* exhibition would serve — quite intentionally — to 'bring audiences back' in a very real sense to the 'drama' of the political struggles that first accompanied the discovery. This is in line with Allegra Fryxall's conceptualization of the Egyptological museum as a chronotopic bridge, one that blurs temporal and geographic boundaries to enchant its disenchanting public.<sup>97</sup> This self-reflexive utilization of the media landscape separated the *Treasures* exhibition from its earlier iteration in the 1960s: while *Tutankhamun Treasures* relied on the novelty of seeing the objects in person for the first time, *Treasures of Tutankhamun* went further to construct their iconic status by pairing them with their own media representations so that they could channel a half-century of socio-political turmoil. Before, they were merely *objects d'art*; now, they were celebrities.

Hoving's efforts to posit *Treasures* as a site of drama, scandal, and political intrigue would pay off: the show attracted unprecedented levels of media attention. While the bulk of the hype would center around the topic of the hype itself — the long lines, the broken attendance records, the heaps of cheap Egyptological knick-knacks for sale on the streets surrounding each museum — a great deal of media coverage would focus on the exhibition's political context, past and present. For one reviewer, the exhibition's

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<sup>97</sup> Fryxell, "Tutankhamen, Egyptomania, and Temporal Enchantment in Interwar Britain," 529.

emulation of the physical structure of the tomb would evoke one of the many outrages and scandals around the competing claims for the tomb:

I think of Howard Carter, the British archeologist who discovered the tomb in November, 1922 and how he picked up this head from the debris in the first passage, tossed there by robbers in search of the tomb, Amun knows how many centuries ago. And how, later, Carter packed it away until, as he said, “the opportunity came for its correct handling.” When it was found much later by Egyptian Antiquities Committee members, in a Fortnum & Mason box marked Red Wine, in one of Carter's storage tombs, a scandal threatened until the archeologist could make acceptable explanations.<sup>98</sup>

Kritzwiser was far from the only visitor to be reminded of the politics of the tomb's discovery. For William French, writing for the *Globe and Mail*, “The fascination for Tut and his treasures was not merely a phenomenon of the giddy twenties,” finding the exhibition's contemporary appeal in its evocation of the Pharaoh's Curse, to “Carter's long squabbles with the Egyptian Government over ownership of the treasures, the controversial exclusive contract with the *Times of London*, and his ultimate downfall.”<sup>99</sup> For others, the exhibition's politics bridged Western conflicts with the Middle East in both the past and present, serving as a newly-possible instance of “Tut for Tat.”<sup>100</sup> A representative from the State Department would make note of the exhibition's function to “normalize relationships”<sup>101</sup> with the formerly socialist nation, and another review would find that “the exhibition is a timely reminder that there are other things in the Middle East

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<sup>98</sup> Kay Kritzwiser, “The Golden Show That's Worth the Hype,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 22, 1979.

<sup>99</sup> William French, “The King Tut Story Is Loaded with Politics, Nationalism, Mistakes. Everything but Sex.,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 23, 1978.

<sup>100</sup> News Dispatches, “Egypt and U.S.: Tut for Tat.”

<sup>101</sup> Grace Glueck, “Are Art Exchanges a Game of Propaganda?,” *The New York Times*, September 26, 1976.

beyond Arab-Israeli tensions.”<sup>102</sup> This framing may perhaps be unsurprising: as McAlister argues, *Treasures* must be understood in the context of the ongoing OPEC oil crisis, where the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries proclaimed an embargo on oil exports to Western nations supportive of the Israeli military. Like the earlier contestations around antiquities, this too was a geopolitical domain to which the West was suddenly denied its previously unfettered access:

Commentators also noted that it was the Western nations that needed (and thus appreciated) the oil. As with the development of pluralistic art appreciation in the West, it was “our” activity that gave “their” resources value. Without the industrialized world’s appetite for OPEC products, it was said, the Arabs would still be poor desert sheiks, sitting on oil they did not know how to refine and could not make use of if they did. Thus the logic of “common heritage of mankind” linked the appropriative art universalism of the mainstream Tut representations to the contemporary concern with maintaining U.S. access to Middle East oil on advantageous terms.<sup>103</sup>

Crucially, McAlister draws attention here to the common structures of valuation that underlay the politics of art and oil: in both cases, the West’s claim is not backed by any legal relation to the land from which the ‘resource’ originates, but rather, by its capacity to “appreciate” that which the Middle East does not. Appreciation here can be understood in a multiple senses of the term: art is appreciated, and stocks appreciate. Conversely, stock values may reflect the less tangible appreciations of their associated industries, and an artwork’s value appreciates when it is collected, discussed, reproduced, and disseminated. Petroleum and artifacts are both valued in relation to the epistemic systems in which they are consumed: in both cases, while they have both come to be globally

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<sup>102</sup> Guardian, “The Tutankhamun Show,” *The Guardian*, March 29, 1972.

<sup>103</sup> McAlister, “King Tut, Commodity Nationalism, and the Politics of Oil,” 139.

commodified, they both have historical associations as imported resources from current or former colonies. Finally, and perhaps most critically in this case, they were at this time both highly valued by the West, and both were made inaccessible as a result of post-colonial and anti-imperial contestations in the Middle East.

Nowhere are the concomitant valuations of oil and Egyptological artifacts made clearer than in a *Wall Street Journal* investigation of the trade in mummified human remains. The headline cements this comparison: “This Story Unravels a Mideast Product Dearer Than Oil.”<sup>104</sup> Oil and mummies are, right from the start, posited as fundamentally comparable goods, ones to which the West was engaged in a valuative struggle. The specific mummy in question is advertised as an “Excellent investment. Outstanding crowd magnet,” and its ongoing contestation is directly associated with its value — namely, its \$65,000 price tag. “Considering the supply,” its seller, “Mr. Rosenbaum figures this is bargain.”<sup>105</sup> Crucially, however, the article posits the mummy’s valuation as an *epistemic* conflict and not strictly an economic one: Ahmed Abushadi, information counselor for the Egyptian embassy condemns the sale, arguing that “These mummies belong to my history, my heritage, my roots [...] They aren't meant to be used as collection pieces. No matter how old they are, these are human bodies,” adding that selling one is “abominable.”<sup>106</sup> But Abushadi’s concerns are dismissed as a kind of fantastical superstition:

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<sup>104</sup> Dean Rotbart, “This Story Unravels A Mideast Product Dearer Than Oil,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 27, 1979.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

“It's not desecration at all to sell it," Mr. Rosenbaum replies, saying he is taking care that the body doesn't fall into the wrong hands. For one thing, no customer who wants it for “anything like black magic” is welcome.<sup>107</sup>

But while Abushadi's *specific* contestation for the mummy's ownership goes unheeded, Egyptian contestation for cultural patrimony *more broadly* is in fact critical to the value of these human remains, since it limits their supply, which, as the seller himself notes, inflates their value. The fact that this contestation is *public*, popular, and mainstream is critical too to the price tag, too: even though this mummy is that of a relatively minor noble, “the interest sparked by the traveling Tutankhamun exhibit” means that its buyer could “make \$1,000 a month just selling T-shirt iron-ons and posters of the mummy.”<sup>108</sup> Suffice it to say, this article — published by the *Wall Street Journal* in the midst of the 1979 oil crisis — does not *accidentally* evoke oil politics in this article on Middle Eastern artifactual claims-making processes.<sup>109</sup> The shared valuations of oil and artifacts are shown here to be bound up with their *appreciations*: that is, their concomitant epistemologies of affect and economy. The West's claim for *both* oil and artifacts hinges on the way the Middle East *feels* incorrectly about these goods in this political moment — i.e., that it considers them *not to be goods* — and in so doing, is incapable of assigning them their proper value. Thus, the threat of the anti-colonial contestations taking place in

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> On the same note, the article implicitly codes the seller and his Egyptian respondent within the Muslim-Jewish/Arab-Israeli political axis of the oil crisis. Obviously, since the overwhelming majority of the antiquities trade — including that in human remains — resulted in a *westward* flow of capital, it would have been a simple matter to write this story about any one of the many antiquities dealers named something other than ‘Rosenbaum’. The choice to do so is one that narratively alleviates the West of its predominant responsibility in this dynamic, replaying, instead a narrative of animosity between Muslims and Jews.

the Middle East can be seen here in their disruption of the complex epistemic networks that tie economy and affect, demanding not just higher prices for goods, but also, demanding a change in those goods' status *as goods per se*.

This valuative contestation works simultaneously on ontological and epistemological levels; that is, it challenges the received wisdom of what artifacts fundamentally *are*, and by extension, the conceptual frameworks through which they *ought to be understood*. One reason that this challenge is so readily dismissed in mainstream press sources such as the *Wall Street Journal* is that the Nixon-era stagflation of the 1970s had begun to catalyze a shift in orthodox economic thought, which would firmly cement the still-dominant merger between neo-Keynesian and Neoclassical frameworks in all major Western economies.<sup>110</sup> This 'New Consensus' eschews the once-popular social and institutional economic approaches, cementing firmly in its stead a framework where "the rational individual of neoclassical economics, with his/her ability to operate with a numéraire and a well- defined set of priorities across all aspects of life, came to be the most prized model of all mankind."<sup>111</sup> This so-called *homo economicus* -- the rational, maximizing individual — is considered to operate through a much more strictly-defined valuative structure, wherein use- and exchange-value are mediated through price to achieve optimal allocative efficiency.<sup>112</sup> Within this formulation,

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<sup>110</sup> See: Anne Mayhew, "Institutions, culture and values" in John B. Davis and Wilfred Dolfsma, eds., *The Elgar Companion to Social Economics*, 2nd ed. (Cheltenham, UK, Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar, 2015), 38; Celeste Jiménez de Madariaga and Juan José García del Hoyo, "The Debate on the Concept of Value: Interpretations from the Perspective of Economics and Social Anthropology," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2016): 11–20, <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2016.v7n2p11>.

<sup>111</sup> Mayhew, 37.

<sup>112</sup> There are, of course, exceptions even within the economic mainstream, such as in the work of Piero Sraffa. (See Ajit Sinha, *Theories of Value from Adam Smith to Piero Sraffa* (London: Routledge, 2010).),

orthodox economic thought would largely exclude *self-reflexive* analyses of value, defining itself in line either strictly or weakly as a 'positive' science; that is, one that *ought* to focus on what *is*, rather than what *could* or *ought* to be,<sup>113</sup> and in which 'value' is literally commensurate with economic profit.<sup>114</sup>

Working, by contrast, through a heterodox economic episteme, Elizabeth Anderson posits a pluralistic framework of value, one that connects the multiple and overlapping means through which individuals feel about things and act upon those feelings.<sup>115</sup> For Anderson, the rational, maximizing individual upon which orthodox economic theory is based is no longer the salient social unit; rather, it is them *and* the network of feelings and relationships through which their social life is mediated. Here, affect comes to the fore as a medium through which value is assessed: for Anderson, "the attitudes engaged when we care about things involve not just feelings but judgment, conduct, sensitivities to qualities in what we value, and certain ways of structuring deliberation concerned with what we value."<sup>116</sup> The hierarchies of meaning, worth, and action encompassed by 'value' in this framework are negotiated through what Anderson terms 'ideals', which "set the standards of conduct and emotion people expect themselves to satisfy with regard to other people, relationships, and things."<sup>117</sup> Such standards

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and more recent approaches such as those of André Orléan (see: *The Empire of Value: A New Foundation for Economics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2015.03.005>).

<sup>113</sup> See: Philippe Mongin, "Value Judgments and Value Neutrality in Economics," *Economica* 73, no. 290 (2006): 257–86, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0335.2006.00501.x>.

<sup>114</sup> See for example the Foreword and Introduction in James L. Grant, *Foundations of Economic Value Added*, 2003, vii.

<sup>115</sup> Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), chap. 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2185995>.

<sup>116</sup> Anderson, 5.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

regulate the normative ways that individuals or groups are supposed to feel: "A U.S. Marine is supposed to be patriotic," "A connoisseur of fine art is supposed to cultivate an appreciation of subtle qualities in painting and sculpture and to be appalled at damage done to great works," and "A labor union activist is supposed to build solidarity with fellow members of the working class and to feel that 'an injury to one is an injury to all.'"<sup>118</sup> Yet while Anderson acknowledges that these ideals are not formed within a social and political vacuum,<sup>119</sup> the resolution to their oppressive capacity is posted as a mere matter of rationality, so that "if a society lacks the social norms needed to adequately express its members' reflectively endorsed valuations, the rational thing to do is to invent and institute such norms."<sup>120</sup> Accordingly, deeply and systematically violent impositions of economic value upon that which would more ethically be considered *invaluable* are regarded within this framework as more of an error in degree than in kind: so, for example,

We speak of slavery as degrading to persons because in slavery, individuals are valued as mere commodities or use-values, rather than as persons, worthy of the higher valuation of respect. Idolatry and fetishism make the opposite error: worshipping or otherwise valuing in a higher way things unworthy of all but lower modes of valuation.<sup>121</sup>

Such a framework trades normative economic monism for a more expansive pluralism that nonetheless fails to question the valuative status — indeed, *humanity* — of contested

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 25

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 71.

goods *qua* goods, and the hierarchies of power and violence through which such valuations are imposed.

A similar set of debates takes place in contemporary discourses on public archaeology: Nikolas Gestrinch, for example, critiques Gabriel Moshenska and Paul Burtenshaw's emphasis on the "economic justifications for archaeology,"<sup>122</sup> arguing instead that "by solely describing value in terms of utility (or money), we lose the subtlety of our value judgements, and we degrade those things whose value ought to be measured on a higher scale."<sup>123</sup> For Gestrinch, the danger in economic arguments for archaeology is that they create a world where "knowledge about the past is no more a common good, but something to be bought and sold, meaning that all archaeology will have to be conducted in a profitable manner."<sup>124</sup> Yet Gestrinch's formulation still fundamentally posits cultural heritage as goods *qua* goods, albeit ones traded in *public* markets (such as those of museums and other cultural institutions, where they may serve the ends of knowledge-production) rather than *private* ones (where the profit is the dominant motive).

It is in the crux between these theorizations that the contestations around Tutankhamun's treasures can be properly understood: not only as a debate around the *degree* but also the *ways* in which artifacts should be seen to be 'properly' valued. Yet

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<sup>122</sup> Gabriel Moshenska and Paul Burtenshaw, "Commodity Forms and Levels of Value in Archaeology: A Response to Gestrinch," *Present Pasts* 3, no. 2 (2011): 83–84, <https://doi.org/10.5334/pp.51>.

<sup>123</sup> Nikolas Gestrinch, "Putting a Price on the Past: The Ethics and Economics of Archaeology in the Marketplace - A Reply to 'What Is Public Archaeology,'" *Present Pasts* 3, no. 2 (2011): 81, <https://doi.org/10.5334/pp.50>.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

with a social and political context deeply intertwined with that of the burgeoning postcolonialism, the assertion of these competing 'shoulds' cannot be regarded as a mere plurality of irreconcilable yet basically commensurate subjectivities. Rather, the imposition a unitary framework of values, feelings, and actions with regard to heritage can be seen to play an ideological role in cementing a new politico-economic relation between West and Mid-East, which, in the case of antiquities and oil both, had come to the fore in the 1970s as deeply fraught sites of valuative contestation.

In disrupting the westward flow of capital, these contestations would come to underscore the mainstream public conceptualization of both oil and artifacts; not separately, but as issues deeply interwoven with one another and with post-colonial politics more broadly. These concomitant valuations of oil, artifacts, and contestation can be located in mass-media discourses of the *Treasures* exhibition, bemoaning the challenge to American geopolitical dominance. In the *New York Times*, for example, Hilton Kramer would rail against *Treasures* and other exhibitions of foreign culture in American museums, arguing that:

The Chinese, the Russians, and now the Egyptians are invited to send exhibitions glorifying their national heritage, but Americans are proscribed from exhibiting the glories of a living culture. For the purposes of détente, the United States is obliged to pretend that it, too, has nothing of contemporary value to show. *Our* public is to be duly impressed, but *their* public is to be left untouched by anything that smacks of a living idea. [...] Many museum officials are concerned, not to say horrified, at the way the public is cajoled and manipulated by these détente exhibitions, which inevitably take on a show-business atmosphere.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Hilton Kramer, "Reconsiderations on the Art of Detente," *New York Times*, October 30, 1975.

For Kramer, cultural exhibitions from the socialist and communist nations with which the United States was in a temporary *détente* — namely, Russia, China, and Egypt — represent a particular threat to American cultural hegemony. These *détente* exhibitions are posited as a kind of political death, one incommensurate with the uniquely American “living culture”. Setting aside Kramer’s asserted proscription on the exhibition of American culture and the exhibitions’ perceived threat to American statehood, his observation of *Treasures*’ underlying politics is an acute reflection of Hoving’s controversy-courting public relations campaign. Kramer notes:

Future historians of the American art museum, when it comes time to chronicle the peculiar features of the nineteen-seventies, will be obliged to deal with a startling new phenomenon: the foreign-policy exhibition, otherwise known as the *détente* show. The latest of these politically determined exhibitions — a show of 53 rarities of Egyptian art from the tomb of Tutankhamen, including 19 works never before allowed to leave Egypt — was announced in Washington on Tuesday, when a formal agreement was signed between Secretary of State Kissinger and the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Ismail Fahmy, on the occasion of President Anwar el-Sadat’s visit.<sup>126</sup>

Kramer’s interpellation of the future art historian would prove prescient. But many exhibitions are “politically determined,” so what is it about the political determination of *this* exhibition that rankles so deeply, upsetting the American social order as Kramer knows it? Here, he makes explicit that which is merely implied in the bulk of the *Treasures* publicity: that *the very possibility of these objects being permitted to travel* is a point of political pressure in Egypt’s favour, made possible by the organized Egyptian claim for them at the time of their discovery. That is, the fact that Egypt (and the non-

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

Western world more broadly) occupied a geopolitical position permitting it to participate in bilateral negotiation, making demands at the threat of withholding its resources, is what makes the ‘détente exhibition’ so galling for Kramer. This is true of both oil and artifacts: the *Treasures* exhibition and the OPEC oil crisis both represented a renegotiation of the West’s role in the Middle East, from colonial arbiter to secondary rival. Thus, the crisis of American culture posed by this exhibition stems from the Eastward location of its balance of power: while many travelling exhibitions bring works to the West for the first time, *Treasures* represented a new power dynamic wherein the West would be forced to wait for half a century before being permitted to view objects *to which it assumed it would be able to originally lay claim*.

This geopolitical shift had been newly made possible by the Cold War détente. In the Egyptian context, this is accompanied by Nasser’s succession by Sadat, whose *infitah* policy would shift alliances rapidly from the Eastern to the Western Bloc. Nonetheless, in the wake of the 1973-74 oil embargo within which Egypt played a significant supporting role, tensions would remain high between the two nations, motivating Jihan el-Sadat’s “hope that King Tutankhamen, in his own special way, can contribute to the friendship and understanding between our two nations.”<sup>127</sup> So, while dozens of articles would breathlessly celebrate the possibility of seeing these objects in all their complex and sordid history for the first time, the *wait itself* is inscribed within the valuative structure that provided the show with its unprecedented hype. This hype, propelled by the affective intensity of the wait, imbues the objects with a sense of potential that they may otherwise

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<sup>127</sup> New York Times, “Jihan Sadat Hopes Mideast Peace Nears,” *The New York Times*, February 8, 1978.

have not had. In this sense, time — in the form the artifacts’ historical age *and* that of the decades they remained in Egypt — contributes to their valuative potential along the lines of Brian Massumi’s formulation, which argues that at its core, “capital is a *time-function*.”<sup>128</sup> For Massumi, “The time element [of capitalism] is fundamentally nonchronological, revolving around potential, which is nothing other than *futurity in the present*. [...] It concerns time as the qualitative interval priming the actualization of potential.”<sup>129</sup> For the *Treasures* exhibition, this potential is actualized as a highly visible site of value; after all, as a *Washington Post* article would point out, it wasn’t *only* that crowds had to wait for hours in cold to enter the exhibition, it’s that they had to wait *fifty years*. “Older people,” we are told, “have been drawn by their rekindled memories of accounts more than half a century ago at the discovery of King Tut’s tomb and its awesome contents. For Grace Peck of Arlington, ‘That was what was important.’”<sup>130</sup>

For audiences like Peck, what is critical here is the political and valuative function of *access* and lack thereof: the perceived *wait* to see these objects contributed to their value in the public eye. The half-century since its discovery meant that even young audiences had been steeped in a media imaginary with a firmly established image of King Tut as a site of value and contestation, such that *Treasures* was stepping into an already deeply-charged terrain. As one reviewer would ask:

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<sup>128</sup> Brian Massumi, *99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value A Postcapitalist Manifesto* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 17.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. The value of time is further theorized by Krister Bykvist in “Value and Time,” in Iwao Hirose and Jonas Olson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Value Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), chap. 7.

<sup>130</sup> Eric Wentworth, “THE LONG, SLOW LINE; Lines at Tutankhamun Exhibit Snakes Slowly Into Gallery; Fewer Than One-Third On Given Day Actually See Tutankhamoun Exhibit,” *Washington Post*, March 8, 1977.

Why the phenomenal interest in an obscure boy king whose tomb was discovered in a valley on the Nile in 1922? There's a fascination about ancient Egypt, says Ron Leprohon, the Ontario gallery's resident Egyptologist. We are brought up hearing about the pyramids and the pharaohs and Moses and the Exodus, and all of a sudden we get a chance to see things, gorgeous things, from those times.<sup>131</sup>

*Treasures*, therefore, did not build a new frenzy from scratch; it deftly utilized a half-century of public consumption of Egypt in general and King Tut in particular as its social, political, and affective foundation. While practically every travelling exhibition will bring at least some works to a place for the first time, this exhibition strove at every turn to evoke the drama that accompanied the initial discovery — from Hoving's exposé of the discovery's sordid details in his best-selling books and newspaper articles, to the use of Burton's photographs of the discovery in the exhibition space itself. Visitors to the exhibition would publicize “the drama it suggests—the archeologist's discovery, the voyage through the Pharaoh's tomb—” allowing the visitor to relive the intensity of “Howard Carter's journey from unearthing of the steps in the desert sands to the final emptying of the chambered tomb.”<sup>132</sup>

This deliberate ‘enchantment’ of Egyptological time — commingling the present with a half-century past and three millennia before that, all in one time and place — reinforces Fryxall's observation that “Modern Egyptomania's self-consciously non-linear conception of time and correspondingly new temporal subjectivity distinguishes it from its predecessors.”<sup>133</sup> This dissolution of temporal boundaries meant that audiences could

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<sup>131</sup> David Lancashire, “Tutmania and the West's Lust for the Exotic,” *The Globe and Mail*, October 27, 1979.

<sup>132</sup> Paul Richard, “A Thrilling Installment In the King Tut Story,” *The Washington Post*, November 16, 1976.

<sup>133</sup> Fryxell, “Tutankhamen, Egyptomania, and Temporal Enchantment in Interwar Britain,” 517.

more easily relate to the objects on display, but it also drew attention to the West's long wait for the objects. This construction of this 'wait' is imbricated with the initial contestation for the tomb's contents: *Treasures* is seen to right a historical wrong which denied the West of its rightful claim to the Tutankhamun find. It is difficult to imagine an American media emphasis on a fifty-year wait to see objects on continuous display at, say, the British Museum, had Carnarvon and Carter negotiated such a compromise. Yet, the contents of Tutankhamun's tomb were not secreted away in a private collection for this duration: they were on display at the Egyptian museum in Cairo, as headlines would woefully note.<sup>134</sup> Thus, the construction of the 'wait' to see the objects functions as part of a broader claims-making mechanism: by positing the inevitability of the treasures' arrival to the West, audiences work through the historical disruption posed by Egypt's claim, play-acting a version of history wherein the colonial relation is still intact.

### **1.5 Ensembles of Value**

Due in part to Hoving's bestselling book about the politics of the competing claims for Tutankhamun's tomb, the *Treasures* media discourse would draw links between the present political context and the one in which Carter made his discovery. The previous exhibition tour of the 1960s lacked the drama and glitz that came to be associated with *Treasures*, which drew record-breaking crowds in every stop. Accordingly, *Treasures* came to be viewed as *the* definitive exhibition by which the King

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<sup>134</sup> New York Times, "Rest of Tut Objects Stay in Cluttered Cairo Museum," *The New York Times*, January 7, 1979.

Tut phenomenon was understood, defining the 'museum blockbuster' genre in ways that continue to impact museum practice decades on.

But to understand how contestation charged the Tutankhamun phenomenon with its particular social power, it is necessary to examine the concept of 'collective value' as it relates to museum collections. This is the idea that the sensibility of cultural artifacts hinges on their context, which is found not only in their place of origin but in their proximity to the other specific objects that lend them their meaning and importance.

Aside from the *ethics* of the coercive or violent seizure of such objects, this view posits that artifacts' *semiotic* and *historical* value is diminished when they are dispersed.

The origins of this concept are typically traced to the writings of Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, an influential critic of Napoleon's voracious project of artifactual seizure, particularly in Italy. In his letters to General Miranda, Quatremère pleads:

What is the antique in Rome if not a great book whose pages have been destroyed and dispersed by time, and whose voids and lacunae modern research continually fills and repairs? The sovereign power that chose, exported and appropriated a selection of the most curious of these monuments would be doing no other than an ignoramus tearing out [arracheroit] of a book all those pages on which he found vignettes.<sup>135</sup>

This oft-cited letter demonstrates, as Webb argues, the "subtlety and force of the arguments with which [Quatremère] defended Rome against the claims of Napoleon," finding that "his account of a deeper layer of relationship and of the delicate connective tissue between works of art and their originating contexts expresses a discomfort with the

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<sup>135</sup> Antoine Quatremère de Quincy, *Letters to Miranda and Canova on the Abduction of Antiquities from Rome to Athens*, trans. Chris Miller and David Gilks (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2012), 100. For more on the etymology of 'arracher' in this context, see **Chapter 3**.

concept of a museum that is prophetically critical."<sup>136</sup> While Quatremère's critique of the museum stems from a discomfort with the revolutionary project, the substance of the critique — that something of fundamental value is lost by its displacement from its material context — is echoed by other critics of normative museology. It is in this sense, for example, that Césaire finds that

the museums of which M. Caillois is so proud, not for one minute does it cross his mind that, all things considered, it would have been better not to have needed them; that Europe would have done better to tolerate the non-European civilizations at its side, leaving them alive, dynamic' and prosperous, whole and not mutilated; that it would have been better to let them develop and fulfill themselves than to present for our admiration, duly labeled, their dead and scattered parts.<sup>137</sup>

In short, 'collective value' emerges not from the scientific, historical, artistic, or economic value seen to be intrinsic to an object *per se*; rather, it is an emergent property resulting from its *proximity to a whole*, not only in a material but broader, geographic, social, and cultural sense.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Timothy Webb, "Appropriating the Stones: The 'Elgin Marbles' and English National Taste," in Barkan and Bush, *Claiming the Stones, Naming the Bones: Cultural Property and the Negotiation of National and Ethnic Identity*, 71.

Additional analyses of Quatremère de Quincy's role in the early formation of the modern museum can be found in Ian Russell, *Images, Representations and Heritage: Moving beyond Modern Approaches to Archaeology* (New York: Springer, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-32216-7>; Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, *Museum Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994); David Gilks, "Attitudes to the Displacement of Cultural Property in the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon," *Historical Journal* 56, no. 1 (2013): 113–43, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X12000453>.

<sup>137</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism, New York* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 71, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>.

<sup>138</sup> Other conceptualizations of the ways that objects gain (and lose) meaning in the wake of their displacement abound, however, including those of 'object diaspora' as set out by John Pepper and Paul Basu. See: Paul Basu, "Object Diasporas, Resourcing Communities: Sierra Leonean Collections in the Global Museumscape," *Museum Anthropology* 34, no. 1 (2011): 28–42, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2010.01105.x>; and John Pepper, "Africa's Diasporas of Images," *Third Text* 19, no. 4 (2005): 339–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528820500124479>.

To understand its practical function in the case of Tutankhamun's treasures, however, we will consult Hoving's account of "a certain Muhammed Mohassib, a canny specialist in the *antika* trade who somehow managed to learn at once about any clandestine excavation, no matter how modest."<sup>139</sup> In the antiquities trade, artifactual value was inscribed (and inflated) thusly:

The trick was to offer, at the right time, one lot to one collector or museum, and another to a second, while at the same time letting out the word to both that, of course, it would be a far better thing if the one collector or museum could acquire both lots. The price for the two would be slightly higher than the sum of the two separately, but think of the scientific value of the whole! Then, when the collector had secured the first two lots, in due time Mohassib would suddenly discover a third, and then a fourth and a fifth, which the collector or museum would be unable to resist.<sup>140</sup>

The antiquities dealer's livelihood depends upon his shrewd understanding of the valuative structures held by the museums and collectors with whom he deals. Hoving's account of Mohassib speaks to a complex framework of valuation, one that hinges not on *objects* but on *relationships*. What set Mohassib apart in Hoving's view was an understanding of the *exponential* relation between particular objects and the perceived whole of the collection to which they intrinsically belong. Owning two related artifacts was worth more than double the value of owning just one. Owning an entire tomb's worth of grave goods — untouched and whole in their relation to a particular individual and historical moment — is worth *exponentially* more than owning the same number of artifacts from differing provenances. Importantly, this anecdote is not simply a

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<sup>139</sup> Hoving, *Tutankhamun*, 130.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

transparent account of Mohassib's motives or practices, but rather, those of Hoving himself in his capacity as the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art — a position of significant social, professional, and financial power. In Hoving's narrative, this function of the *collection* as a *collective* is portrayed as a common-sense understanding, broadly accepted within the archaeological field. Howard Carter, for example, is quoted in relation to an earlier find as emphasizing the “‘great importance that all these objects should, if possible, remain together, both from a scientific point of view and a ‘collective’ value.”<sup>141</sup> What this speaks to is a broader logic through which the value of a collection as a whole must be understood, one that underlies the valuative function of the claims for Tut's treasures: that is, the way that dispersal *and* collection *both* contribute to museal value. Or, more specifically, this is the way that dispersal is rhetorically deployed as part of the ontological function of the collection, while contributing to it in turn.

As part of the valuative function of the ‘collection’ *per se*, this construction can be traced to the very origins of the modern museum. For Amand Lemaître, writing a history of the Louvre in 1878, the history of the museum is not just one of collection, but dispersal, too. He argues that:

It is not only by saving masterpieces of art from dispersal that the institution of public museums have acquired in modern annals a glorious rank and imperishable destinies; a vaster horizon adds still to this noble goal its infinite perspectives. If we consider, in fact, these immense collections from the point of view of the services which they are called upon to render, we are struck by the grandeur of the work and its inexhaustible fruitfulness. In what more attractive form could we propagate taste for beautiful things and popularize their information? From what purer sources have comparative studies, so useful to the progress of the arts, ever drawn more clearly defined notions? [...] In these rich galleries, the spectacle

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<sup>141</sup> Howard Carter, quoted in Hoving, *Tutankhamun*, 133.

which charms the sight at the same time adorns the mind and forms the taste. Alongside the reminders (*souvenirs*) attesting to the greatness of the ancient civilizations of the Orient, the visitor will admire Greek art, its masterpieces, and its pre-models.<sup>142</sup>

Lemaître remarks quite plainly that “It is not only by saving masterpieces of art from dispersal” that museum collections “have acquired in modern annals a glorious rank and imperishable destinies.” It is in fact in their *facilitation of dispersal elsewhere* which aids in the *concentration of value here*. The “glorious rank” of the museum is shown in this case to be a function of its mediation of both dispersal *and* collection. The meaning-making function of relationality only emerges in the collection: in this case, it is only “alongside the reminders attesting to the greatness of the ancient civilizations of the Orient” that “the visitor will admire Greek art and its masterpieces,” thereby situating the West and the Orient in their intended places along the civilizational hierarchy. But collection is shown here to be intrinsically reliant upon dispersal: if those Greek and Oriental reminders — *souvenirs* — remain in Greece and the Orient, then their history-making function is negated: they cannot be used by the museum-going audience to remember — *souvenir* — the state-sanctioned French national past.

Through these conceptualizations of national value, it become evident that the broadly-defined value of a collection is more than just the sum of its parts. It is an emergent, relational property that relies upon the social, historical, and narrative function of objects — *things* — *in relation to one another* and to a place and a people. It is for this reason that now, following decades of reform and advocacy,

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<sup>142</sup> Amand Lemaître, *Le Louvre : Monument et Musée Depuis Leurs Origines Jusqu'à Nos Jours* (Paris: Imprimerie Jules Le Clere et Cie., 1878), 165.

It has long been recognized by archaeologists, art historians, museum curators and even politicians that objects of cultural property should not be dismembered and, if this had happened in the past, such a mutilation of *objects d'art* should be stopped and dispersed pieces of an *ensemble* should be reassembled.<sup>143</sup>

What set Tutankhamun's tomb apart from previous discoveries was its function as an *ensemble* in this sense; a 'collection' unto itself, with a specific relational value that emerged from the fact that *it was maintained as such* after its discovery. This is what lent its exhibition in the 1970s such immense social capital: the international competition for archaeological treasure had heretofore scattered all meaningful artifactual *ensembles* to museums around the globe. While this lent *each* museum a portion of the net asset value that comes with being able to position one's national history at the end of a civilizational hierarchy with Egypt at its base, the centuries of archaeological rapine had also all but demolished the 'collective value' that *could* emerge from allowing Ancient Egyptian *things* to maintain the *thingness* of the gathering in the Heideggerian sense.<sup>144</sup> The preservation of the ensemble permitted, in this sense, not only an *epistemological* shift in the how the individual 'treasures' could be understood, but an *ontological* one too, re-defining what the *thing* under discussion even was. Beyond the value of the individual objects, the ensemble *as ensemble* — its *gathering*, the process though which it was kept whole, *as a gathering* — was transformed through mass media into a site of assembly, a *matter of discussion* engendering social potentialities beyond that which the prevailing emphasis on artifactual materiality had heretofore been capable of capturing.

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<sup>143</sup> Kurt J. Siehr, "The beautiful one has come — to return: the return of the Bust of Nefertiti from Berlin to Cairo," in John Merryman, ed., *Imperialism, Art, and Restitution* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 127.

<sup>144</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1971), 164-84.

These social and historical potentialities were of little interest to the museums financially reliant upon the spoils of Egyptological expeditions, however. The unilateral Egyptian claim for the *entirety* of the Tutankhamun find was vociferously decried as a historically destructive — or at least unproductive — act by the archaeological and museological stakeholders who sought a portion of its value, but in fact, it served as an *interruption of the museological process of dispersion* that had systematically robbed the world of its capacity to extract the ‘collective value’ of all of that which has been scattered and devalued in its atomization. The straightforward hypocrisy of this claim became too the subject of a great deal of Egyptian media editorialization, critiquing the ways in which the attempted dispersal would ostensibly serve the study of science and history in Western museums, when their value unambiguously lay in their proximity to one another as an unbroken unit. In the words of one contemporary:

Rather, what would be the rule of the world over us if we gave in or were lenient in the matter of this group of artifacts? And what is the ruling of the world on those who invoke the power of deprivation to deprive science and history of some of these objects? that complement each other and that cannot substitute one another; where every one has its own cause and context, its own significance and condition, and every object has its own clues. And if the protection of these relics is of great importance and above all other considerations, then it is because their existence together is not as golden treasures or as industrial artifacts, but because, as we said, it is a complete book that contains evidence of a complete civilization, a complete creed, and a complete history of an era.<sup>145</sup>

It was not lost on Egyptian critics of the era that the struggle to maintain a claim over the find was a valuative struggle for epistemic and material control, one that cut to the heart

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<sup>145</sup> “Ālṭama‘ ḥta biaṭār tut ‘anḥ amun [Greed, even for the artifacts of Tutankhamun],” *al-Ahram*, May 17 1929.

of the colonial monopoly on the means of knowledge-production. Heretofore, the terms of the debate demanded that Egyptians cede material control if they were to be permitted access to scientific authority. What Tutankhamun provided was exemplary grounds to reverse those terms: only *sole* Egyptian control would permit the maintenance of the tomb's holistic, ensemble value, and Carnarvon and Carter's vociferous claims otherwise only rendered more and more transparent the self-interest at the heart of their claim.

Thus, the Egyptian press declared:

Science requires that these relics remain as they are, and history requires that they remain undisturbed. And the history of Carnarvon and Carter themselves forbids us from extending a hand to this precious group. We say that all of this forbids touching this archaeological group if we are to adhere to Egypt's sole rights. Because Egypt's sole rights may not suffice in the eyes of the ambitious as a strong defence against their ambitions. Because Egypt's sole rights may not find strong defenders to defend it. And Egypt's sole rights are those of the weak who stand before the ambitions of the strong, only to receive disgrace and weakness at times, sacrifice and offerings at others.<sup>146</sup>

Thus, it was not *simply* the Egyptian claim for the find that contributed to its ultimate value: it was the Egyptian claim for the find *as a whole* that interrupted a deeply historically destructive process — heretofore accepted as status quo by the museum profession — and in so doing, created an *ensemble* with an unprecedented 'collective value'. This valuative structure is made evident, again, in the breathless media coverage of *Treasures*. Hilton Kramer, for example, who in a different article rails against the foreign presence in the American museum, locates the power of the exhibition from its intact status and its accompanying socio-political drama:

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

The exhibition gains much, of course, from the romance attending the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb. It was in November 1922 that the British archeologist Howard Carter and his sponsor, the fifth Earl of Carnarvon, first uncovered the objects that had remained concealed for more than 2,000 years. This was one of the stellar events in the history of modern archeology— for unlike the tombs of other Egyptian kings, Tutankhamen's was essentially intact — and has ever since retained an almost mythical status.

This aura of myth and romance is very much a part of the present exhibition— perhaps too much a part of the exhibition. By means of didactic charts, photographic blowups and extended captions on the walls, the visitor to the “Treasures” show is given a quick course in the history of ancient Egypt and a dramatic account of the tomb's discovery.<sup>147</sup>

Kramer's perspective here is typical of the exhibition's press coverage. Not only is the ‘intact’ status of the collection highlighted as a primary point of interest, but it is noted as an integral part of the drama of its discovery, which is used, in turn, as the focal point of the exhibition. While *Treasures* was not the first Tutankhamun exhibition, Hoving's choice of particularly iconic pieces — ones the public would recognize from Burton's documentation of the discovery — made this exhibition of only 55 of more than 2000 objects seem representative of *the whole*, that which catalyzed the initial media frenzy around discovery.

## 1.6 The Immortal King

What this all ultimately contributed to was a massive proliferation of the King Tut phenomenon. The *New York Times* would make note of the years-long “Tut glut”: just as in the 1920s, when “a passion for all things Egyptian touched popular culture from fashion to phonograph records and influenced the movement known as Art Deco,” the

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<sup>147</sup> Hilton Kramer, “Hailing the Romantic Treasures of Tutankhamen,” *The New York Times*, November 16, 1976.

*Treasures* exhibition was similarly influential, inspiring everything from “bed linens to T-shirts” to a “car with a fibreglass grill in the shape of Tut's head, a cobra-head stick shift and sphinxes adorning the running board.”<sup>148</sup> The “golden show” would come to be associated with outlandish wealth, and not just for the shining treasures on display: breaking records for attendance and merchandise sales, its profits would far outstrip the \$5 million in revenues Hoving had initially estimated.<sup>149</sup> This, naturally, set *Treasures* as a new standard by which blockbuster exhibitions were expected to perform, a new fiscal trajectory for which museum advisory boards were increasingly pressured to aim.

By the end the *Treasures* run, a shift in global museum strategy would be increasingly evident, and “*Treasures of Tutankhamun* would become the exemplar for the transformation overtaking American art museums in this era.”<sup>150</sup> The exhibition’s unprecedented popularity and financial success would contribute to public worry that “critical financial pressures are tempting American art museums to increase profits by staging ‘commercialized blockbuster’ shows such as the much celebrated *Treasures of Tutankhamun*, according to a report by the Twentieth Century Fund.”<sup>151</sup> The report would call for a reappraisal of museum practices, calling for “a re-examination of patronage practices” and “a uniform standard for assessing the financial needs of museums.”<sup>152</sup> But

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<sup>148</sup> Marilyn Chase, ... “... But Los Angeles Faces a Tut Glut,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1978.

<sup>149</sup> Chase; Kritzwiser, “The Golden Show That’s Worth the Hype”; Hoving, *Tutankhamun: The Untold Story*, 411.

<sup>150</sup> Neil Harris, *Capital Culture: J. Carter Brown, the National Gallery of Art, and the Reinvention of the Museum Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 194, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jau531>.

<sup>151</sup> *New York Times*, “Blockbusters ‘Tempt’ Museums,” *New York Times*, February 25, 1979. See also: Keith Roberts, “Are the Major Shows Too Big?,” *The Guardian*, March 6, 1975.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

the calls for fiscal reform in the museum sector would go largely unheeded, and years later, the effects would still be felt. "The emphasis on exhibition has reached a state of madness," Katherine Watson, director of the Bowdoin College Museum of Fine Art would lament, speaking to the changing standards of museum funding set by the federal funding bodies in the United States. "Success is measured in terms of blockbuster exhibitions. Publicity is the goal to pursue. The accent is on new acquisitions when vast stores of art and artifacts lie in desperate need of care."<sup>153</sup> This emphasis on drama, controversy, and publicity would be a consistent note: in the wake of the Hoving era, the director of the Maine State Museum in Augusta would echo that "the museum revolution geared to the 'me' generation, that has resulted in some museums becoming places where things happen to people and where audiences, not collections, matter."<sup>154</sup> But despite the frustration expressed by such leaders of the museum profession and the material and logistical difficulties of attempting to emulate its standard, *Treasures* would remain the firm benchmark by which museums were henceforth expected to operate. Christine Stiassni, state representative to the New England Museum Association and director of the Bridgeport Museum of Art, Science and Industry, for example, would argue that "contrary to the thinking of many boards of directors, that museums make money on exhibitions such as the extravagant one on King Tutankhamen of a few years ago," but in fact, "they barely break even."<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Eleanor Charles, "Museums Assess Their Future Roles," *The New York Times*, September 26, 1982.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

This frustrating dichotomy — whereby institutions struggling with Nixon-era austerity and neoliberalization would be incentivized to strive for *Treasures*' big-budget success, but, lacking Hoving's knack for the dramatic, would find themselves in even further financial straits — would be confronted even at the Met. Following Hoving's "decade of frenetic expansion," the Metropolitan Museum would opt to bring "a kind of regularization to the museum that was lacking when Tom was here."<sup>156</sup> The new directors, William B. Macomber Jr. and Philippe de Montebello would insist — despite the plummeting ticket sales — that "The idea that attendance will drop if too much time elapses between blockbusters is absurd," arguing that "It's wrong to choose shows or to pace them to boost the budget [...] We've been using foreign museums like Sears, Roebuck catalogues." At the same time, financial pressure would temper their distaste for "the sort of Mickey Mouse participatory program where the person is more engaged in the game process than the actual artistic experience," associated with Hoving's tenure. After all, blockbusters are a vital source of ticket and merchandise revenue, and "money, particularly operations money [is] always harder to come by than funds for capital projects that can perpetuate a donor's name."<sup>157</sup> This financial pressure would have tangible effects on the Met's operations: "We have to develop as many spigots as we can for revenue," Macomber would emphasize, but the non-blockbuster-centric efforts would fail to generate the kind of revenue the museum would now be pressured to bring in:

At tapping new spigots, however, Mr. Macomber has so far not met with startling success. It is too early to tell, he says, whether his government connections will

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<sup>156</sup> Grace Glueck, "How Fares the Met Museum - In the Post-Hoving Era?," *New York Times*, April 8, 1979.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

bring more from the Federal spigot, and as for big private money, Mr. Dillon notes, “He hasn’t had time yet to develop the real contacts.”<sup>158</sup>

Thus, the post-Hoving era at the Met would be marked less by consolidation and regularization, and more by a gradual return to the blockbuster-centric managerial style that had by then become a necessary financial ‘spigot’ within the museum’s increasingly neoliberalized bureaucratic machinery. But this systemic change would take place at the intersection between managerial strategy and affective negotiation: Hoving’s abilities as a “wonderful showman”<sup>159</sup> were seen to be a critical component of *Treasures*’ financial success, contributing to a sense that the “new breed” of curators would now need to sate public appetites for drama, controversy, and politics in the museum.<sup>160</sup> “It’s a matter of survival,” one such curator would remark.<sup>161</sup> Endless reviews would hail the ‘drama’ of the exhibition, including those by critics such as Hilton Kramer with otherwise negative appraisals of the exhibition and its media “hoopla”.<sup>162</sup> The objects’ appraisal as sites of focused political contestation would contribute here to the drama of the exhibition: that contestation, after all, was a critical part of narrative of their discovery. This drama would be emphasized by Hoving’s bestselling and mass-reproduced account of the politics of the discovery and through the utilization of Burton’s photographs in the exhibition space,

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> But while Hoving contributed significantly to the *Treasures*’ media success, this is not to unduly credit him with its logistical and financial success: on that front, others such as Carter Brown were integral to effecting the exhibition’s initial contract to travel to the United States. See: Harris, *Capital Culture: J. Carter Brown, the National Gallery of Art, and the Reinvention of the Museum Experience*, 104.

<sup>161</sup> Liz Roman Gallese, “A New Breed: Curators Now Need Skills and Showmanship,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 23, 1979.

<sup>162</sup> For Kramer’s more positive assessment, see: “Hailing the Romantic Treasures of Tutankhamen,” 41; for a more typical representation of the exhibition’s affective impact on audiences, see: Richard, “A Thrilling Installment In the King Tut Story.”

which would invite audiences to occupy the role of the archaeologist on the verge of a deeply fraught discovery. Hoving's showmanship would amplify the objects' social, political, and affective relevance to contemporary audiences, contributing to the King Tut mythos and providing an endless font of media controversy to feed the *Treasures* hype.

One outcome of this would be a re-opening of the debate around the material claim for Tutankhamun's treasures, and for Egyptian antiquities more broadly. In lauding the exhibition, articles would frequently lament the conditions of their home museum in Cairo. A review in *The Guardian*, for example, would note that

There are undoubtedly risks of theft and breakage in transporting these priceless exhibits around, but they are worth taking. Cairo is still for many too distant to visit easily. And in the Cairo Museum itself the treasures are poorly displayed. [*Treasures of Tutankhamun*] is an opportunity not to be missed for many more people to pay court to the King than would otherwise have been possible.<sup>163</sup>

The sad state of the Cairo museum is utilized here not as part of the rationale for the *Treasures* exhibition — after all, the Egyptian proceeds were earmarked for the museum's improvement — but rather, a normative argument for the objects' proper place in the West, where they can be cared for despite the “risks of theft and breakage” involved in their transport. Similarly, a *New York Times* headline announces despairingly that “Rest of Tut Objects Stay in Cluttered Cairo Museum,” where “laborers have managed to drip paint and leave brushmarks on 2,500-year-old hieroglyphics” and “young Egyptian school-girls ducked under tables holding the Pharaoh's jewelry.”<sup>164</sup> When a museum official is quoted in his conviction “that God protects our museum,” this

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<sup>163</sup> *Guardian*, “The Tutankhamun Show.”

<sup>164</sup> *New York Times*, “Rest of Tut Objects Stay in Cluttered Cairo Museum.”

assertion is painted as a dangerously naïve one that undermines the authority of his claim, and not a serious one that speaks to the integration of his professional responsibilities with those of his faith.<sup>165</sup> A similar dynamic plays out in the *Wall Street Journal*, where an Egyptian official's aversion to the "abominable" sale of human remains is dismissed as a fear of "black magic;"<sup>166</sup> the Egyptian subject is reinscribed as irrational and superstitious, incapable of the complexities of modern governance, and thus, intrinsically — even *necessarily* — colonizable. By Orientalizing the Egyptian institution in such a way, the *Treasures* publicity leverages the exhibition as a means of staking a Western claim for the objects. This claims-making function would serve dual purposes: it would contribute to *Treasures*' allure as a site of exhibitionary drama, and it would mediate King Tut's diplomatic role in mediating Western and Egyptian interests under Sadat's infitah policies.<sup>167</sup> This, in turn, would become part of a new set of Nixon-era expectations for the public institution: not only would it be required to turn a profit in addition to providing a public good, but, in addition, it would serve the state's foreign-policy interests, generating foreign-policy goodwill where needed.<sup>168</sup> As a *Guardian* article would explain,

King Tut may be the exception that breaks all the rules, a firm favourite with the British public ever since Howard Carter disturbed his 3,300-year rest just 50 years ago. But there is another difference which underlines the curious *rôle* of governments in making—or breaking — cultural exchanges between their

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Rotbart, "This Story Unravels A Mideast Product Dearer Than Oil."

<sup>167</sup> For an overview of how King Tut's employment as an "honest broker" between Egypt and Western nations, see: David Beadles, "The Art of Diplomacy," *The Guardian*, December 30, 1972.

<sup>168</sup> As exemplified by the fact that "The contract for Tut was signed three months after U.S.- Egyptian relations were resumed in 1974." Joseph McLellan, "The Modern Medicis," *Washington Post*, July 22, 1979.

subjects. The Tutankhamun exhibition which ends tonight (over 16 million visitors and £600,000 to the good) was museum-inspired, something both Cairo and London had been talking about for years. The Fanfare, the quality of the cultural goodies notwithstanding, is a plug for EEC entry. Culture in the service of politics.<sup>169</sup>

The assertion of *Treasures*' political function was not simply a conspiratorial hypothesis put forth by a sensationalistic media; rather, it would be confirmed by public officials occupying positions of political power in the U.S. State Department. In fact, the State Department would institute a new position, that of the Advisor on the Arts, whose function would be to "facilitate in any way [...] international exchange in the arts."<sup>170</sup> As previously noted, Peter Solmssen, the first to occupy this position, would support the international exhibition's function to "normalize relationships"<sup>171</sup> with the Eastern Bloc and Non-Aligned nations, a state function that was especially pertinent in the *Treasures* exhibition:

According to Thomas Hoving [...] during the complicated negotiations between the Met and the Office of Egyptian Antiquities for the Tutankhamun show, Solmssen journeyed to Egypt with Hoving in the spring of 1975 and used his legal knowledge to nail down the precise language of the government-to-government contracts that preceded any shipment of art here, then worked out with Egyptian officials details of the six-museum tour.<sup>172</sup>

The incorporation of this new role speaks to a relationship between the state and the museum that began to change under the Nixon administration, and would continue to do so thereafter as neoliberal state policies came to be enshrined in many Western states. As Brian Wallis observes, this era of museum policy would see a shift towards 'treasure' -

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Glueck, "Are Art Exchanges a Game of Propaganda?"

<sup>171</sup> Glueck.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

focused blockbusters aimed at “the promotion of tourism, the populist expansion of the role of the museum, and the development of international business and political connections.”<sup>173</sup> This shift would build in the following decades toward the development of the ‘cultural festival’-type exhibition, which would “[differ] from other ‘treasure’ shows not only in size and complexity but also in their specifically political motivations.”<sup>174</sup> For Wright, this trend towards commercialization is cemented by the drama and controversy of exhibitions of contested artifacts. In 1989 he warns:

Unfortunately, in a period of Thatcherite values (pay-for-what-you-use), art museums could be forced to turn somersaults — chasing endlessly sensational 'blockbuster' exhibitions, or embracing the dishonest farrago of pretending that bronzes from Benin or marble reliefs from Greece constitute our 'national heritage' — in order to establish or retain a supportive constituency.<sup>175</sup>

But while these profitable controversies would court geopolitical conflict, the museum’s expanded role as a broker of ‘international development’ discourses and practices would aid in mitigating them.<sup>176</sup> This role would be aided by the increasingly explicit imbrication between cultural institutions and those of the state: in the U.S. context this would come to include “the State Department, the U.S. Information Agency, the White House,” and relevant ambassadorial bodies, which could offer administrative and

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<sup>173</sup> Brian Wallis, “Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy,” in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 267.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> Philip Wright, “The Quality of Visitors' Experiences in Art Museums,” in *The New Museology*, ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 129–30.

<sup>176</sup> For more on these development-centered policies and practices, see: Christina F Kreps, “Museums, culture, and development” in *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Heritage Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2003), chap. 5.

financial support to increasingly cash-strapped institutions through exhibitions aligned with governmental aims.<sup>177</sup>

Such mediation on the part of the state would come into play with all major international exhibitions; particularly, as Solmssen notes, the Met's other blockbuster, *Scythian Gold* and the National Gallery of Art's *Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China*.<sup>178</sup> But in King Tut's case, it is *specifically* the state's claim on Egyptian patrimony that would motivate its involvement in the exhibition. When asked if the United States expects to send exhibitions back to all the nations it receives exhibitions from, Solmssen retorts: "It doesn't have to be a one-to-one thing [...] After all, Egyptian culture is part of the Western heritage."<sup>179</sup>

Museums' new social, political, and financial realities reveal some of the ways that the *Treasures* exhibition contributed not only to the lasting public conceptualizations of King Tut, but also, in functional and material ways, to museum practice more broadly. It would become evident that in an increasingly neoliberalized political economy, "museum curators now need managerial skills [and a] dash of showmanship" in *Treasures'* wake.<sup>180</sup> And so, for instance,

Nobody has to tell the Boston curator that big shows such as the now-legendary *Treasures of Tutankhamun* exhibit have extra benefits. They help attract more funds from the federal and state governments, foundations, corporations and other donors, for one thing.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Wallis, 269-270.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Gallese, "A New Breed: Curators Now Need Skills and Showmanship," 1.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

At the same time, the ‘New Museology’ would find its origins in this time period, placing its impetus on the “widespread dissatisfaction with the 'old' museology, both within and outside the museum profession.”<sup>182</sup> By contrast, the *new* museology would strive for “a radical re-examination of the role of museums within society,” lest “museums in this country, and possibly elsewhere, may likewise find themselves dubbed 'living fossils’.”<sup>183</sup>

Indeed, as I have aimed to demonstrate, the museum’s social role was in fact rapidly changing in the wake of widespread dissatisfaction with its historical practices, and also, there was a real, material and structural incentive for museums to avoid becoming such ‘living fossils’. But in order to understand how those demands for reform shaped the museum, it is vital to recognize that those demands were decidedly not new; in fact, the King Tut phenomenon — a major catalyst of museological change in the 1970s — *relied upon* the public’s memory of contestations more than a half-century past. The King Tut craze hinged on public interest in the drama of the shocking, unilateral Egyptian claim to the Tutankhamun find, which transformed it from a run-of-the-mill archaeological discovery to a phenomenon of mythic proportions. The fact that the find became such a concentrated site of ‘drama’ — or affective investment in conflict — made it easy for Hoving to transform the Met’s *Treasures* exhibition into a spectacle that vastly outstripped its earlier iterations’ popularity and profits. The contestations of the 1920s resonated with the Mid-East conflicts of the 1970s, allowing *Treasures* to re-ignite the West’s fifty-year-old claim for the find, providing the exhibition with new, ever more

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<sup>182</sup> Vergo, *The New Museology*, 3.

<sup>183</sup> Vergo, 3–4.

dramatic publicity, keeping it in the headlines — and the public imagination — for years on end. But the contemporary relevance of *Treasures* would not have been possible had it not been for the decades-old legacy of contestation that preceded it, one that transformed the exhibition into a social force powerful enough to spark widespread institutional and policy-level changes affecting major museums’ social, political, and economic functions for decades hence.

**1.7 “Is there any Egyptian pharaoh now more widely known, any more celebrated?”<sup>184</sup>**

The lasting impacts of the *Treasures* exhibition would be felt both in the field of museology, and in the public imaginaries of the boy-king. His treasures would represent the museum blockbuster *par excellence*, being recalled decades later as a standard metric by which visually captivating major exhibitions of all kinds would be measured. A 2019 Dior exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum, for example, would sell out all pre-bookable tickets, outdoing a record previously held at the institution by an Alexander McQueen show. Yet despite its thematic differences from *Treasures*, its success would be historically framed by the exhibitions most likely to remind audiences of the megablockbusters of the past, noting that “In box-office terms this puts it ahead of both the Mona Lisa’s three-and-half-week visit to the Met in 1963 and the legendary Tutankhamun exhibition of 1978.”<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Edward Rothenstein, “Mystique of Tut, Increasing with Age,” *New York Times*, April 23, 2010.

<sup>185</sup> Fatema Ahmed, “Runway Success,” *Apollo*, 2019, 31.

Along similar lines, *Treasures* would become a reference point for conceptualizations of the blockbuster as a blockbuster. *According to What?*, the Art Gallery of Ontario's 2008 Ai Weiwei survey, for example, would call to mind the changing public conception of the blockbuster, with the standard having been set by the AGO's 1978 stop on the *Treasures* tour. In the *Toronto Star*, arts critic Murray White would note that "Sure, touring shows still get all the hype, but the days of a year-making single show appear to be long gone."<sup>186</sup> But for Whyte, the Ai and King Tut exhibits were comparable, classic blockbusters for more than one reason: "A blockbuster needs to do a number of jobs. It sells tickets, first and foremost, but it's also intended to pull an audience outside of core gallerygoers who visit regularly. Ai did that."<sup>187</sup> First here is the material issue of ticket revenue: Whyte notes that when the AGO "hosted Tut in late 1979, drawing 750,000 visitors, an all-time record for the museum that still stands."<sup>188</sup> By comparison, for the Ai exhibit, "Going in, the AGO set as a benchmark just under 80,000 visits. Nine weeks later, the show was bumping up against 150,000, about the same as a concurrent exhibition at the gallery of undeniable global superstar David Bowie."<sup>189</sup> But ticket sales alone do not a blockbuster make: the AGO CEO Matthew Teitelbaum would note that "people are looking for unique and special experiences and, more and more, that notion revolves around the idea of narrative; people want a story."<sup>190</sup> For Whyte, this is where the comparisons end. Tut's success was a matter of "hype" generated by a

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<sup>186</sup> Murray Whyte, "Art on a Grand Scale," *Toronto Star*, August 9, 2014, E1.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

“publicity-hungry” Hoving — while on the other hand, “Ai’s work bundled up a host of anxieties, contemporary and ancient, regarding his homeland’s rush to modernization in recent years.” Beyond even David Bowie, Ai was:

Much more than an art world figure [...] He was a contemporary culture figure; he was a contemporary politics figure; he was a contemporary icon of resistance. And that created anticipation, a sense that it was coming, that it was going to be something you had to account for.<sup>191</sup>

This interweaving of art, emotion, and political resistance is, in Whyte’s view, what marks *According to What?* as “an art blockbuster more suited to the 21st century.”<sup>192</sup> However, as I have sought to argue thus far, public consumptions of Tutankhamun’s tomb *also* “bundled up a host of anxieties, contemporary and ancient,” stemming from *its* “homeland’s rush to modernization in recent years.” I do not fault Whyte for this erasure — the fact is that the predominant narrative around *Treasures* centers the media frenzy, the tacky merchandise, the mummy’s curse, and of course, the gold. But the exhibition and the accompanying media frenzy both reignited *and* recreated the claims-making conflict of the 1920s by shifting the context from the post-WW1 anti-imperial movement to that of the oil crisis. Ultimately, the Egyptian claim for the Tutankhamun find was a critical part of its public narrative’s affective draw, that which gave it its uniquely manic charge in the Western media.

Naturally, the intensity of the public interest in all things King Tut would result in countless iterative reproductions of the Tutankhamun image. Beginning from the time of the tomb’s discovery and multiplying dramatically through gift shop sales, these

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid,

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

iterations have widely proliferated in visual and material culture: from the “Tutankhamen lemons, blouses, skirts, sandals, pillows, and perfume” of the 1920s,<sup>193</sup> to the “television specials, coffee-table books, and memorabilia ranging from Tut statues to calendars to key rings” of the 1970s.<sup>194</sup>



Figure 8, left-to-right: Advertisement for the Johnston Fruit Company, California, for ‘King Tut’ Brand Lemons, 1920s. Via Tim Masters, “Tutankhamun: How ‘Tut-Mania’ Grippped the World,” *BBC News*, July 24, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-28403598>  
Steve Martin on *Saturday Night Live*, 1978. Via David Kamp, “King Tut’s Cultural Influence, From Steve Martin to *Downton Abbey*,” *Vanity Fair*, March 19, 2013. <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2013/04/king-tut-exhibit-new-york>

These everyday representations may seem inconsequential to the broader claims-making politics at work, but they reflect and reproduce the discourse’s operative mechanisms. As McAlister notes,

This gesture of the appropriation of wealth through its fake gold signifiers contained a good bit of self-irony. Nonetheless, it promised the possibility of taking back, and rather cheaply at that, some small piece of what seemed to have slipped away: that earlier sense that the “common heritage” was securely “ours.”<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Fryxell, “Tutankhamen, Egyptomania, and Temporal Enchantment in Interwar Britain,” 525.

<sup>194</sup> McAlister, “King Tut, Commodity Nationalism, and the Politics of Oil,” 125.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-140.

In one specific merchandising example, a women’s t-shirt branded with the slogan “Keep your hands off my Tuts!” can be seen to restage the question of ownership through apparently feminist terms. Accordingly, “Tut becomes the property of a spunky female who, like the women of the biblical epics, refuses to countenance unwanted advances on her (sexual) property.”<sup>196</sup> At the same time, Egyptian pop culture was defining its own approach to Pharaonicism in the postcolonial era: films such as *Gharam fi al-Karnak* (*Love in Karnak*) made extensive use of Pharaonic imagery, and, in combination with the Reda dance troupe’s stylings, would enter the popular imagination as staples of the Egyptian media landscape.<sup>197</sup>



**Figure 9, left-to-right: Vintage t-shirt, 1970s. Via Etsy user VeloriaVintage. Video cassette cover image, *Gharam fi al-Karnak* (*Love in Karnak*), Aly Reda, 1965. Via University of Michigan Language Resource Centre, Record Catalog. <https://www.lrc.lsa.umich.edu/catalog/record.php?id=58951947>**

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>197</sup> The author can anecdotally confirm that, at least, among Egyptians visiting the Temple of Hatshepsut near Luxor, lyrics from the popular song *Hatshepsut* from the film’s soundtrack are a fixture at the site.

The result of this legacy of mass reproduction is a museological context so deeply fraught and so densely semiotically packed, that with each new exhibition, “the more objects from that horde are seen, the larger Tut looms. Yet the more we know, the less imposing he becomes, and the more puzzling the contrast seems.”<sup>198</sup> But despite the apparent disjuncture between the ‘high’- and ‘low’-culture reconceptualizations of the ‘King Tut’ phenomenon, in fact, an underlying politics of claims-making and contestation remain interwoven throughout. Just as the press and museums in the 1920s and 1970s emphasized the political drama surrounding the artifacts’ ownership, the 2014

*Discovering Tutankhamun* exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum asks its audience:

Carter’s excavations in the 1920s took place during a period of political unrest in Egypt. What do you think are the challenges for archeologists working in countries where conflicts are taking place?<sup>199</sup>

The political conflict surrounding the tomb’s discovery can still be seen here as a powerful draw for museums and audiences. In this exhibition that highlights “the thrill of [the tomb’s] discovery [and] Howard Carter’s original records, drawings and photographs,” museum-going audiences are still asked to appraise contemporary heritage conflicts through Howard Carter’s perspective.<sup>200</sup> Other questions follow a similar vein, asking audiences to embody a dominant subject-position as a Western archaeologist or museum professional in relation to the objects and their contestation. Examples include: “What would it be like to be one of the team working inside the tomb?” and “What are

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<sup>198</sup> Rothenstein, “Mystique of Tut, Increasing with Age.”

<sup>199</sup> Learning Resources, Ashmolean Museum, “Discovering Tutankhamun,” 2014, <https://www.ashmolean.org/event/discovering-tutankhamun>.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

the problems in sending valuable objects on tours of museums around the world?” and “How do you think the excavation site was protected from the crowds? (note the soldier in one of the images).”<sup>201</sup>

As the exhibition’s “Key Questions,” they hinge on a view that archaeological value-extraction and preservation should supersede local issues in those (presumably foreign) “countries where conflicts are taking place”: after all, audiences are asked to consider the challenges for *archeologists* and not those for the *countries* that are thrust into conflict, in service of archaeology. Here, again, affective intensity — that sense of drama — is deployed to perform a chronotopic function, “collapsing the time span between ancient Egypt and modern Europe,”<sup>202</sup> bringing objects in to a more intimate relation to their viewer. Bridging past and present, these exhibitionary tropes produce not only a dense discursive terrain but also a materially significant claim upon tangible cultural patrimony. The objects at stake hover somewhere between ‘worthless’ and ‘priceless’, moving from the tomb to the tv screen and back again, fluctuating in semiotic and economic value as per social and political demands.

Yet perhaps, a new relation to the past is made possible by considering a different set of questions: how might the visual culture of political unrest of decades past inform strategies of counter-hegemonic resistance in the present? How do such loci of visual culture make visible new affective potentialities, and in so doing, expanding the breadth of social possibility? How do institutional forms of dissemination and control of such

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Fryxell, “Tutankhamen, Egyptomania, and Temporal Enchantment in Interwar Britain,” 539.

public images work to impose normative epistemic bounds, and what other forms might a counter-institutional re-appropriation of ‘King Tut’s’ legacy look like?

I posit that this might look a bit like Marwan Shahin’s *Anonymous Pharaoh (2Vth)*, and other works of revolutionary street art which deploy images of the boy-king as part of a Fanonian national culture, one borne of a need to “compose the sentence which expresses the heart of the people, and to become the mouthpiece of a new reality in action.”<sup>203</sup>

The street thus becomes a public square that makes visible the contestation that has been bound up with these images from the moment of their discovery; here, their value hinges less on the materiality of gold but rather, the *hurma* of the dead, both ancient and modern, and their power to catalyze social change. In contrast with the museum’s preservationist mandate, graffiti *demand*s ephemerality of which its subalternity is both cause *and* effect. On the street, ‘preservation’ might be re-imagined through a bottom-up consensus stemming from shared values antithetical to those of the museum. Here, the revolutionary moment makes visible these new social potentialities, producing counter-institutional spaces that resist value-extraction just as they enact liberation:

At the very center of Tahrir there are no walls, but citizens have created a "museum" where visitors can write messages on pieces of paper. These notes are then hung from strings to form temporary walls, a space inside which one stands and hears the flapping of paper in the breeze and realizes that all expression is possible but also, in the end, ephemeral.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 223, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20048263>.

<sup>204</sup> Samuli Schielke and Jessica Winegar, “The Writing on the Walls of Egypt,” *Middle East Report* 42, no. 265 (2012): 17, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8365.2010.00808.x>.

## Chapter 2: The Bust of Nefertiti: Inter- and intra-national contestations in the interwar period

### 2.1 The Digital Heist

In March of 2016, the *New York Times* broke a news story that would quickly capture media attention at the intersection of technology, museology, and postcolonial politics: that “two German artists walked into the Neues Museum in central Berlin in October and used a mobile device to secretly scan the 19-inch-tall bust of Queen Nefertiti,” which they then release online as a free high-resolution 3D scan.<sup>1</sup> The artist duo, Nora al-Badri and Jan Nikolai Nelles, explained that this project “confronts what they see as cultural theft and persisting colonialist notions of national ownership by making the object widely available.”<sup>2</sup> This so-called NefertitiHack was motivated by a decolonial ethos: “Nefertiti stands for millions of stolen and dead objects, which are buried in museums,” positing the 3D model’s free distribution as a form of digital restitution and resistance.

The saga continued, however, when designer and technician Cosmo Wenman argued that the artists’ accounts of how they surreptitiously obtained the scan were simply not possible; that the model was too close a match to the Neues Museum’s official 3D model, and that the Kinect scanner the artists claimed to have used is simply incapable of the requisite level of detail.<sup>3</sup> This argument was seemingly confirmed by an

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<sup>1</sup> Charly Wilder, “Swiping a Priceless Antiquity ... With a Scanner and a 3-D Printer,” *New York Times*, March 2, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Cosmo Wenman, “The Nefertiti 3D Scan Heist Is a Hoax,” *Cosmowenman.com*, 2016, <https://cosmowenman.com/2016/03/08/the-nefertiti-3d-scan-heist-is-a-hoax/>.

interview with Nelles, who asserted that he did not personally process the image data, and that the artists' unnamed collaborator may have acquired the scan through other means such as an institutional data leak.<sup>4</sup> Wenman, however, is himself a long-time practitioner of this form of what I term 'guerilla repatriation', having previously liberated scans of the Venus de Milo, iconic sections of the so-called 'Elgin marbles', and dozens more artifacts. Beyond shedding light on the apparent falsehood of al-Badri and Nelles' process, he also lambasted the institutions themselves, who own yet refuse to share the high quality 3D models of their collections.<sup>5</sup> In line with the aims of his own guerilla practice, Wenman issued the Neues Museum's parent institution — the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, henceforth SPK) — a Freedom of Information request to demand access not only to their scan of the Bust, but also, to information about how, precisely, the SPK financially benefits from the Bust itself, its scan, and from digital models of their collections more generally.<sup>6</sup> This three-year legal battle revealed the paltry revenues for which the SPK justified its secrecy — “less than 5,000 Euro, *total*, from marketing the Nefertiti scan, or any other scan for that matter” — but also, it would yield access to the Neues Museum's original Nefertiti 3D model as well.<sup>7</sup> Wenman would, naturally, make this model available for public use, but not before noticing a confounding detail: on the base of the sculpture, the museum had digitally

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<sup>4</sup> All Things 3D, “3D in Review for February 20-26, 2016: ‘Spy Scans’” (Youtube, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Wenman, “The Nefertiti 3D Scan Heist Is a Hoax.” This list of unreleased 3D models includes classical sculptures, Michelangelos, Rodins, Matisses, and a *billion* triangle scan of Donatello's *David*. By means of comparison, the 'hacked' Nefertiti model, lauded for its incredible detail, only has about two *million* triangles of resolution.

<sup>6</sup> Cosmo Wenman, “A German Museum Tried To Hide This Stunning 3D Scan of an Iconic Egyptian Artifact. Today You Can See It for the First Time,” *Reason*, November 13, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

‘stamped’ a Creative Commons licence, requiring its users to acknowledge the SPK not only as the Bust’s *owner* but as its *author*, too.

A generous interpretation of this usage of Creative Commons licensing may suggest that the SPK simply used it as a shorthand for the ‘share and share alike’ ethos by which Free and Open-Source communities typically operate, with no litigious intentions. The SPK’s legal history with the Bust, however, and the fact that the SPK is advised by the law firm WilmerHale (whose client list includes Boeing, Deutsche Bank, Monsanto, Goldman Sachs and more<sup>8</sup>) makes this kind of legal oversight unlikely. Intentions aside, in releasing the 3D asset with a Creative Commons license despite its ostensible place in the public domain (having been created 3,000 years ago, well before the invention of modern copyright law), the SPK was *functionally* mounting a legal claim to its authorship. EU copyright law explicitly states that digital versions of works in the public domain *remain* in the public domain since copyright is applied on the basis of originality, and such a scan is intentionally and specifically produced as a reproduction.<sup>9</sup> As Michael Weinberg argues, The SPK’s claim performs an important function nonetheless:

Licenses can signal intent to users even if they are not enforceable. In this case, it appears that the Neues Museum is attempting to signal that it would prefer people not use the scan for commercial purposes. [...] When a large, well-lawyered institution carves legally meaningless lawyer language into the bottom of the scan of a 3,000-year-old bust to suggest that some uses are illegitimate, it is getting dangerously close to committing copy fraud—that is, falsely claiming that you

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<sup>8</sup> A more complete listing of which can be accessed at: “Clients,” WilmerHale. Accessed 2021/03/24. Page archive: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210301124220/https://www.wilmerhale.com/en/about/clients> .

<sup>9</sup> For an explication of the relevant ruling, see: Paul Keller, “Implementing the Copyright Directive: Protecting the Public Domain with Article 14,” 2019. For further details on the relevant portions of EU copyright law, see works by Tomas Margoni such as “Digitising the Public Domain: Non Original Photographs in Comparative EU Copyright Law,” *Copyright, Property and the Social Contract: The Reconceptualisation of Copyright*, no. January (2018): 1–287, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95690-9>.

have a copyright control over a work that is in fact in the public domain. The Neues Museum could easily write a blog post making its preferences clear without pretending to have a legal right to enforce those preferences. In light of that, this feels less like an intent to signal preferences than an attempt to scare away legitimate uses with legal language.<sup>10</sup>

If the licence is understood thus, the SPK's claim for the Bust's authorship was simply a confounding legal fiction necessary for the cultural arm of the German state retain some measure of control over the Bust's image. But to this point, Weinberg argues that:

Adding these restrictions runs counter to the entire mission of museums. Museums do not hold our shared cultural heritage so that they can become gatekeepers. They hold our shared cultural heritage as stewards in order to make sure we have access to our collective history. Etching scary legal words in the bottom of a work in your collection in the hopes of scaring people away from engaging with it is the opposite of that.<sup>11</sup>

Weinberg's assessment draws an important parallel with Al-Badri and Nelles' NefertitiHack, in which the artists targeted the Bust specifically "because it is not only an ancient artifact, but also a media icon with its own social power."<sup>12</sup> The Bust of Nefertiti is the site of this conflict as it is *already* a locus of intense public fascination and desire, extending as far back as the moment of its discovery.

Copyright law is revealed here as a contemporary mechanism through which public production and consumption are regulated via license owners' monopolies. But some objects escape the boundaries within which they are confined, becoming unenforceable, uncontainable in their sheer social power; they gain such a breadth of overdeterminations that they spill beyond the bounds of liberal property law. They

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Weinberg, "The Nefertiti Bust Meets the 21st Century," *Slate*, November 15, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Weinberg.

<sup>12</sup> Wilder, "Swiping a Priceless Antiquity ... With a Scanner and a 3-D Printer."

*demand* freedom; or rather, publics demand their liberation, enacting it through grassroots, extra-institutional, extra-national means. The NefertitiHack case study is an exemplar of such action; Nora al-Badri, Jan Nikolai Nelles, and Cosmo Wenman— an Iraqi, German, and American artist, respectively — did not work merely as representatives of the interests of the nation-states from which they hail. Repatriation discourses typically center state actors, national institutions, and other metonyms of broader political bodies and narratives; media coverage will declare that *the Egyptians* are lodging a demand against *the Germans*, as though Egyptian and German citizens are univocal monoliths. The NefertitiHack case study — and in fact, the broader history of the Bust of Nefertiti — demonstrates the complexity of intra-national artifactual contestations, which often work against hegemonic national projects to carve out spaces of ideological resistance. As this chapter will argue, the Bust of Nefertiti’s complex public re-imaginings reveal the valuative underpinnings against which these repatriative campaigns function.

## **2.2 Nefertiti in the popular imagination**

As discussed in the previous chapter on Tutankhamun’s tomb, media discourses both produce and reflect the broader object-centered imaginaries in which contestation plays a significant role. But while the Egyptian government has yet been able to prevent the Bust’s removal nor to successfully pressure the German government to return it, the Egyptian claim for the Bust has marked its institutional and public conceptualizations since the time of its discovery. In the West in general and in Germany in particular, Nefertiti is regarded as an icon of timeless femininity, one “so extraordinarily important” that her retention justified a long-lasting diplomatic rift between the German and

Egyptian states.<sup>13</sup> This particular affective intensity characterizes her European reception: in a typical example, she is lauded in 1935 by critics who found that her “charm and her strength lies in the expressiveness with which she embodies all women’s souls, Madonna and Amazon, Maenad and Bachantin, i.e. all opposite types.”<sup>14</sup> Claudia Breger discusses Nefertiti’s remarkable affective hold on the German national self-image, finding that “the bust of Nefertiti seems to have gained its extraordinary symbolic value during the Weimar Republic both as a predecessor of Lady Di and as successor of an earlier ‘queen of hearts,’ the Prussian Luise.”<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, her image is used to sell everything from jewelry, makeup, and perfume, to vast swathes of kitsch.<sup>16</sup> Still “the undisputed star of the Neues Museum” and “the best known exhibit on Berlin’s Museumsinsel,” the Bust remains a lynchpin of the German museum sphere.<sup>17</sup>

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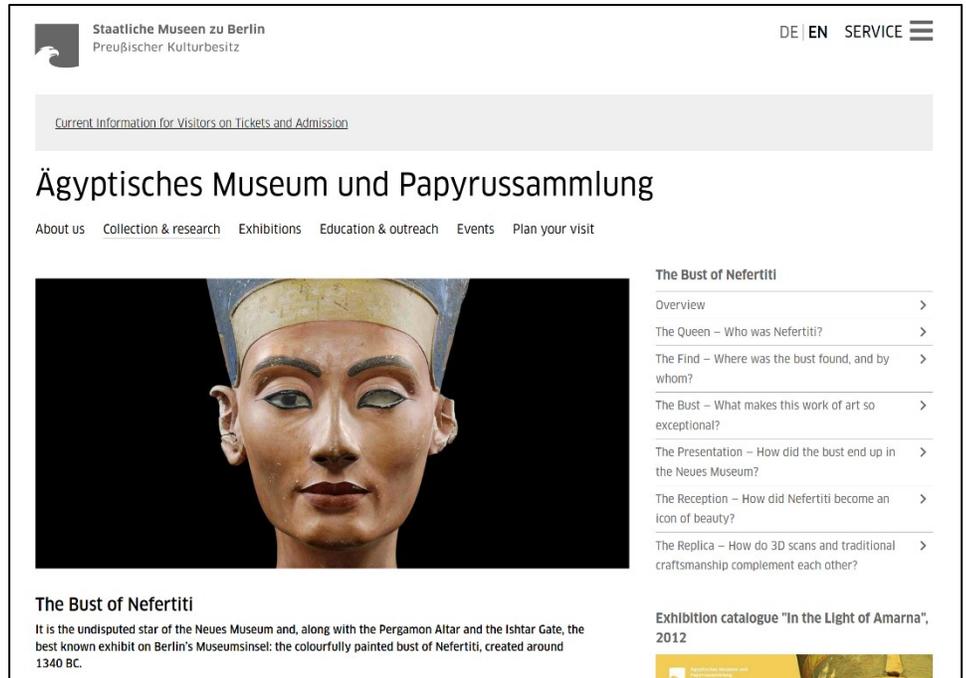
<sup>13</sup> Claudia Breger, “Imperialist Fantasy and Displaced Memory: Twentieth-Century German Egyptologies,” *New German Critique* 96, no. Fall (2005): 149.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Zimmer, “Grigol Robakidse: „Dämon Und Mythos“.,” *Jugend: Münchner Illustrierte Wochenschrift Für Kunst Und Leben*, December 10, 1935.

<sup>15</sup> Breger, “Imperialist Fantasy and Displaced Memory: Twentieth-Century German Egyptologies,” 149.

<sup>16</sup> An impressive cross-section of such merchandise is catalogued as part of CulturCooperation’s 2007 web campaign. See: CulturCooperation, “Vermarktung,” Nofretete Geht Auf Reisen, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20071009103453/http://www.nofretete-geht-auf-reisen.de/impressu.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, “Bust of Nefertiti,” Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/aegyptisches-museum-und-papyrussammlung/collection-research/bust-of-nefertiti/>.



**Figure 10, left-to-right: Nefertiti’s image looms large in front of the Neues Museum in Berlin. Image by Anton Ivanov, via Shutterstock. Screenshot of the Bust of Nefertiti page on the SPK website, in which it is declared the museum’s “undisputed star.” Via <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/aegyptisches-museum-und-papyrussammlung/collection-research/bust-of-nefertiti/>**

In Egypt, too, she holds an esteemed place: with a permanent spot on Zahi Hawass’s “Antiquities Wish List”, the legality of her removal has rankled with Egyptian publics for close to a century.<sup>18</sup> Here, she is reimagined and reappropriated as an integrally Egyptian figure: from visual art in the 1920s to a 2020 promo featuring “fugitive from the museum” (*hariba min al-mathaf*) actress Sawsan Badr, Nefertiti’s high cheekbones, full lips, and dark brows racialize her as an extraordinary yet fundamentally

<sup>18</sup> Nevine El-Aref, “Antiquities Wish List,” *Al-Ahram*, July 14, 2005.

*Egyptian* woman.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, she is less of a cultural touchstone in Egypt; this may be because her Bust has never been exhibited there. The only Egyptians to have seen the Bust in Egypt since the Eighteenth Dynasty have likely been those involved in Ludwig Borchardt's expedition. Thus, for many Egyptians, Nefertiti is but one queen among a pantheon: one exalted for her striking beauty and elegance to be sure, but perhaps with a less fervent intensity than that which can be found in Germany.

Underlying these popular reappraisals, however, is the dramatic appeal of the narrative of the Bust's discovery, and the circumstances through which it was first exhibited to the global public. Those circumstances — borne of the political specificities of colonial-era Egyptology — would shape public conceptions of the Bust, raising counter-claims and contestations that highlight the valuative logics by which museology more broadly operates. In this case, museal claims to the objects of colonial plunder are made sensible through a transformation of the object into a conceptual terrain, a dematerialized site of knowledge-production. At the same time, the artifact can be seen to accrue (social, political, economic, and semiotic) value through its contestation, which is made sensible through public anxieties around race, gender, and national identity to transform what might otherwise be understood as an inert object into a locus of overdetermined affective intensity.

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<sup>19</sup> For utilizations of Nefertiti's image in early Pharaonicist art, see: Radwan, "Between Diana and Isis: Egypt's 'Renaissance' and the Neo-Pharaonic Style (1920s – 1930s)." For coverage of the Sawsan Badr promo, see: Sarah Salah, "Sawsan Badr Tusharik Gumhuruha Bromo Al-Film Al-Qasir 'Hariba Min Al-Mathaf,'" *Youm7*, July 26, 2020.

Not coincidentally, the Bust of Nefertiti is a touchstone of repatriation discourses. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush argue that “The Egyptians were said to demand restitution, but there is no reliable evidence for such a demand.”<sup>20</sup> In fact, treatises in both German and English have been written on the subject, detailing the lengthy politico-legal history of the Egyptian claim to the Bust; Kelly Culbertson, for example, outlines the normative legal arguments surrounding the Bust’s German ownership<sup>21</sup>, and in John Merryman’s widely-cited text, *the* major reference points of the restitution debate are “the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum, the bust of Nefertiti in Berlin, and American Indian artifacts and human remains in American museums.”<sup>22</sup> German-language legal opinions on the matter abound as well, including work by Herbert Ganslmayr, Gert von Paczensky, and Reinhard Mußnug.<sup>23</sup> A broad cross-section of appraisals are represented in Merryman’s book: for Kurt Siehr, there are “very good reasons” why the Bust should be returned as per international law.<sup>24</sup> These include:

- a) The 1913 division of Spoils was incorrect insofar as the Egyptian Antiquities Authority never consciously agreed to the removal of the Bust of Nefertiti to Berlin.

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<sup>20</sup> Barkan and Bush, *Claiming the Stones, Naming the Bones: Cultural Property and the Negotiation of National and Ethnic Identity*, 45.

<sup>21</sup> Kelly Culbertson, “Contemporary Customary International Law in the Case of Nefertiti,” *Art Antiquity and Law* 17, no. 1 (2012): 27–68.

<sup>22</sup> Merryman, *Imperialism, Art, and Restitution*, I.

<sup>23</sup> See: Herbert Ganslmayr and Gert von Paczensky, *Nofretete Will Nach Hause: Europa-Schatzhaus Der “Dritten Welt”* (Munich: C. Bertelsmann, 1984); Reinhard Mußnug, *Wem Gehört Nofretete? Anm. Zu d. Dt.-Dt. Streit Um d. Ehemals Preuss. Kulturbesitz ; Vortrag Gehalten Vor d. Berliner Jurist. Ges. Am 1. Dezember 1976* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1977).

<sup>24</sup> Kurt G. Siehr, “The Beautiful One Has Come -- To Return. The Return of the Bust of Nefertiti from Berlin to Cairo.” In *Imperialism, Art, and Restitution, Imperialism, Art, and Restitution*, 116.

- b) Cultural Property *ensembles* should not be dismembered and, if dismembered, should be reunited.
- c) Archaeological finds have their “home” in the country of origin and should be preserved in that country.
- d) States that suffered under imperialism or colonialism should be supported in their efforts to collect their cultural treasures and to recover them from foreign states to which they had been removed in times of dependence.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, Stephen K. Urice argues against its return, finding that “the bust of Nefertiti [...] should remain in Germany, where it has been located and cared for since 1913.” Examining whether Egypt “has a cognizable legal claim for the return of the bust,” Urice “concludes that it does not.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Urice finds that “relevant nonlegal values and concerns argue strongly against returning the bust to Egypt,” where, he argues, it would be “isolated from the stream of creative expression to which it can contribute and from which it can derive new meaning.”<sup>27</sup> Urice cites appropriations of the image of Nefertiti by Western artists (such as Little Warsaw’s 2003 installation, discussed below) and points to their accompanying critique by Egyptian officials, finding that the Bust’s transfer to Egypt would inextricably cut it off from contemporary creative and artistic practices, which rely on “living artists” who “create new works in the context of earlier creative expressions” to “maintain the ancient tradition of creating cultural

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. See also: Stephen K. Urice, “The Beautiful One Has Come -- To Stay.” In *Imperialism, Art, and Restitution*, 136

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 165.

heritage.”<sup>28</sup> Excluding to an absolute extent all creative expressions by living Egyptians around the image of Nefertiti,<sup>29</sup> Urice defines Egypt as a land of *dead* artists, in contrast with Europe’s “living” ones. At the same time, the West is posited again as the heir of Pharaonic civilization, as it is there that creative practitioners “maintain the ancient tradition of creating cultural heritage.”<sup>30</sup> Egypt, within this framework, is a graveyard of culture, all its great achievements set firmly in its past, so that “to condemn the bust to such an existence is [...] to assure that the bust remain, forevermore, beautiful but dead.”<sup>31</sup>

Constructing his argument around legal and cultural claims, Urice implicitly acknowledges Siehr’s argument that contemporary international law must recognize the rights of formerly colonized nations. To this point, his argument posits the Bust’s repatriation — and in fact, repatriation more broadly — as a net detriment to Egypt:

The floodgates/Pandora's box theory is an appropriate concern in assessing whether the bust should remain in Berlin or be returned to Egypt. In recent years, Egypt has aggressively pursued the return even of antiquities that have been held and exhibited in public collections for decades and that raise no issue of illicit excavation or illegal export. Egypt has backed its efforts with threats of retribution for archaeologists from countries whose museums do not cooperate with Egypt's repatriation efforts. These threats are inimical to Egypt's best interests (collaborating with foreign archaeologists assists Egypt in developing its own corps of archaeologists, increases the scientifically recovered historical record, lowers the cost to Egypt of archaeological excavation in Egypt, and continues to expand the field of Egyptology internationally, etc.) and presents a simplistic (though mediagenic) approach to exceedingly complex issues.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 156.

<sup>29</sup> To name but a few examples, early iterations are discussed by Reid (2015, Chap. 10), and more contemporary examples may be located in the work of Huda Lutfi and Hossam Dirar, and in the street art of the 2011 Egyptian revolution (see, for example, <https://brooklynrail.org/2015/06/criticspage/nefertiti-in-a-gas-mask#> )

<sup>30</sup> Urice, 156.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 155-6.

This argument bears close analysis, as it reveals the epistemic threat that repatriation seemingly poses to museology, even in its ‘new’ and more socially-informed models. Urice situates his argument in terms of “Egypt’s best interests” which include “collaborating with foreign archaeologists,” while dismissing the repatriative campaign that Egyptian archaeologists have maintained for the better part of a century. At the same time, it obscures the colonial aims and outcomes of archaeology’s systematic despoliation of the nation’s cultural patrimony.<sup>33</sup> Within these terms, ‘collaboration’ belies an extractive, unilateral, and deeply paternalistic politics. Urice’s claim that such unequal ‘collaboration’ would “[assist] Egypt in developing its own corps of archaeologists” erases the contributions of the *existing* Egyptian archaeological corps central to this debate<sup>34</sup>, and in so doing, entrenching the familiar, colonial trope of Western experts versus backwards natives with a “simplistic (though mediagenic) approach.”

There *is* something to be said, however, for the perceived mediagenicity of the Egyptian repatriative approach: Urice’s own argument demonstrates that this approach may, in fact, be more impactful than the strictly juridical one. Urice and Sier’s historiographies both reference Egypt’s many legal claims for the Bust since its discovery, and Germany’s consistent dismissal of them.<sup>35</sup> The salient distinction here may be that which lies between *de jure* and *de facto* approaches to political change; that is, approaches that work, respectively, through official legal mechanisms versus those

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<sup>33</sup> A key analysis of this history is provided by Peter France, *The Rape of Egypt* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> Central to which is Zahi Hawass, cited by *Urice himself* in this very section.

<sup>35</sup> Siehr, 116-119.

that work ‘in fact,’ regardless of legal requirements.<sup>36</sup> In fact, Egypt’s deployment of *de jure* methods of legal recompense have been consistently and near-silently disregarded. In this context, such ‘mediagenic’ campaigns represent a renewed, *de facto* approach to a struggle that, as Urice acknowledges, is not simply a legal matter, but a complex social, cultural and political one as well. Strategically, this “aggressive” *de facto* approach is, objectively, *yielding results*: one supposedly extreme example of repatriation cited by Urice is one in which the remains of the Pharaoh Ramesses I were returned after having been exhibited in a “freak-show” alongside “five-legged pigs,” and the fact of Zahi Hawass’ stardom clearly contributed to the campaign’s success.<sup>37</sup>

Recognizing the effectiveness of these public-facing repatriative campaigns, it may accordingly be strategic to emphasize the *productivity* of Urice’s assessment that the Bust’s repatriation would represent a “floodgates/Pandora’s box.” Nefertiti’s outsized affectivity marks her Bust as a keystone of sorts: a load-bearing point, the dislodgement of which may mark an end to the certainty with which Western museums have held their most prized possessions. More importantly, the *way* Nefertiti might be repatriated could, by marking a pressure point in museology’s politico-legal logics, represent an important strategic asset in global grassroots decolonial praxis. Accordingly, I locate these

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<sup>36</sup> Erich Hatala Matthes further discusses this distinction as it pertains to repatriation in “Repatriation and the Radical Redistribution of Art,” *Ergo: An Open Access Journal of Philosophy* 4, no. 32 (December 2017), <https://doi.org/10.3998/ERGO.12405314.0004.032>.

<sup>37</sup> Ariel Hart, “A Journey Back to Egypt for a Mummy Thought to Be a Pharaoh,” *The New York Times*, October 25, 2003.

This ‘aggression’ with which Egypt has been pursuing the repatriation of its antiquities belies another of Urice’s claims: while he argues that modern Egyptians are utterly culturally severed from the nation’s ancient past — “The former was pagan; the latter is predominately Muslim; the former was a monarchy, the latter is a democratic state; and so on.” — the century-long commitment to the Bust’s repatriation seems to point to a definite affective connection, if not a cultural one as well. (Urice, 153.)

institutional pressure-sensitive sites not only to understand them in theory, but also, in practice; that is, to understand how *ongoing* repatriative efforts might best utilize them. When those who support museology's colonial *status quo* draw attention to their most potent sources of institutional anxiety, it becomes all the more important to rethink this anxiety as a marker of decolonial *success*, one that can be studied, understood, and reduplicated to even greater effect.

The Bust of Nefertiti is certainly the locus of such institutional anxiety. With this museological context in mind, I will outline a broad history of the century-long campaign to repatriate the Bust. Unlike many texts on this subject, I do not do so from a *de jure* perspective, but rather, a *de facto* one: rather than examining Egypt's past or potential future legal claims to the Bust, I will examine instead the multiform extra-legal strategic efforts undertaken as part of this campaign, and the effects thereof. As part of a more broadly decolonial praxis, I posit this historiographic approach as a counter-hierarchical, grassroots-centric model that resists the hegemonic paradigms entrenched by colonial legal structures. By focusing on public, mass-media discourses as an *agora* of strategic decolonial labour, new avenues of resistance are extended outwards to the present, reframing the Bust's narrative from one of long-dead claims to one of ongoing action.

## 2.3 The Beautiful One Has Come

The Bust of Nefertiti was discovered by Ludwig Borchardt as part of his 1912/1913 excavation at Tell el-Amarna. Modern Tell el-Amarna — or simply, Amarna — sits atop the ancient city of Akhetaten, which briefly became Egypt’s capital when Amenhotep IV would, in “a sharp break with the old gods,” abolish the traditional Egyptian pantheon in



**Figure 11: Akhenaten, Nefertiti and their three daughters under the Aten. Limestone relief stele. Photograph © José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro under CC BY-SA 4.0**

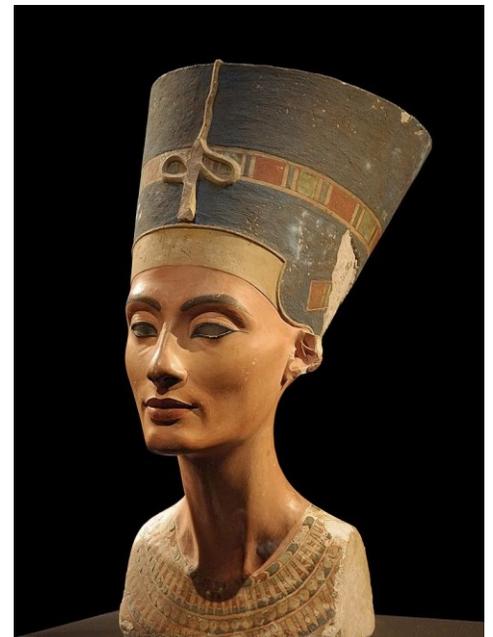
favour of the sole sun-god Aten, rename himself Akhenaten, move the capital city from Thebes, and reign amidst upheaval until his death would rapidly restore the millennia-old status quo.<sup>38</sup> This Amarna period in which Akhenaten ruled (1372-1355 BCE), would be marked by famous names: his, that of his royal wife Nefertiti, and his son, Tutankhamun.<sup>39</sup> And while the new capital’s sudden abandonment would mark of the end of Akhenaten’s monotheistic experiment, it would represent a remarkable boon for future archaeologists, leaving the city preserved, Pompeii-like, for millennia. Nefertiti, whose

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<sup>38</sup> Reid, *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from WWI to Nasser*, 42.

<sup>39</sup> For concise summations of the details of this period, see the entries on Akhenaten, Aten, and Tell el-Amarna in Donald B. Redford, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt: Volume 1*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.49-5423>.

name means “The Beautiful One Has Come” bore six daughters,<sup>40</sup> and is represented in Amarna-era artwork with remarkable realism. In another break with Egyptian artistic tradition, Nefertiti is iconographically represented as the Pharaoh’s near-equal as they tenderly play with their children. Their bodies lack the particular stylization with which Pharaohs are typically represented, too: Akhenaten is shown with a protruding belly and spindly arms, wide hips and strange facial proportions. While the Bust’s ancient history is not the focus of this chapter, it contributes to the circumstances that set it apart from other Pharaonic artifacts. Above all else, the Bust’s lifelikeness and beauty are its most consistently noted attributes. These qualities are owed to several factors: first, Amarna’s sudden abandonment kept the sculptor Thutmose’s workshop in a preserved state, allowing the buildup of sand and rubble to preserve the Bust’s delicately painted surface, and second, as Krauss argues, the “Borchardt’s characterization of the Nefertiti bust as the ‘most lifelike work of Egyptian art’ actually applies to Amarna art as a whole,” due to the era’s stylistic innovations.<sup>41</sup>



**Figure 12: The Bust of Nefertiti at the Neues Museum, Berlin. Painted plaster on limestone. Photograph © Philip Pikart under CC BY-SA 3.0.**

In part due to this idealized yet “lifelike” quality, the

Bust of Nefertiti was marked as the expedition’s centerpiece from the very moment of its

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<sup>40</sup> Meaning that Akhenaten fathered his famous heir, Tutankhamun, with a secondary wife.

<sup>41</sup> Rolf Krauss, “Nefertiti: A Drawing-Board Beauty?,” *Amarna Letters. Essays on Ancient Egypt, c. 1390 - 1310 BC* 1, no. Fall (1991): 49.

discovery.<sup>42</sup> Having been informed by his assistant of a potential find, Borchardt describes racing to the worksite to witness the excavation of the fragments of a life-sized colourful bust of Akhenaten, which had been torn off its shelf millennia past, possibly during the violent upheaval at the end of the Amarna era.<sup>43</sup> The tiny, delicate fragments made it apparent to Mohammed Ahmed es-Senussi, first foreman of Borchardt's expedition, that work in the vicinity should be undertaken with exceptional care, sifting through the rubble by hand rather than with speedier but more potentially destructive digging tools.<sup>44</sup> This is how the Bust of Nefertiti was discovered: having sat on a wooden shelf in its sculptor's workshop until the wood gave way, it landed upside-down on the flat top side of its crown, slowly covered by rubble which protected it from the elements.<sup>45</sup> With es-Senussi's Egyptian crew working slowly by hand, gradually, the base, neck, face and crown would be revealed — "Then," remarks Borchardt, "the colorful bust was lifted out and we had the most lifelike Egyptian work of art in our hands."<sup>46</sup>

Borchardt's expedition did not, however, take place in a political vacuum. In 1912, Egypt was a *de jure* province of the Ottoman empire while remaining under *de facto* British control. The Antiquities Service, however, remained under French control with Pierre Lacau at the helm. Borchardt's expedition, funded by James Simon, operated

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<sup>42</sup> Ludwig Borchardt, *Porträts Der Königin Nofret-Ete* (Leipzig: J.C Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1923), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 31: "Dann wurde die bunte Büste erst herausgehoben und wir hatten das lebensvollste ägyptische Kunstwerk in Händen." *Lebensvollste* here is translated by Krauss as 'lifelike', although it also carries connotations of 'lively' and 'vivid'.

through the purview of the German Oriental Society (*Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft*, henceforth ‘DOG’). Borchardt’s 1912/1913 expedition was well-timed: under European pressure, Egypt passed a law in 1912 outlining the *partage* process, by which expedition funders would be permitted ownership of half the total value of any discovered antiquities, after the Antiquities Service exercised its pre-emptive right of selection. As the letter of the law outlines,

Absent an agreement on amiable partition, the Antiquities Service shall take the objects it intends to keep. For the other objects, the partition into two shares of equal value shall be made by the Service, and the discoverer shall have the right to choose between the two lots.<sup>47</sup>

Lacau, however, would appoint junior inspector Gustav Lefévre to conduct the inspection from which the still-unresolved Egyptian claim to the Bust would originate. Lefévre would fail to exercise Egypt’s right to pre-emptively select finds from the dig, then, allowing the export to take place without documentation.<sup>48</sup> What records there are of this expedition’s *partage* remain strictly controlled by the German archives; however, a 2009 investigation found that “The bust lay already wrapped up in a box in a dimly lit room when [...] Gustave Lefebvre [sic] perused the various artifacts found in the excavation.”<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, knowing that “Lefévre had already agreed that plaster objects could go to Berlin,” Borchardt listed the Bust in his inventory as a “plaster bust of a princess of the royal family” when his own notes demonstrate his knowledge that the

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<sup>47</sup> “Law No. 14 of 1912 on Antiquities,” translated in Adrienne L. Fricke., “Appendix II: Egyptian Antiquities Laws,” in Merryman, *Imperialism, Art, and Restitution*, 181.

<sup>48</sup> Culbertson, “Contemporary Customary International Law in the Case of Nefertiti,” 30.

<sup>49</sup> Der Spiegel, “Did Germany Cheat to Get Bust of Nefertiti?,” *Der Spiegel*, February 10, 2009.

Bust was only plaster *coated* and not fully comprised of plaster, and that it in fact depicted a queen and not a minor princess.<sup>50</sup>

Nonetheless, the Bust would be sent to Berlin, where it would remain, little-known, in the possession of James Simon for nearly a decade. The expedition's findings would be presented in a large-scale 1913-1914 Berlin exhibition, but only one piece — the piece Borchardt himself placed atop the ranked list of findings — was not exhibited.<sup>51</sup> In fact, despite the obvious initial enthusiasm with which Borchardt evaluates it, “the bust was not publicly exhibited for more than ten years after its transport to Berlin because of an explicit policy of concealment initiated by Borchardt.”<sup>52</sup> Whether or not Borchardt can be found to have intentionally deceived the Egyptian Antiquities Service, this decade-long policy makes the Bust's political position evident: Borchardt knew that the Egyptians would want the Bust back if they knew about it, and, that this desire would likely cause trouble for the German-Egyptian diplomatic relationship.<sup>53</sup>

While Borchardt would share with Howard Carter a reputation for a somewhat prickly demeanour, unlike Carter, Borchardt had a far greater facility with the realities of international diplomacy. His repeated appeals for the Bust's concealment would prove to be prescient. In 1923, following a change in leadership at Berlin's Egyptian Museum and in the wake of a renewed Egyptomania following the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb,

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<sup>50</sup> Reid, *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from WWI to Nasser*, 110.

<sup>51</sup> Breger, “Imperialist Fantasy and Displaced Memory: Twentieth-Century German Egyptologies,” 145.

<sup>52</sup> Breger, 146.

<sup>53</sup> Reid, *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from WWI to Nasser*, 110.

the Bust was finally publicly exhibited to immediate German adulation and Egyptian uproar. Facing embarrassment in his position at the head of the Antiquities Service,

Lacau grilled his assistant, Gustave Lefebvre, who denied any clear memory of having seen the bust when making the division of finds with Borchardt in 1913. Conceding from the beginning that Lefebvre had made a mistake in allowing the export of the bust, Lacau made his case for its return to Egypt on moral rather than legal grounds. Demanding its return, Egypt refused to authorize excavations by Borchardt, the German Archaeological Institute, the DOG, or the Berlin Museum until 1929.<sup>54</sup>

The ban on German archaeological permits was only one of Egypt's diverse politico-diplomatic attempts to address the Nefertiti conflict via legal and legislative channels. Testing the German assertion of the Bust's superior aesthetic and historical value, Egypt would present an artifactual counter-offer of a life-sized statue of Ranofer, one acknowledged in German media to be "first-class";<sup>55</sup> this offer too would be quickly rejected, and official relations between the two nations remained tense until the end of the Second World War. Due to the secrecy and obfuscation of the *partage* process, Egypt had access to limited documentation upon which it could base a legal claim. The very earliest claims launched by Lefebvre on behalf of the Antiquities service would be based on "moral rather than legal grounds" inflamed by the press; a "mediagenic" strategy in Urice's terms. This rhetorical strategy, as we will see, would underlie the Bust's prevailing formation in the global public imaginary.

What would follow would be decades of Egyptian claims and German dismissals. Siehr summarizes these politico-legal efforts as follows:

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<sup>54</sup> Reid, 111.

<sup>55</sup> Die Kunstauktion, "Nofretete Und Die Gegengaben," *Die Kunstauktion* 4, no. 15 (1930): 10.

- In 1925, Egypt refused to grant any excavation permission to Germans unless Germany returned the bust of Nefertiti or, at least, agreed to arbitration on the question of return. Germany declined.
- In 1929 Egypt offered valuable antiquities in exchange for the return of Nefertiti. Germany declined in 1930.
- In 1933 German diplomats and politicians wanted to return the bust but Hitler refused to do it.
- In the 1950s Egypt inquired whether Germany might be inclined to talk about the return of the bust of Nefertiti. These efforts had no success.<sup>56</sup>

These efforts continue in a largely similar vein until the present day (for a more detailed chronology of the claims and responses, see **Appendix 1**). Thus, the Bust remains in Berlin, the star of the Neues Museum, becoming the site of focused public attention and political contestation such that this portrait of an Egyptian queen would be transformed into an icon of German national identity, her Egyptianness subsumed by acclamations of her ‘universal’ beauty, which are conflated, in turn, with Whiteness.

To trace the public effects of the Egyptian claim on the Bust, I will examine mass-media and scholarly writing on Nefertiti and other Egyptological subjects, beginning at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here, I use both broader textual analyses and close readings of representative sources. In line with James Dobson’s call to critically reconsider

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<sup>56</sup> Siehr, “The Beautiful One Has Come — To Return.” In Merryman, *Imperialism, Art, and Restitution*, 116.

archival boundaries and their (un)containment of affect through digital methods,<sup>57</sup> I use both broad and close media analyses of ‘Nefertiti’ as represented in mass media. Using digitized historical press archives, I first present a broad historiography of these representations at work. I then engage in a form of Geertzian thick description of specific media exemplars as “anecdotes” in Dobson’s sense: that is, as “historicizing objects” which “[provide] access to history without resorting to the grand narratives,” narrowing the contextual focus to analytically productive instances as opposed to datasets as a whole.<sup>58</sup> By looking to editorial cartoons as a site of ambivalence between text, context, and subtext, I unpack the intertwined social, political, economic, and affective responses among European publics to contestation around the Bust of Nefertiti.

To do this, I deploy a diverse range lexical and archival tools: my English-language analytical corpora include the Google Books Standard corpus (155 billion words), as well as the ProQuest digitized historical newspaper collection. All sources in this latter meta-database begin in the mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup> century, and include: the *Globe and Mail*, the *Guardian*, the *Observer*, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, and the *Toronto Star*. German-language scholarly and media sources derive from the Heidelberg University database of historic literature, which includes newspapers as well as publications on art, Egyptology, archaeology, and other subjects in the humanities extending as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century. All French and

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<sup>57</sup> James Dobson, “Digital Historicism and the Historicity of Digital Texts” in *Critical Digital Humanities* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), chap. 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

Arabic translation has been performed by me, and all German texts have been translated by a translation agency.

#### 2.4 Nefertiti, the cover model

The Bust's public transformation can be witnessed in both German- and English-language press. Here, we see a constellation of meanings coming to be deeply intertwined with the Egyptian claim for the Bust's ownership. The fact that this political contestation emerges at roughly the same time that the Bust enters the public sphere means that those two domains of meaning are closely tied: there is little public knowledge of the Bust from *before* the Egyptian claim against which the tone of the media coverage from *after* the claim can be compared. This is not to say that Egyptologists were previously unaware of Nefertiti as a historical figure: while she is discussed in fairly specialized Egyptological texts as early as 1875, her name does not appear in mass-media periodicals until the 1923 exhibition.

As may be expected, these earlier publications discuss Nefertiti as a fairly typical historical figure, while mass-media communications convert her into a contemporary icon. For example, she is named as Akhenaten's spouse by Paul Pierret in 1875, discussed as part of Akhenaten's reign by Flinders Petrie in 1894, and the nominative structure of her royal title is discussed extensively in an 1894 issue of the French Egyptological journal, *Le Muséon*.<sup>59</sup> In these contexts, her relevance is primarily in

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<sup>59</sup> Paul Pierret, *Vocabulaire Hiéroglyphique, Comprenant Les Mots de La Langue, Les Noms Géographiques, Divins, Royaux et Historiques* (Paris: A. Franck, 1875), 265; William Matthew Flinders Petrie, *A History of Egypt During the XVIIth and XVIIIth Dynasties Vol. 2, A History of Egypt* (C. Scribner's Sons, 1896), 182–83; Eugène Lefébure, "Sur Les Noms Royaux de La Dix-Huitieme Dynastie Egyptienne," *Le Muséon* 13 (1894): 484–500.

historical relation to her royal husband, or as a case study of some specific point in Ancient Egyptian philology: that is to say, as an unexceptional figure of Egyptological interest, but no further. But by 1923 when the Bust is first exhibited, the tone of the media coverage shifts dramatically: now, “it could only be compared with the finest work of any country or any period whatsoever.”<sup>60</sup>

Claudia Breger suggests that part of the German rationale for the Bust’s eventual exhibition after a decade of concealment was due to “a national wave of irritation with the British “goldminer’s luck” in their recent discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, “with the bust of Nefertiti the Berlin public was presented with its own treasure — which, by virtue of its colors, was just as lustrous as King Tut’s gold, but, unlike this gold, was not in Cairo.”<sup>62</sup> Breger’s argument reveals a valuative logic that is shared between Nefertiti and Tutankhamun: both were re-made into icons by Egypt’s emphatic claim for their ownership, but Nefertiti, unlike Tut, could be upheld as a unique site of value in Germany because she was *here* — within our grasp — and he was not. Their shared contestations forge deep valuative links between them, shaped by a politics of acquisitive desire: for Tutankhamun it is the desire to *get*, for Nefertiti it is the desire to *keep*. Yet their diverging material circumstances contribute to marked differences in their respective representational regimes. While both Tutankhamun and Nefertiti were subject to frenzied debate around their ownership, Nefertiti’s continuous yet contested place in

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<sup>60</sup> Manchester Guardian, “ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ART: NEFERTITI PORTRAITS IN THE ‘M.G. WEEKLY.’,” *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, February 9, 1923.

<sup>61</sup> Breger, “Imperialist Fantasy and Displaced Memory: Twentieth-Century German Egyptologies,” 150.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

Berlin has resulted in claims to her *identity* as much as her visage: while national and colonial narratives contribute to both respective discourses, Nefertiti is upheld as a metonym for the German nation and state to an extent not mirrored by the ‘King Tut’ phenomenon.

If, as Breger argues, Germany aimed to confer upon Nefertiti some portion of the attention and adulation that came with the Tutankhamun media frenzy, then this was certainly successful. In these early media appraisals, the Bust of Nefertiti is immediately linked with Carter’s ongoing excavation in the Valley of the Kings: indeed, the very first English-language publication of the Bust’s photographs clarifies that even though Nefertiti was the “wife of Akhenaten, the ‘heretic king’ who preceded Tutankhamun,” in fact, the Bust’s discovery “was made during the excavations at Tel El Amarna in 1912,” and “has nothing to do with the present excavations in connection with Tutankhamun’s tomb.”<sup>63</sup> Even in 1923, these discoveries’ chronotopic function was self-reflexively evident to the world press: “Never before,” one article points out as it tracks Carter’s excavation, “has the civilised world followed, or been able as now to follow, step by step, immediately upon the heels of discovery.”<sup>64</sup> This same capacity to close the span of space-time is located as well in Nefertiti:

What could link us more surely to the actuality of the past than such delicate and expressive portraiture as that of Queen Nefertiti, whose bust was discovered

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<sup>63</sup> Manchester Guardian, “THE HEAD OF QUEEN NEFERTITI: A REMARKABLE PIECE OF SCULPTURE FROM ANCIENT EGYPT,” *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, February 7, 1923. Confusingly, this publication describes Akhenaten as Tutankhamun’s father-in-law rather than his father, which is in fact true but only by dint of Tutankhamun’s marriage to his half-sister, as would have been traditional.

<sup>64</sup> Observer, “THE CONQUEST OF THE PAST: HISTORY AND THE PHARAOH’S TOMB,” *The Observer (1901- 2003)*, February 18, 1923. For more on the ‘time travel’ function of Egyptian antiquities in the West, see: Fryxell, “Tutankhamen, Egyptomania, and Temporal Enchantment in Interwar Britain.”t

before the war? This was a real person, not veiled by the conventions of sacred art [...] It would be no surprise to meet these lineaments anywhere on the Southern coasts of Europe, and they set moving a speculation whether they do not speak of the contact gained with the Kingdom of Egypt by the forerunners of the Greeks.<sup>65</sup>

As we see here, Nefertiti's physiognomy is directly related to the Bust's value. Nefertiti *looks like she belongs here*, in the West; this article would be far from the only one to assert that "it would be no surprise to meet" her or her ancestors in Europe. Thus, we see the Bust's ambiguous racialization as part of its chronotopic function: serving as a 'missing link' of sorts, Nefertiti's visage serves not only as part of the justification for her *own* place in Europe, but that of *Egyptological collections as a whole*, which are re-asserted as a foundational part of Western civilization via Greece.

In the years immediately after the Bust's first exhibition, global media attention would largely speak to its beauty or to its links with Tutankhamun. But by 1927, Egypt would make public its claim for the Bust, shifting English-language headlines to focus on the question of the Bust's ownership. Newspapers between 1927 and 1930 would be dominated by such headlines as: "BAN ON A GERMAN EGYPTOLOGIST: Egyptian demand for return of an antiquity," "EGYPTIAN DISPUTE WITH GERMANY: Queen's head in a Berlin museum," and "EGYPT MAY RANSOM NEFERTITI: Offers to Berlin museum."<sup>66</sup> In 1927, this media coverage outlines the controversy as it appeared at the time: that "Herr Burchardt [sic] found this head at Tel-el-Amarna and, it is alleged,

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., "The Conquest of the Past."

<sup>66</sup> Manchester Guardian, "BAN ON A GERMAN EGYPTOLOGIST: EGYPTIAN DEMAND FOR RETURN OF AN ANTIQUITY," *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, January 22, 1927; Manchester Guardian, "EGYPTIAN DISPUTE WITH GERMANY: QUEEN'S HEAD IN A BERLIN MUSEUM," *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, December 8, 1927; Observer, "EGYPT MAY RANSOM NEFERTITI: OFFERS TO BERLIN MUSEUM," *The Observer (1901-2003)*, April 6, 1930.

removed it to Germany unknown to the authorities.”<sup>67</sup> Alongside a large, photographic insert, the *Manchester Guardian* reminds its readers: “This famous bust of the Egyptian princess Nefertiti reached the Berlin Museum, where it still is, just about time of the outbreak of the war in 1914”, and that Egypt would not “allow the archaeologist responsible for its removal to renew his work in Egypt unless It is returned to Egypt from Berlin.”<sup>68</sup>

By 1929, the situation had advanced somewhat beyond the German-Egyptian diplomatic fracture, due in part to the Egyptian King Fuad’s attempts to carve out a diplomatic solution. Here, the *New York Times* describes the “machination and intrigue,” ancient and modern, surrounding Nefertiti, asserting that “in all cases of a weak or uncertain reign, especially in the Orient, it is well to look about for the strongest court official.”<sup>69</sup> While this claim most specifically addresses Amarna court politics, the axiomatic nature of the statement interpellates a timeless Oriental subject, one used to more fully *grasp* the ongoing political impasse. But to this point, the article is ambivalent: on the one hand, “The German Oriental Society, then operating under an agreement with the Egyptian Government to share the findings equally,” is argued to have “acquired the bust, [where] it remains in undisputed possession until the World War.”<sup>70</sup> At the same time, Egyptian desire — posited *as* desire rather than legal means or politic — is nonetheless at the forefront: Nefertiti is poetically described as a “Queen

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<sup>67</sup> Manchester Guardian, “BAN ON A GERMAN EGYPTOLOGIST: EGYPTIAN DEMAND FOR RETURN OF AN ANTIQUITY.”

<sup>68</sup> Manchester Guardian, “NEFERTITI,” *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, January 25, 1927.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

who ruled men's hearts in the dawn of history [...] and whose return to her native land is the desire of her people's rulers thousands of years after her beauty turned to dust."<sup>71</sup> Here, the subject of the Queen's beauty gains a new tenor that will be amplified as the 1930s draw on: not only is Bust's racialization a critical signifier of racial anxieties more broadly, but also, the Bust's gender posits it decidedly as an *object of desire*.

By 1930, the crisis seemed all but resolved: the *Manchester Guardian*, boasting that "The beautiful features of the painted bust [...] have become widely known since photographs of them were published in our own pages some years ago," informs its readers that:

The dispute between the Egyptian and the German authorities over the possession of this new Helen has also received a good deal of publicity from time to time, and though there has never been any danger that another siege of Troy would be provoked by this classical beauty, it is satisfactory to learn that there are now strong prospects of an amicable settlement between Cairo and Berlin [...] All things considered, the inhabitants of this part of Europe can hardly complain if it becomes necessary to go to Cairo to inspect the original work, which, by illustration and reproduction, has become within the space of twenty years a world-famous example of ancient art. By the "formula" as outlined Nefertiti will go back to Egypt and Berlin will receive in exchange some life-size, full-length figures from the Pyramid period and other valuable museum pieces from the Egyptian excavations [...] All things considered, the inhabitants of this part of Europe can hardly complain if it becomes necessary to go to Cairo to inspect the original work, which, by illustration and reproduction, has become within the space of twenty years a world-famous example of ancient art.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Manchester Guardian, "A Return of Nefertiti," *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, April 7, 1930.

While this prediction that Egypt would regain the Bust is echoed in the headlines of 1930 with a great deal of certainty,<sup>73</sup> the *Manchester Guardian*'s coverage stands out here for reiterating an image found primarily in German-language publications: that of Nefertiti as a modern Helen of Troy, one whose classical, eternal beauty is such as to drive nations to war. Unusually for the time, however, this article destabilizes the colonial cartography by which the West is regarded as the civilizational center in which 'world heritage' must naturally reside: instead, the Bust's fame means that there is no shortage of reproductions for *the West* to study, and its historical importance is great enough that "the inhabitants of this part of Europe can hardly complain if it becomes necessary to go to Cairo to inspect the original work." This repatriative model reverses Peers and Brown's much more recent concept of "visual repatriation," in which 'source communities' are provided reproductions, and Western museums? retain originals.<sup>74</sup> Published in 1930, the tenets and temporalities by which the 'New Museology' orients itself are challenged herein: while, naturally, more recent contestations have continued to drive forward museological change, the origins of that contestation and its accompanying reforms are seen here to be far older than is commonly assumed.

Nonetheless, to public surprise and media delight, by 1934 Germany would abruptly end negotiations with Egypt due to then-Chancellor Adolph Hitler's personal intervention. A widely disseminated Reuters wire reads:

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<sup>73</sup> See for example: Observer, "EGYPT MAY RANSOM NEFERTITI: OFFERS TO BERLIN MUSEUM"; New York Times, "TO REGAIN NEFERTITI BUST. EGYPT WILL EXCHANGE OBJECTS OF ANTIQUITY WITH GERMANY.," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, May 13, 1930.

<sup>74</sup> Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203987834>.

“I am in love with Nefertiti,” declared Chancellor Hitler through the German Minister to Egypt. Herr Hitler thus shuts the door temporarily, if not permanently, in the face of efforts which are still being made by the Egyptian Government to regain the bust of Nefertiti, the ancient queen of Egypt, which is still in Berlin.<sup>75</sup>

This form of object-desire — characterized here in Hitler’s case as fetishistic excess — is a consistent part of the Bust’s inscription as locus of intense affective identification, projection, and socio-political transference. Here again, Nefertiti is cast as Helen in a geopolitical psychodrama of power and desire: she is an “ancient queen” whose nation seeks to “regain” her from a rapacious adversary. While the legality of the object’s acquisition is typically the central point of debate on institutional responses to calls for repatriation, Nefertiti is a useful case study in demonstrating the role of desire *per se*, as part of what might in Žižekian terms be described as a ‘libidinal economy’.<sup>76</sup> This formulation draws attention to one discursive function of the Bust’s beauty; that is, to transform it into a site of heightened political *jouissance*, of excess pleasure that spills out beyond rationality and into pain when its desirability exceeds the limits of its own purported function.<sup>77</sup> After agreeing to the value of the objects that Egypt was willing to offer in exchange — as well as the resumption of excavation privileges — Hitler “is said to have intervened personally, suggesting that he intended to have the bust installed in its own, majestic room (with a cupola) in the planned new Egyptian museum.”<sup>78</sup> The

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<sup>75</sup> See: Reuters, “GERMANY TO KEEP THE NEFERTITI BUST,” *The Observer (1901- 2003)*, April 1, 1934; Reuters, ““IN LOVE WITH NEFERTITI,”” *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, March 31, 1934.

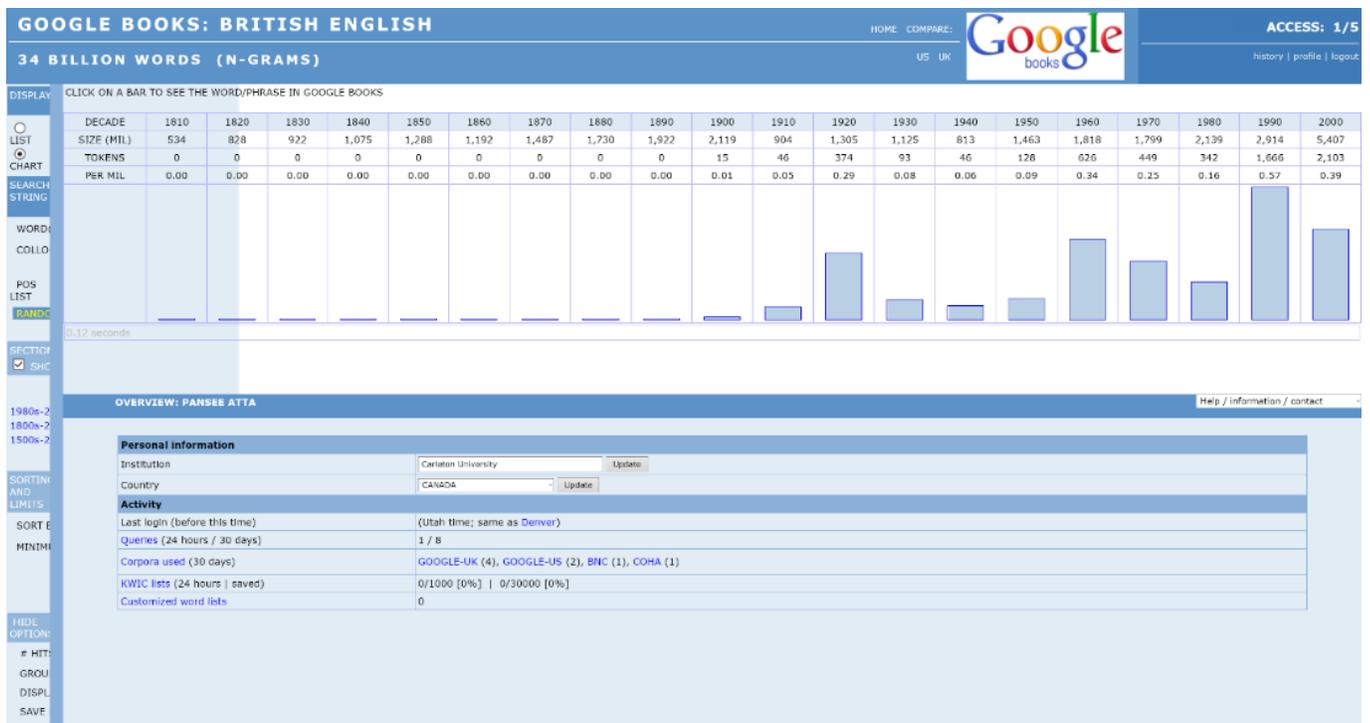
<sup>76</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Can One Exit from The Capitalist Discourse Without Becoming a Saint?,” *Crisis & Critique* 3, no. 3 (2016): 481–99.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 489.

<sup>78</sup> Breger, “Imperialist Fantasy and Displaced Memory: Twentieth-Century German Egyptologies,” 155.

German state here undercuts its own claim to legal, scientific rationality by basing *its own* claim, just as Egypt does, on desire. This alone is not a negation of the German argument to its right to the Bust; rather, it is an observation that desire, as reflected and re-inscribed through public discourses, contributes to artifactual value-production more broadly.

This sudden about-face would mark a critical juncture in the Bust's fate. While the decade between its initial exhibition and Hitler's intervention in 1934 saw the escalation of an all but successful campaign for the Bust's retrieval, this absolute, final refusal dramatically changed the tone of all subsequent responses from Berlin, which are either absent or similarly final (see **Appendix 1**). The campaign would be interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War and the anti-British organizing in Egypt leading up to the revolution of 1952, but would continue thereafter, albeit in a halting and largely unilateral fashion. Media coverage would diminish accordingly until the renewed Egyptomania of the late 1960s (see **Figure 13**). Thus, this period marks the pivotal, foundational stage through which Western public understandings of Nefertiti would be formed, unmatched in volume until the explosive media growth heralded by the Internet in the 1990s.

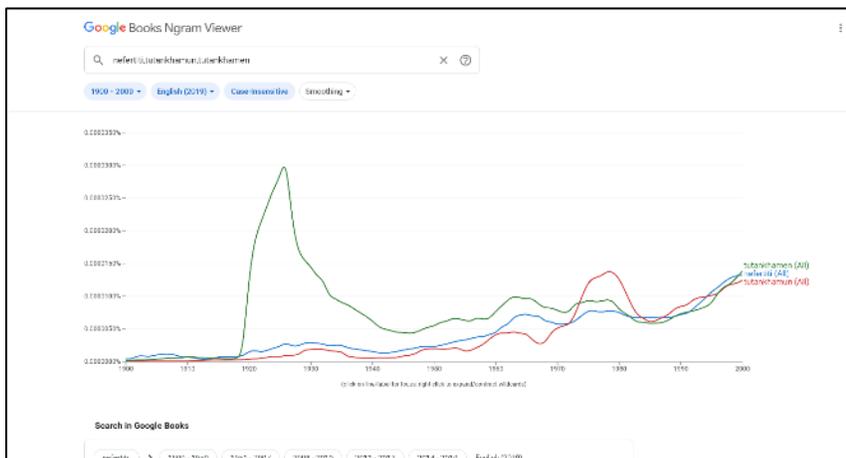


**Figure 13: An N-gram search for the term “Nefertiti” over time through the Google Books- British English corpus.**

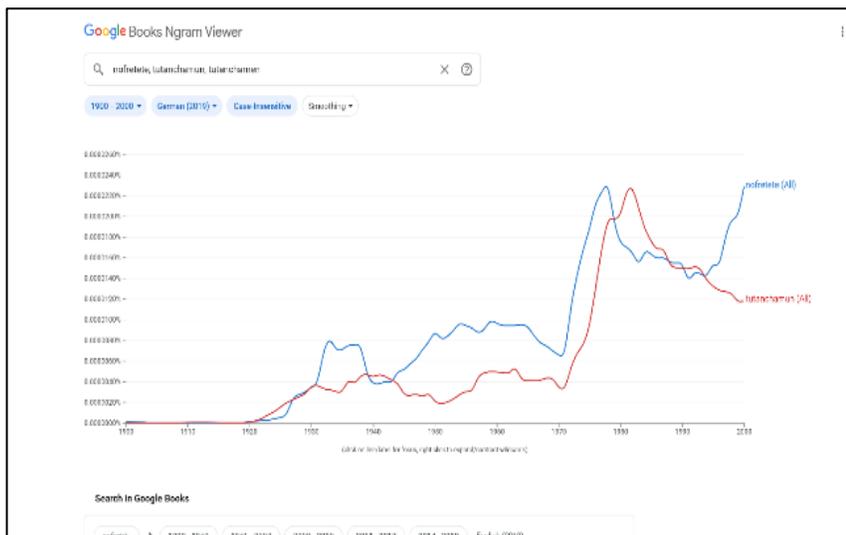
## 2.5 Die ägyptische Helena

Although the English-speaking world’s Egyptomania would primarily focus on Tutankhamun, in Germany, Nefertiti would be the star of the show (see **Figure 14 & 15** for comparison.) There is a stark difference between the English- and German-language media receptions of Nefertiti: English-language interest in Nefertiti would hardly be affected by the initial Egyptian claim and never truly rival interest in Tutankhamun until the mid-1980s. By contrast, in Germany the initial claim would mark a dramatic turning point in Nefertiti’s fame, resulting in an immediate uptick which would follow the ebb and flow of subsequent claims, but would generally remain significantly above that of Tutankhamun. Even the *Treasures of Tutankhamun* exhibition of the 1970s would only provide the boy-king with a few years of relatively higher interest, as the accompanying

Egyptomania would actually renew interest in Nefertiti as well. These differences in media focus may relate to their respective national contexts: in Germany, the Egyptian claim would much more seriously challenge national self-conceptions at a time when they were already deeply fraught, marking the Bust as a site of intense, focused desire. But while prevalent nationalist narratives would staunchly defend the Bust’s German captivity, resistant counter-narratives can be found in Weimar- to Nazi-era satirical media, revealing resistances to the German state project and nascent allyships with global anti-colonial and anti-imperial movements.



**Figure 14: Comparative n-gram searches for “Nefertiti,” “Tutankhamen,” and “Tutankhamun” over time, through the Google Books English corpus. In English-language media, Nefertiti does not surpass the Tutankhamun until after the end of the King Tut craze in the mid-1980s.**



**Figure 15: Comparative n-gram searches in the Google Books German corpus for the most common German-language spellings of Nefertiti and Tutankhamun. The effect of the Egyptian claim on Nefertiti’s popularity is clear here: while her fame trails that of the boy-king in the early years following the Bust’s first exhibition, by the late 1920s her fame gains a substantial lead which only diminishes after the controversy has waned. Nonetheless, her fame supersedes that of Tutankhamun until the present day, apart from a peak marking the 1980–1981 Tutankhamun exhibition in West Germany.**

These nuances are most readily accessed in the political art and poetry of German satirical media, whose humour and irony reveals its ideological underpinnings more transparently than news media which purports to objectivity. Ann Taylor Allen's analysis of satirical periodicals such as *Kladderadatsch*, *Jugend*, and *Simplicissimus* reveals a wide scope of ideological orientations: Allen finds that "*Kladderadatsch* and *Simplicissimus*, as the most conspicuous examples of the old and the new styles of satirical journalism respectively, commended themselves both by their intrinsic artistic and literary interest and by the diversity of their content."<sup>79</sup> Other periodicals expressed a more limited scope: *Der Wahre Jacob*, served an expressly socialist mandate, for example, and other journals such as *Die Kunstauktion*, *Der Kunstwart*, and *Der Cicerone* retained a more specific cultural or art-historical focus, and accordingly, reached a smaller, more niche audience. To trace the Bust of Nefertiti's climb to its particular site of German notoriety, this section surveys the Bust's representations from both hegemonic nationalist perspectives as well as more critical anti-imperial viewpoints. These representations — starting with the Bust's first exhibition in 1923 to the peak of the media frenzy around the Egyptian claim in the early 1930s — chart the origins through which the Bust would be understood thereafter in the public eye. This period is especially significant since anti-nationalist or otherwise critical media representations *following* the Nazi Party's 1933 seizure of power become scarce, and so these earlier publications represent an important corpus of mainstream critique.

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<sup>79</sup> Ann Taylor Allen, *Satire and Society in Wilhelmine Germany* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), xii.

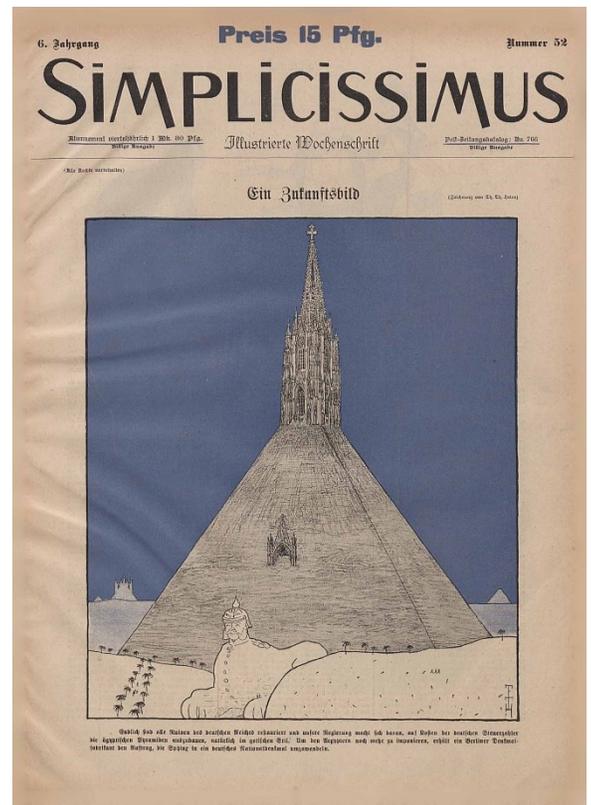
In this decade following the Bust's first exhibition, Nefertiti and the Egyptian claim are frequent subjects of media interest. But the utilization of Egyptological imagery as part of broader German national projects did not begin with the Bust's discovery or its exhibition: as early as 1902, a *Simplicissimus* cover image shows a Gothic spire mounted atop a pyramid, behind a Sphinx with a moustachioed face evoking Kaiser Wilhelm II (see **Figure 16**).

Below, a caption reads:

Finally all the ruins of the German empire have been refined and our government is starting to build the Egyptian pyramids at the expense of German taxpayers, naturally, in Gothic style! In order to impress the Egyptians even more, a Berlin monument manufacturer is commissioned to convert the Sphinx into a German national monument.<sup>80</sup>

Here, the contemporary German-Egyptian diplomatic relationship is made manifest through

these 'renovated' ruins. The relationship imagined here is a bilateral one: "the ruins of the German empire" become pyramids, and the Sphinx becomes a German emperor. This imagined exchange is seen to work not only on a material level but an affective one too, as this German expression of appreciation for the Pharaonic past is intended to "impress



**Figure 16: A Vision of the Future, *Simplicissimus* 6/52, March 17, 1902.**

<sup>80</sup> *Simplicissimus*, "A Vision of the Future," *Simplicissimus*, March 17, 1902. This image itself might be understood along a historical lineage of political appropriations of pyramidal imagery in Europe, such as the tomb of the paetor Gaius Cestius. See Peter Lacovara, "Pyramids and Obelisks Beyond Egypt," *Aegyptiaca. Journal of the History of Reception of Ancient Egypt* 2 (2018): 7–17.

the Egyptians even more.” Ultimately, we see origins here of a rhetorical strategy that leverages the affective appeal of this imagery as part of a claims-making mechanism, one that in this case, satirically posits the Kaiser as a kind of biblical Pharaoh who builds and collects grand ruins for the sake of exorbitant hubris.

Through such representations, Pharaonic imagery and its affective associations come to be embedded in the German political press. Along similar lines, a 1924 *Kladderadatsch* cartoon shows a beautifully decorated sarcophagus labelled the “Peace of Versailles,” opened to reveal a horrifying fanged mummy labelled “Secret contracts” (Figure 17).<sup>81</sup> Utilizing the shock factor of archaeological discovery to highlight German anxieties about Versailles, this image demonstrates some of the ways in which Egyptological imagery permeated German media *before* the Nefertiti affair became part of contemporary political discourse.

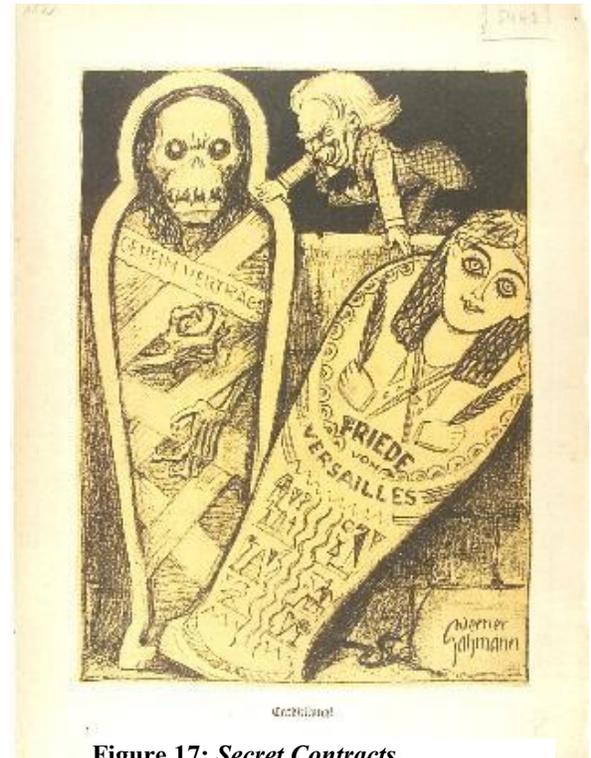


Figure 17: *Secret Contracts*, *Kladderadatsch* 77/1924.

These media representations would increase exponentially, however, when the Egyptian government formalized its first claim for the Bust in 1927. In this year, *Kladderadatsch* would publish a political cartoon depicting a brown-skinned, Fez-wearing, fanged Anubis dragging a bound, fair-skinned Nefertiti by her throat who raises her arms in protest (Figure 18). Below her, White men in suits fan and protect the queen,

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<sup>81</sup> Werner Gahmann, “Enthüllung!,” *Kladderadatsch* 77 (1924): 112.

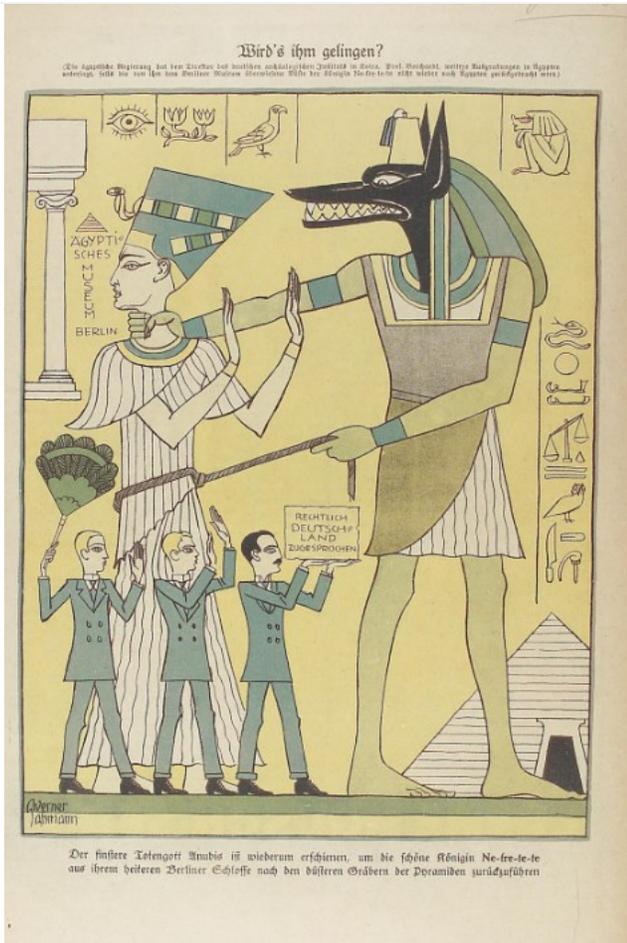
presenting the Anubis figure with an offering labelled “Legally awarded to Germany.” Above, and a caption explains that “The Egyptian government has forbidden the director of the German archaeological institute in Cairo, Prof. Borchardt, from carrying out further excavations in Egypt if the bust of Queen Nefertiti, which he had transferred to the Berlin Museum, is not returned to Egypt.”<sup>82</sup> Even at this early stage, the German backlash against the Egyptian claim functions by provoking a visceral response to fears of miscegenation: the imagery strikingly echoes that of another 1927 *Kladderadatsch* cartoon (**Figure 19**) depicting the kidnapping of White women by dark-skinned Moroccan men, who similarly bare their teeth and use ropes ensnare their light-skinned prey in an implicit prelude to sexual violence.<sup>83</sup> In the scope of these media representations of Nefertiti, the personified figure of Egypt is racially ambivalent, shifting between antiblack and Orientalizing stereotypes as required by the rhetorical strategy at hand. Here, tropes of Black sexual aggression are deployed to stoke public resentment against the Egyptian campaign for the Bust’s repatriation. This violent public strategy works along the lines put forth by Jared Sexton, who finds that colour lines are more rigidly policed in light of Black resistance, so that facing the “prospect of increased black freedom, that prospect is declared a violent threat to the white body politic [...] and that threat of violence is infused with fears of a consuming, violating black sexuality.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Werner Gahmann, “Wird’s Ihm Gelingen?,” *Kladderadatsch* 80 (1927): 96.

<sup>83</sup> Werner Gahmann, “Französische ‘Zivilisation’ Trägt Früchte.,” *Kladderadatsch* 80 (1927): 735.

<sup>84</sup> Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.), 12, <https://doi.org/10.5406/jamerethnhist.30.4.0117>.



**Figure 18: Will He Succeed? Kladderadatsch 80/1927.**



**Figure 19: French "Civilization" Bears Fruit, Kladderadatsch 80/1927.**

In these examples, ownership is asserted through heteropatriarchal dominance and fears of miscegenation. Egyptian desire for the Bust takes on an implication of sexualized violence; here, the 'rape of Egypt' is committed by Egyptians.<sup>85</sup> This allusion to Egyptological 'despoilment' is not limited to the German context; monographs by Peter

<sup>85</sup> France, *The Rape of Egypt*; Brian M. Fagan, *The Rape of the Nile: Tomb Robbers, Tourists and Archaeologists in Egypt*, *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 144 (Oxford: Perseus Press, 1978), <https://doi.org/10.2307/634678>.

France and Brian Fagan follow this allusion even in their title, but there, as is more typically the case, the victim-perpetrator dynamic is reversed. The love of Egypt is what compels Europe to save it from the Egyptians; the Egyptian is constructed as “the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him [...] disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality,” such that “all values, in fact, are irrevocably poisoned and diseased as soon as they are allowed in contact with the colonized race.”<sup>86</sup> Fanon’s description is salient here in that it illustrates the imbrication between value(s) and beauty via the construction of the colonial subject, a construction which moralizes aesthetic and its appreciation. The unruly Egyptian subject, beyond the disciplinary reach of those institutionally-sanctioned affects and values, becomes a threat to the body politic as represented by the White(ned) female body. In this case, the prioritization of the Bust’s beauty as noted by Borchardt at the time of its discovery becomes more than just an archaeological point on the state of its preservation: it becomes a *schema* through which a political framework is made sensible, wherein Nefertiti becomes *Die ägyptische Helena*,<sup>87</sup> a woman with a face capable of launching a modern fleet of ships. A 1928 *Kladderadatsch* poem urges the queen,

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<sup>86</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 41–42.

<sup>87</sup> Richard Strauss’ 1928 opera bears this name, with a title is clearly influenced by the ongoing Nefertiti craze.

Nefertiti, Nefertiti,  
Don't be a ghostly toad  
Do not bring us into war trouble,  
That we don't have to fight about you  
Even at odds with Egypt,  
While we already in Europe  
Are wrapped in hatred and anger.<sup>88</sup>

While more strait-laced, news-oriented publications would vocally insist on the strength of the German claim and the folly of Egypt's actions,<sup>89</sup> here in the satirical *Kladderadatsch*, a suppressed anxiety is made evident: is Germany — already on tense terms with much of Europe in the wake of Versailles — too weak to stand up to political pressure on multiple fronts? Nefertiti, here again in the role of Helen, is implored to spare her host nation from another extended and futile military engagement in what re-emerges as a consistent site of anxiety.

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<sup>88</sup> Reino., "Nefretete," *Kladderadatsch* 81 (1928): 27.

<sup>89</sup> Andre Blum, "Die Büste Der Königin Nofretete," *Die Kunstauktion* 3, no. 25 (1929): 10.

Germany is cast again as the doomed city of Troy in a 1930 cartoon illustrating the tale of “Nefertiti, or, the Fate of the Beautiful Egyptian Helena” (Figure 20).<sup>90</sup> Following the arc of the Greek myth, this narrative is told by *Kladderadatsch* in six parts. In part 1, “The Abduction,” Borchartd cradles the Bust aboard a Nile *felucca* (small sailboat), bringing her to Berlin where, in part 2, she is the subject of adulation. Panels 3 and 4 show the conflict that follows: Egyptian cannons fire headlines decrying “Robbers! Thieves! Kidnappers” to a sardonic German retort: “Kiss my ass. Liars. Come get her.” Part 5 shows the “Entry of the Trojan exchange horse through the Brandenburg Gate,” which takes the form of the statue of Ranofar, the Egyptian government’s artifactual counter-offer, represented instead with a

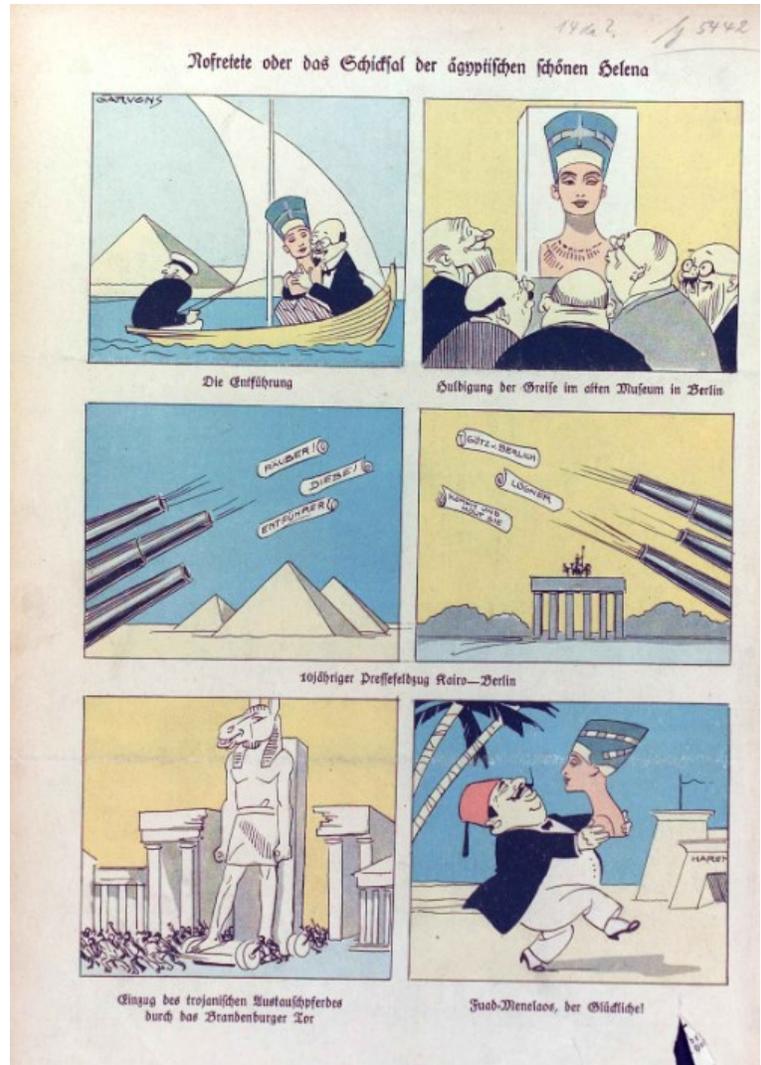


Figure 20: *Nefertiti, or, the Fate of the Beautiful Egyptian Helena*, *Kladderadatsch* 83/130.

<sup>90</sup> Oskar Garvens, “Nofretete Oder Das Schicksal Der Ägyptischen Schönen Helena,” *Kladderadatsch* 83 (1930): 272.

donkey's head. Finally, the anticipated outcome: "Fuad-Menelaus, the lucky one!" gleefully makes off with the Bust back to his harem.

King Fuad reappears — not as Menelaus, Helen's husband, but as a harem-hoarding Oriental aggressor against which Nefertiti's German residency is constructed as an act of defiance against British imperial might (**Figure 21**):

On a visit to Berlin in 1929, King Fuad implores Nefertiti: "Come back to Egypt with me, beautiful Nefertiti, and I'll make you my favorite wife in the harem!"

Nefertiti: "Out of the question, my little Fuad, I'm better off in Berlin in a glass case than in Cairo as make-believe queen by England's grace and favor!"<sup>91</sup>



Figure 21: *That suits you so well!* Kladderadatsch 82/1929.

Two rhetorical strategies can be seen to function here: German ownership of the Bust is posited first as a means of protecting femininity from Oriental sexual aggression, and second as an interruption of British imperial power. The former theme deploys the "phantasm of the harem," as Malek Alloula posits it: a metaphor for the *inaccessibility* of the Orientalized female body from the consuming gaze of the (European) male subject, whose desire is sublated into the imagined sexual excesses of the Oriental domestic

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<sup>91</sup> Oskar Garvens, "Det Kennte Dir so Passen!," *Kladderadatsch* 82 (1929): 441. Translation by Donald Malcolm Reid (2015, p. 113).

space.<sup>92</sup> In this phantasmic space, “the imprisonment of women becomes the equivalent of sexual frustration,”<sup>93</sup> a frustration that, in this case, affectively bolsters the cartoons’ broader point about *ownership of, access to, and desire for* the Bust.

The latter theme alludes to popular German national sentiments with regards to the British empire. This theme emerges through these texts’ interrogation of Germany’s geopolitical power —both in relation to the other, more dominant European colonial powers, and their respective colonies. German desire for the Bust can be seen to emerge from its *denial*; not just from Egyptians, but from the British too. In what is regarded as a “widespread mood,” for example, an art handler’s letter in the journal *Die Kunstauktion* urges the Prussian Prime Minister to reconsider the proposed exchange. He entreaties:

Allow me, dear Prime Minister, to demonstrate to you the opinion of British scholars about the value of the bust by the following fact. The British Museum in London has set up a plaster cast of the bust of Nefertiti (made in the state workshops of the Berlin Museums) in the midst of its immense wealth of original works of ancient Egyptian art from all times.<sup>94</sup>

For Sinz, the plaster Bust demonstrates British desire for the original, which they are currently denied by the German monopoly on its reproduction. Just as in the SPK’s current legal position concerning the Bust’s 3D model, the German state here controls both the museum and the workshop through which reproductions are produced, thus monopolizing not just the object but its image too. Here again, the Bust’s value is asserted through its denial, as the German state gains social and political capital via the

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<sup>92</sup> Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem, The Colonial Harem*, vol. 21 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), chap. 3, <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.cttth83.13>.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>94</sup> Max Sinz, “Für Die Nofretete,” *Die Kunstauktion* 4, no. 23 (1930): 12.

monopoly through which the British museum officials must navigate for access to this trophy. Thus, for Sinz, the plaster cast in the British Museum and its accompanying adulatory inscription serve to substantiate the original Bust's trophy-value:

The fact that the British Museum placed a plaster cast of this bust among its original works would be enough in itself. From the inscription, however, it can still be seen how this particular work is appreciated by British experts. I hope that the judgment of foreign museum officials, which certainly in this case can claim the greatest impartiality, will contribute to the preservation of this gem of Egyptian art, *which is the envy of the whole world*, for the German people. [emphasis added].<sup>95</sup>

Important here is Egypt's status as a British colony. One implicit fear in **Figure 21** is that returning the Bust to *Egypt* would amount to offering it up to *Britain*. The German-British animosity of the interwar years is made evident through extensive use of Egyptological imagery: for example, a 1922 cartoon (**Figure 22**) mocks the British loss of power in Egypt with the image of a triumphant brown-skinned trumpeter "marching on the Nile," while a fearful John Bull crouches behind the Pyramids.<sup>96</sup> A 1924 cartoon (**Figure 23**) titled "Tit for tat!" shows stereotypically dark-skinned Egyptians gleefully carry away the ornate coffin of Edward VI to the shock of British onlookers, with the caption: "As a substitute for the many Egyptian kings that the English dragged to London, the Egyptians want to bring the dead English kings to Cairo."<sup>97</sup> A 1929 cartoon (**Figure 24**) shows British Prime Minister Macdonald grudgingly kissing "Frau Sphinx"

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<sup>95</sup> Sinz.

<sup>96</sup> Arthur Johnson, "Umsturz in Agypten," *Kladderadatsch* 75 (1922): 37.

<sup>97</sup> Werner Gahmann, "Wie Du Mir, so Ich Dir!," *Kladderadatsch* 77 (1924): 156.

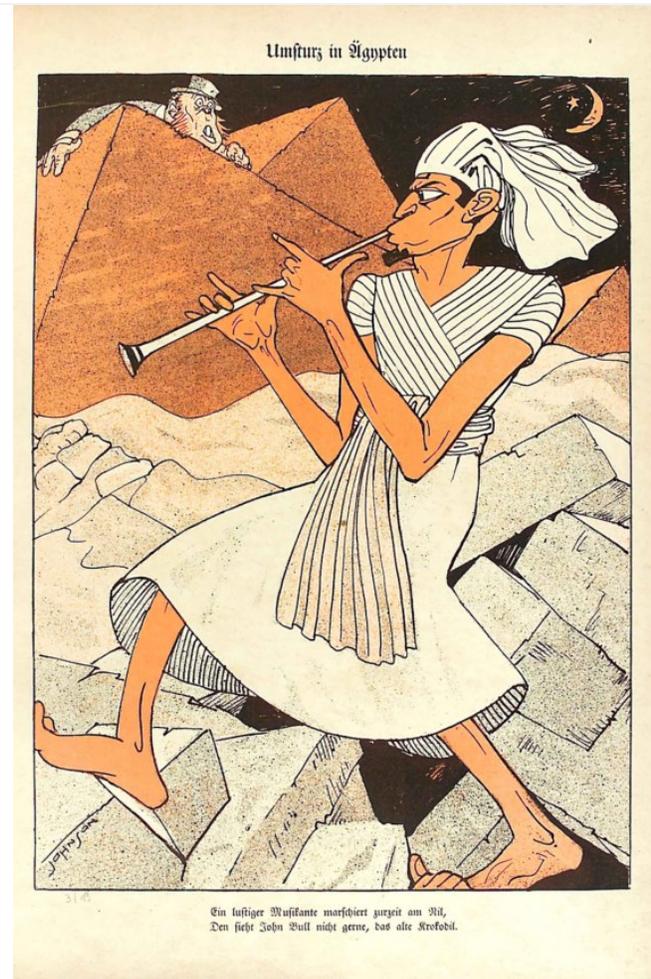


Figure 22: *Overthrow in Egypt*, Kladderadatsch 75/1922.

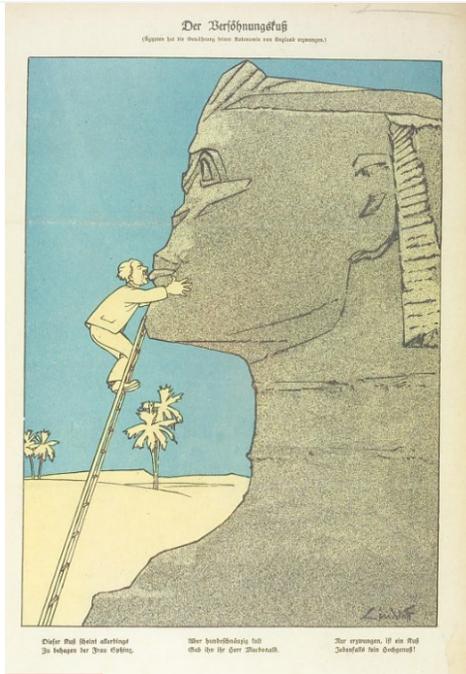


Figure 23: *Tit for Tat!* Kladderadatsch 77/1924.

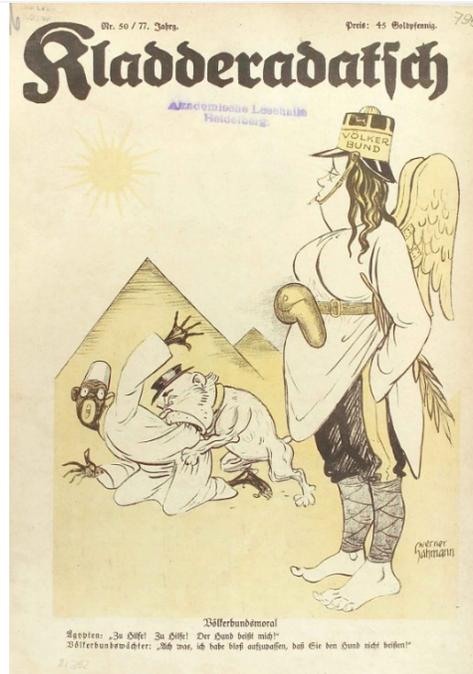
on her “cold dog-nose” as a gesture of reconciliation following a tumultuous year of Egyptian unrest.<sup>98</sup> In these examples, *Kladderadatsch*’s satirical edge is turned against the British imperial project, albeit with an antipathy towards Egyptians themselves, who are seen to kowtow before the edifice of British might (Figure 25). As Allen notes, *Kladderadatsch*’s populism is ideologically heterogenous; while there may not have been

<sup>98</sup> Hans Lindloff, “Der Versöhnungsskuss,” *Kladderadatsch* 82 (1929): 548.

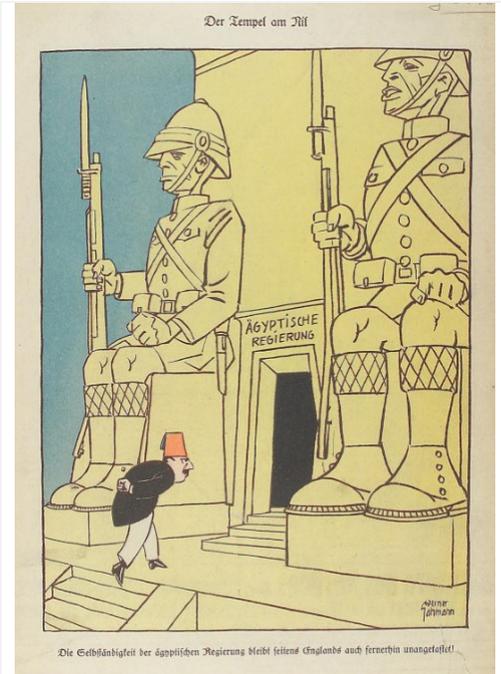
a consensus regarding the legitimacy of the Egyptian claim for the Bust (or to Pharaonic antiquities more broadly), anti-British sentiment spanned the breath of the political spectrum. Britain, in this case, is the fanged aggressor: a John Bull-dog bites a caricatured black-skinned Egyptian on the rear, while the League of Nations looks on, unmoved, ready to blow a whistle “[so] that you don’t bite the dog!”<sup>99</sup>



**Figure 24: *The Kiss of Reconciliation*, Kladderadatsch 82/1929.**



**Figure 25: *The League of Nations’ Morals*, Kladderadatsch 77/1924.**



**Figure 26: *The Temple on the Nile*, Kladderadatsch, 81/1928.**

These images speak to the complexity of Weimar Germany’s geopolitical relation to Egypt; insofar as the Egyptian anti-imperial project resisted British might, German popular media gleefully interpreted it as the righteous work of an oppressed people — albeit a crude and servile one — against tyranny. But to the extent that this project

<sup>99</sup> Werner Gahmann, “Volkersbundmoral,” *Kladderadatsch* 77 (1924): 795.

threatened *German* national interests, it is Egypt that then becomes a fanged beast, a domain of Oriental despots, sex-crazed and bent on rapine. Yet both sets of representations draw on Orientalizing and deeply racist imagery — as in the Black figures represented with exaggerated, pale mouths — such as that which was deployed in Wilhelmine-era imperial expansions through Africa.<sup>100</sup>

These nuances reflect not only the ideological complexities of Weimar Germany, but also the social utility of artifactual discourses in entrenching racial and colonial relations, as well as the politico-economic mechanisms through which the Bust gained its museal value. The subject of the Bust's value is exceptionally concrete from the moment of its discovery, when, as part of the *partage* process, Borchardt was obliged to declare and hierarchalize the value of his expedition's discoveries so that they could be equally divided between him and the Egyptian government. From this moment, the subject of the Bust's value would remain at the forefront of its contestation: Borchardt's misrepresentation of the material from which the Bust is sculpted bore tangible, material implications for the *partage*, as would the declaration that it represented a figure of lesser nobility than the Queen herself. The stakes of these facts were not merely academic: they bore direct relation to subject of the Bust's ownership, and the consequent material rights to its image and access. As the Egyptian campaign for its return wore on, the subject of its value would re-emerge in German media in relation to the artifactual counter-offer of the life-sized painted statue of Ranofer. Here, again, an ambivalence is reasserted such as

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<sup>100</sup> The imperializing function of these representations are examined in depth in David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2011).

that which appears in relation to the question of the Bust's ownership. A 1930 article in *Die Kunstauktion* grapples extensively with these questions:

On the one hand, the charming head of Nefertiti is one of the most valued pieces of the Amarna finds. On the other hand, it is only one of the numerous Berlin monuments of the same style. And, moreover, the most important aspect was that one could receive sculptures as a counter-offer, which are artistically just as important, if not to a greater extent, and with which one could fill painfully felt gaps in the Berlin museum. Most notable here was the statue of Ranofer [...] It certainly remains an open question whether the Amarna finds forfeit their main piece with the passing on of Nefertiti's head, and thus lose their center. On the other hand, it is quite understandable that one would not want to let the opportunity pass by to acquire works of such superior artistic power and museum rarity. Dr. James Simon also finally agreed to the exchange, which, by the way, has not yet been officially confirmed, but there seems to be no doubt that it will take place. No matter how highly the interesting episode of the art of Amenhotep IV is valued, the secular significance of Egyptian art is based on works of such monumental character as Berlin is now to receive.<sup>101</sup>

Beyond the notable certainty with which the publication expresses its (ultimately mistaken) belief that the exchange would take place, what is striking here is the nuanced assessment of the Bust's value in relation to the offered "counter-gifts". The statue of Ranofer is described as "first-class," as "the high posture of the figure, representing a high official, represents in an excellent way the imposing grandeur of ancient Egyptian art." The material itself is here again under consideration: the proposed exchange is seen to be "all the more convenient for the Berlin Museum, as [the statue] has no stucco of any significance from that early period."<sup>102</sup> The ambivalence of this assessment is surprising given that it takes place in a climate in which German public affection for the Bust was

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<sup>101</sup> Die Kunstauktion, "Nofretete Und Die Gegengaben."

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

“almost unparalleled for all museum pieces,”<sup>103</sup> making any show of public support of the exchange a deeply fraught proposition within the rising tide of Nazi power.

*Kladderadatsch*, for example, would lament the proposed exchange in poetic form:

Little Nefertiti, little Nefertiti,  
Pretty "Pyramid-Gretchen",  
Whom thou shalt soon drive away;  
You wife of Amenhotep -  
Alas, only the "dumb"  
Believe that you will stay with us!  
[...]  
Whether our diplomats  
Know, or, only guess  
What value you hold, *ma chère*?  
I have a hunch that instead of you  
Probably a copy of Serapis,  
Or even an ox, Apis,  
Will come here!<sup>104</sup>

Here, the politico-legal exigencies of the proposed exchange are dismissed as the shallow concerns of “diplomats,” incapable of grasping the *true* extent to which the Bust, addressed here directly and affectionately, is *valued* by its German public. Similarly, an article in *Die Kunstwart* dismisses the proposed exchange as “simply [...] the aftermath of the chivalric methods of this war,” a process which, through its pecuniary obsession with taxonomizing and quantifying the world’s cultural treasures, destroys something of beauty in the process.<sup>105</sup> The article ostensibly positions its critique of the exchange in opposition to this process, since “Artworks of great importance cannot be weighed

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<sup>103</sup> Walther Unus, “Nofretete,” *Der Kunstwart* 43, no. 2 (1930): 198.

<sup>104</sup> Oskar Garvens, “Nofretete?,” *Kladderadatsch* 83 (1930): 346.

<sup>105</sup> Unus, “Nofretete.”

against each other at all: not even two works of the same master endure such - brutality.”<sup>106</sup> Here, the interwar political context is especially salient. The author notes:

Versailles being twelve years ago, all sorts of painful things are at play. Even if we assume that the ban on excavations in Egypt issued against Germany would now probably finally fall even if this exchange does not come about, the extremely embarrassing press campaign of the Egyptians against us remains: That we have stolen this head. In other very large museums in Europe there are countless masterpieces that have been demonstrably looted or stolen, without such labeling embarrassing the nations concerned in the least, while we are not used to it and are particularly sensitive after a lost war.<sup>107</sup>

Evident here is one of the major stakes of the Egyptian campaign for the Bust’s return; that is, German embarrassment in the face of a global community against whom it had so recently lost a major war. The anxiety that the Egyptian campaign was embarrassing to Germany at large is a consistently repeated refrain in editorials both for and against the exchange: a 1930 editorial in *Der Cicerone*, for example, asks “How is the Nefertiti comedy to be solved without damaging the German reputation?”<sup>108</sup> and another in *Die Kunstauktion* bemoans the damage to the national reputation caused by ever having considered the offer from the start.<sup>109</sup>

In this sense, it becomes evident that political value is derived from the Bust’s retention *or* its return, so long as either option puts a final end to the embarrassing Egyptian press campaign. And so when, for example, a different article in *Die Kunstauktion* states that even though “the Egyptian Museum in Berlin would have been

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> S., “Nofretete,” *Der Cicerone: Halbmonatsschrift Für Die Interessen Des Kunstforschers & Sammlers* 22 (1930): 404.

<sup>109</sup> Walter Bondy, “Die Königin Spricht,” *Die Kunstauktion* 4, no. 29 (July 20, 1930): 7.

substantially enriched by the counter-gifts,” that nonetheless, “this gain must not be bought by the loss of a work of art of equally high rank and with such a present-day effect as that emanating from Nefertiti,”<sup>110</sup> we are not witnessing a mere instance of cognitive dissonance. Underlying this statement is embarrassment at the loss of Germany’s geopolitical position with respect to its European neighbors, exacerbated by an extended campaign from a *colony* comparing *the German state* to a mere ‘robber’ (see again: **Figure 20**). Thus, a work of potentially greater artistic and historical value should not be acquired if doing so would mean acceding a political loss to Egypt.

Ultimately, the political balance would tilt in favour of the German national outcry rather than the Egyptian one. Following an intervention by Hitler and a final refusal by the Prussian Minister of Culture, *Die Kunstauktion* would rejoice in the media’s role in effecting this decision:

Undoubtedly, the open letter of Prof. H. Schmitz to the Prussian Prime Minister, in which he raised a lively objection against the quasi-already-decided exchange — and which we published in No. 19 of "Kunstauktion" — also contributed to this decision. This is new proof that it is never too late to take a public stand on a matter that seems to have already been decided, and to speak up unswervingly for a cause that has been recognized as the right one.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Die Kunstauktion, “Nofretete Bleibt in Berlin,” *Die Kunstauktion* 4, no. 26 (1930): 9.

<sup>111</sup> Die Kunstauktion.

The Bust of Nefertiti is thus transformed by this bilateral contestation into a site of heightened political and affective intensity, a rallying point around which both Egyptian and German publics hinged their national self-image in a time of rapidly-changing political structure. The *value* of the Bust, broadly defined, is hereafter inextricably tied to its contestation. This may quantitatively be seen in the frequency of references to Nefertiti in years following the Bust's discovery (see: **Figure 14**), but nowhere is its qualitative meaning more evident than in a 1930 cartoon, published initially by *Kladderadatsch* and republished in *The Manchester Guardian* (**Figure 27**). The English-language paper describes it as follows:

Nefertiti is to remain in Berlin. In the upper picture “*Kladderadatsch*” shows the crowd in front of her when she was supposed to be going, and in the lower the treatment the cartoonist hopes she will not now receive.<sup>112</sup>

Alone in a cobwebbed room, Nefertiti, having been definitively secured for the German state, has lost her star status. Though her valuation in the public eye may have



**Figure 27: Berliner “Enthusiasm” for Art, Kladderadatsch 83/1930.**

<sup>112</sup> Oskar Garvens, “Editorial Cartoon 1 -- No Title,” *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959), August 5, 1930.

appreciated, she is now no longer appreciated. Oskar Garvens, with misanthropy typical of his style, depicts more than just a fickle Berlin public: moreover, he makes an incisive observation on the role played by the Egyptian repatriation campaign in transforming the Bust into a popular icon, and on the function of contestation as a determinant of artifactual value more generally.

## 2.6 Value and contestation

Claudia Breger observes that the Bust of Nefertiti's status as "as a truly singular masterpiece of ('world') 'art' [...] is the effect of a process of symbolic appropriation closely connected to the fights over the entitlement to the material artwork."<sup>113</sup> As we have seen above, the museum is one such site where this appropriative process takes place, elevating an object's status — or eroding it, as Garvens predicts. From Breger's perspective as a member of the Berlin museum-going public such as those represented by Garvens, she describes the contemporary experience of viewing the Bust at the Neues Museum:

In Charlottenburg, the room next to the bust documented its modern history. Between metonymies of a "heroic" archaeological event, including the open diary of Borchardt, the visitor was told that the Egyptian authorities were not interested in the bust when it was presented to them at the end of the dig. *Only after this work of art had become famous was their desire to own it aroused* [emphasis added].<sup>114</sup>

Working rhetorically, again, at the intersection between desire and control, this final statement is of critical significance here. As I have aimed to demonstrate thus far, not

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<sup>113</sup> Breger, "Imperialist Fantasy and Displaced Memory: Twentieth-Century German Egyptologies," 147–48.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

only is the Neues Museum's claim that the Egyptian desire for the Bust followed its rise to fame demonstrably ahistorical, in practical terms, it is nearly the opposite of the actual chain of events. While the Egyptian repatriation campaign began after the Bust's first public exhibition after a decade of secrecy, in fact it was German desire for the Bust that closely tracked the Egyptian repatriation campaign, which catalyzed a great deal of the media attention and political contestation within and beyond Germany. As Garvens' pessimistic cartoon demonstrates, as early as 1930 it was already evident that the Bust's status — its apparently objective artistic, historical, artifactual valuation — was deeply bound up in the German public imagination with its ongoing contestation. Its value was, even by that early point, already deeply predicated on the notoriety it had acquired through the public debates around the Egyptian claim. The contestation *preceded* and thus underlay its valuation.

I return here again to the Neues Museum's assertion, observed by Breger, that it was “only after [the Bust] had become famous was [the Egyptian] desire to own it aroused.”<sup>115</sup> Setting aside the statement's historical veracity, I will instead momentarily examine its *productivity*. That is; even if it *were* true, what *good* does it do the museum to make this assertion? What *work* does this statement do, and *how* does it do it? Moreover, how does the role of contestation here allow us to understand museological value-production more generally?

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<sup>115</sup> Breger, “Imperialist Fantasy and Displaced Memory: Twentieth-Century German Egyptologies,” 148.

I argue that the Museum's statement can be seen here to function as a politico-legal argument to the Bust's ownership, based on a claim to the Bust's *authorship*. Its underlying logic is as follows:

- 1) Egyptians did not desire the Bust until it was famous; they also did not make it famous.
- 2) Making an artifact famous is *ipso facto* grounds for its ownership because it is not just any kind of commonplace object; it is an *artifact*, whose *telos* or central defining purpose is to be *made known* — to be collected, preserved, exhibited, and studied in public spheres capable of its appreciation.
- 3) The museum is critical to the fulfillment of the artifact's ontological function not only because it performs the necessary work of collection, preservation, exhibition, and study, but also because it *produces* the very publics required for its appreciation.
- 4) Regardless of where the Bust was made or where it was found, its most salient value is that of its fame; that is, the process through which it is *made known*.
- 5) An undiscovered — *un-known* — artifact is of no value, having never been made known. It becomes value-able via the extractive museal processes of collection and exhibition that transform it into a knowable, *visible* object.
- 6) Thus, it is not its sculptor but its archaeologist who began the process through which it came to acquire value as an artifact *per se*, and it is the museum that culminates it.

- 7) The Bust's particular fame indicates that the Berlin Museum<sup>116</sup> was particularly successful at making it *well-known*, and is, accordingly, a particularly strong claimant.

Insofar as knowability is regarded as the primary function of an artifact, then *any* claim by *any* institution of knowledge-production will be regarded as being better than one not founded upon an extractive episteme; this is another way of saying that *the museum is* (regarded as) *its own justification*.

This ontological argument works through a multifaceted understanding of where the *value* of the thing lies. As Graeber points out, 'value' can be broadly theorized as a threefold construction, pertaining to morality (as in "what is good, proper or desirable in human life"), economics (as in financial value), and linguistics (as in "meaningful difference" in the semiotic sense).<sup>117</sup> For Graeber, these diverse understandings of 'value' can be synthesised as "the way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves [...] normally, as reflected in one or another socially recognized form."<sup>118</sup> Crucially, however, "it is not the forms themselves that are the source of value,"<sup>119</sup> but rather, it is the productive *actions* through which objects become sites of social relation that they come to represent value of some form or another. Accordingly, the salient issue here is not simply one in which differing epistemic systems disagree about their respective modes of value-production; rather, it is the imposition of a hierarchy of both

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<sup>116</sup> Re-named the Neues Museum (or the 'New Museum') following its post-WW2 renovations.

<sup>117</sup> David Graeber, *Toward An Anthropological Theory of Value* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780312299064>.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

action and affect, wherein the labour of European academics is made visible at the expense of that of Egyptians past and present, and public receptions, as demonstrated in the previous figure, are gauged for their capacity to produce the forms of visible appreciation conducive to museal ends. Visitorship and preservationism become, as Bennett argues, part of the museum's disciplinary function, which substantiates *and* produces public space as "a means of celebrating the citizenry's co-presence to and with itself."<sup>120</sup> As Henry, Otto, and Wood note, these overdeterminations of artifactual value within the museum are not unusual, since "artifacts, and the social interactions that establish their properties, escape easy categorization in terms of the well-established dichotomies between gifts and commodities, individual and public ownership."<sup>121</sup> Accordingly, they regard "the artifact's value and materiality as historical process," one in which the artifact is brought together through a Heideggerian process of becoming, through which it becomes not just an object but "a complex phenomenon, consisting of a collected material thing, its specific documentation, and the stories and theories that give it a history."<sup>122</sup> Thus, "it is in the very tension or contradiction between flow and fixity, thing and object, that value is created;"<sup>123</sup> importantly though, "such objectifications are not politically neutral and, therefore, artifacts are never merely amalgams of equivalent

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<sup>120</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York, London: Routledge, 1995), 51.

<sup>121</sup> Rosita Henry, Ton Otto, and Michael Wood, "Ethnographic Artifacts and Value Transformations," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3, no. 2 (2013): 35.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

values [...] It is the artifact's treatment as a thing in often conflicting real life interactions that determines and actualizes its values at any one moment."<sup>124</sup>

Yet while Henry, Otto, and Wood's analysis of the ways in which artifacts accrue prestige, monetary, and barter value explicitly disregards *exhibition* as a salient feature of artifactual value, other formulations, such as those by Walter Benjamin, place greater emphasis on the productive power of visibility and display. Benjamin introduces opposing concepts of cult value and exhibition value, where cult value, paramount before the age of mechanical reproduction, is derived from the auratic *distance* between audience and object, which in turn requires its uniqueness, its secrecy, its concealment.<sup>125</sup> Exhibition value, by contrast, closes that distance and maximizes reproduction, ubiquity, visibility. Byung-Chul Han expands on this formulation, finding that "exhibition value, which signals the fulfillment of capitalism, cannot be derived from the Marxian opposition between use value and exchange value," in that it is constructed as an ends unto itself, beyond the typical economic rationales for object valuations.<sup>126</sup> Exchange value "exists thanks only to the attention it produces,"<sup>127</sup> and to the extent that attention is constructed as value-able, it is moralized as a productive extraction of artifactual value.

In this case, the Museum lays a legal, material claim to the Bust based on the assertion of the relative importance of the different forms labour involved in the accretion of its many values; that is, on the basis that making the Bust *famous* for appreciative

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>125</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

<sup>126</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford Briefs, 2015), 9.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

publics is more important than actually *making* it. Fame in this sense becomes not only a measure of its degree but its kind, recognizing only its value-able forms. This argument may be characterized as a ‘cultural mercantilism’ of sorts; just as in the capitalist-colonial economic mode through which “countries accrue wealth by importing primarily raw materials and exporting manufactured goods, thus increasing the added value sold,” here, the tangible, material object of study is treated as raw material to be transformed by European institutions of knowledge-production into a finished good, one *knowable* within the extractive confines of colonial epistemes.<sup>128</sup>

Thus, by dismissing the Egyptian claim on the basis that Egyptians did not make the Bust famous, the Museum asserts a legal claim to the Bust’s ownership by making a different kind of claim — not just an *epistemic* one, but an *ontological* one too as to *what kind of thing* the Bust fundamentally *is*. If it is basically an *object*, then the traditional mechanisms of property law apply, including those of its contentious *partage* process and the basic sovereignty of the Egyptian state over that which is found within its borders. But if it is more like a *conceptual terrain*, ripe for colonial extraction , then its genesis is not in the labour of some long-dead sculptor, but rather, in the work of European cultural institutions and those historians who *conceived* it as a thing of particular import, transforming it into a popular symbol. It is in this sense that the Museum posits itself as the Bust’s *author*; a title that, in specific legal terms, may just as often be tied to the “fixation” or “best exploitation” of a work than to its actual, material creation.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 3–4.

<sup>129</sup> See: Jane C. Ginsburg, “The Concept of Authorship in Comparative Copyright Law,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.368481>; Laura A. Heymann, “A Tale of ( At Least ) Two

In fact, this precise legal framework is cited by the German state to maintain its monopoly on the Bust's image: specifically, the SPK denied Cosmo Wenman his 2016 request for the Bust's 3D model — despite its apparent place in the public domain, and despite the inapplicability of EU copyright law to mere reproductions — on the basis of the argument that “The scan is a creation that was produced similarly to a photograph and as such is subject to Article 72 Section 1 UrhG (Copyright Law). Thereby, the scan is protected under the relevant application of the regulations valid for photographs.”<sup>130</sup> Despite the Bust's age and the Museum's public mandate, it maintains its claim on the basis of having ‘fixed’ the image to the intangible, freely reproducible form of the 3D model.

Jane Ginsburg and Laura Heymann examine this complex relationship between copyright, authorship, and ownership of artistic works through the Western legal tradition, and how it has contributed to this counter-intuitive though commonplace understanding. As Heymann observes,

Given that copyright law has at its core not this ephemeral "author" but rather the "work of authorship" — fixed and therefore commodifiable — it should not be surprising that the rights granted to an author concern the economic exploitation of the work rather than rights personal to an author.<sup>131</sup>

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Authors : Focusing Copyright Law on Process Over Product on Process Over Product,” *The Journal of Corporation Law* 34, no. 4 (2009): 1009–32.

<sup>130</sup> Cosmo Wenman, “Bust of Nefertiti 3D Scan Freedom of Information Effort Overview,” no. August 2016 (2019): 21. Nonetheless, Wenman’s same investigation revealed that the SPK, the cultural organization within which the Museum operates, “had completely failed to commercially exploit the valuable data idling on its hard drives,” having “earned less than 5,000 euro, *total*, from marketing the Nefertiti scan, or any other scan for that matter.” Wenman, “A German Museum Tried To Hide This Stunning 3D Scan of an Iconic Egyptian Artifact. Today You Can See It for the First Time.”

<sup>131</sup> Heymann, “A Tale of ( At Least ) Two Authors : Focusing Copyright Law on Process Over Product on Process Over Product,” 1018.

This emphasis on economic exploitation stems early-modern European property law as it pertained to artistic production and publication. Through it, “local rulers granted monopolies to those who invested in the publication of works, whether by contemporary or ancient authors,” and not to the creators — ‘authors’ — of the work itself.<sup>132</sup> As a result, the currently predominant legal model is one characterized by Ginsburg as a “‘best exploiter’ regime,” one that places “the exclusive rights in the hands not of those who created the works (many of whom had been dead for a millennium or more), but of those who assured their public dissemination.”<sup>133</sup> At the same time, the prioritization of an artwork’s dissemination and economic exploitation over any other un-commodifiable creative, cultural, or personal value it may hold means that it comes to be *objectified* as one single facet of the complex thing it may otherwise be, while at the same time being *abstracted* as, fundamentally, something other than a thing *made* by labour which has, in turn, been rendered invisible. In this sense, to say that the Museum makes a claim to the authorship of the Bust is not to say that it literally claims that Germans created the object itself. Rather, it is to underscore the Museum’s assertion that it produced its most salient source of (moral, economic, semiotic) *value*: that is, its fame, through which it has come to be *known* worldwide. But this logic is neither limited to the legal contestation around

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<sup>132</sup> Ginsburg, “The Concept of Authorship in Comparative Copyright Law,” 1064.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. As an example of how dissemination, ‘fixation’, and economic exploitation are legally prioritized over creative production in the attribution of ‘authorship’, Ginsburg cites a “notorious” legal case whereby “a reporter employed by the Times of London was [determined to be] the author of a verbatim account of speeches delivered extemporaneously by Lord Rosebery, because the transcription of the speeches required the exercise of the reporter’s “skill and labour” in transcribing rapidly-delivered prose. Rosebery himself could not be a copyright owner because he had not fixed his extemporaneous speeches. Rather, the reporter of the transcription was entitled to his own authorship status, because “an ‘author’ may come into existence without producing any original matter of his own.” (Ginsburg, 1073)

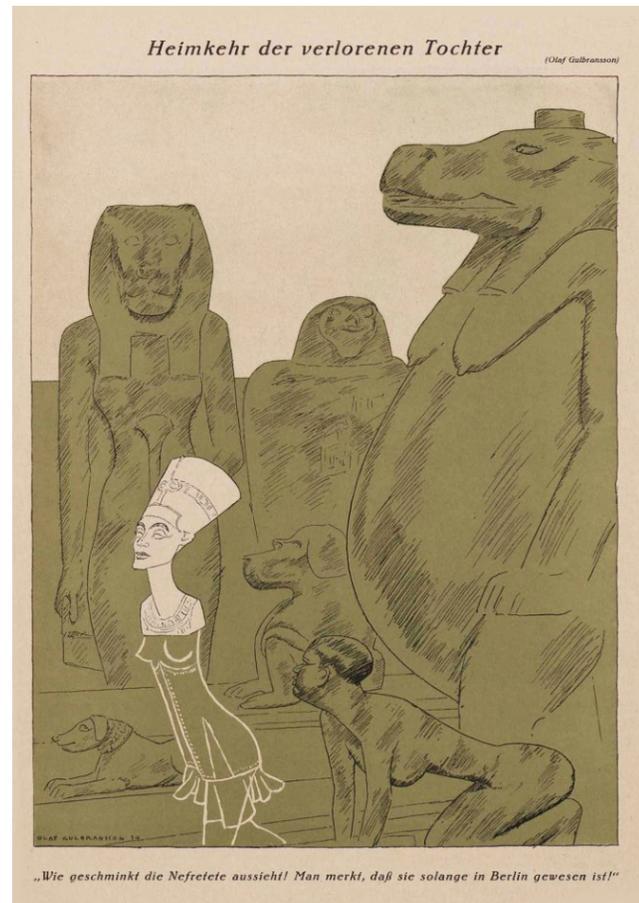
the Bust, nor the social exigencies of the museal sphere; rather, it is the product of a broader epistemic framework that regards art and culture first and foremost as a commercial enterprise, and has over the course of centuries accordingly built multifaceted ideological apparatus. And so, as Heymann notes,

"Author" and "owner" thus became conflated, such that two kinds of stakeholders — creators and publishers/distributors — were subsumed within the general category of "author" without any reflection of their divergent interests, a situation that persists today.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Heymann, "A Tale of ( At Least ) Two Authors : Focusing Copyright Law on Process Over Product on Process Over Product," 1020.

This conflation between ownership and authorship can be seen here as more than just an abstract legal principle; it is both materially relevant to the Museum's ongoing reassertion of its claim to the Bust, and a reoccurring theme in the Bust's public re-appropriations. We see it, for example, in historical media representations that ascribe a fundamental *German-ness* to Nefertiti, thereby making her, in a very real way, basically a German product. These representations typically work not only through the logic of property, value, and ownership, but also through those of gender and coloniality. Olaf Gulbransson's 1930 editorial cartoon in *Simplicissimus* (Figure 28), for example, shows dark, animal-headed, Egyptian goddess figures; among them, a massive, hippopotamus-headed Taweret stands in the background with drooping breasts as a dark-skinned female figure crouches in the foreground, her form echoing that of a stylized crouching dog nearby.<sup>135</sup> In the



**Figure 28: Return of the Prodigal Daughter, *Simplicissimus*, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1930.**

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<sup>135</sup> Olaf Gulbransson, "Heimkehr Der Verlorenen Tochter," *Simplicissimus*, May 5, 1930. Another example can be found in Bondy, "Die Königin Spricht." Here, Bondy, with tongue firmly in cheek, makes a different sort of argument to Nefertiti's European origins. He observes, based on Nefertiti's German appellation, 'Nofretete':

"It may have escaped the notice of some that Nefertiti in French means, "Don't give the head." - "Offrir" give or offer, "tête", the head and in addition the "N" with the apostrophe as negation. "N'offre tête!" that is clear and obvious. - The small orthographic blunder will surely be forgiven by the good Queen, who lived

foreground, by contrast, is Nefertiti; light and lithe, she wears a form-fitting dress that highlights her youthful form. Titled “The Return of the Prodigal Daughter,” the caption exclaims: “How made-up Nefertiti looks! You can tell she has been in Berlin for so long.”<sup>136</sup> Here, Nefertiti’s iconic looks — her delicately lined eyes and striking red lips — are credited to her stay in fashionable Berlin. But moreover, her beauty is marked as an attribute of Whiteness, a feature that sets her apart from the bestial Egyptian women that she has come to be surrounded by. Implicit here is not only an argument that Nefertiti *belongs* in Berlin, but that in some ways, she is *of* Berlin, or at least Europe — somewhere surely distant from Egypt’s animalistic darkness. Here, again, the Bust’s authorship is credited to European genius and insight rather than mere Egyptian handicraft; its distinctive appeal a result of its stay in Berlin.

These representations reveal that it is not the mere *fact* of the Bust’s beauty but its particular *tenor* that would shape its public discourses. The projections of Nefertiti’s beauty, Whiteness, and European cultural production are deeply interlinked: in addition to the German images discussed above, in English-language media she is described as a “classical beauty,”<sup>137</sup> “The World’s First Blonde,”<sup>138</sup> resembling Audrey Hepburn.<sup>139</sup> This trope continues to the present day in highly-publicized contemporary examples, such as

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so many centuries before the French language. It is praiseworthy enough that she uses this language, which almost all educated people think they can speak, or at least understand.”

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Manchester Guardian, “A Return of Nefertiti.”

<sup>138</sup> Manchester Guardian, “MISCELLANY: Poor Nefertiti,” *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, February 1, 1929.

<sup>139</sup> Washington Post, “Mother-in-Law of King Tut Called Modern Girl’s Model: Egyptian Nefertiti, Who Lived 1350 Before Christ, Named One of History’s Loveliest Women; She Resembles Hepburn, Too.,” *The Washington Post (1923-1954)*, April 14, 1934.

Little Warsaw's *Body of Nefertiti* art installation at the 2003 Venice Biennale (as discussed above by Urice), whose curator, Zsolt Petrányi, would argue that

This statue is one of the important sources of European cultural history and sculpture, even though it was created outside the continent. Its outsider position adds further meaning to the project of completing: this 3000 years [sic] old model of beauty has been contributing, ever since it was found and put on public display, to the European ideal of beauty.<sup>140</sup>

Here, the concept of Nefertiti's beauty as a *classical* one comes to the fore. Scholarly assessments of the Bust's "perfect beauty"<sup>141</sup> highlight the harmony and mathematical precision of its proportions, the grid-like distribution of its symmetrical features. These aesthetic qualities are, in turn, associated with the classical tradition, with its emphasis on the "harmonious relationship of the parts of a whole to each other and to the whole" and "correct" proportions that are *canonically determined* and *numerically determinable* [emphasis added].<sup>142</sup> While Krauss, for example, acknowledges that "It is true that the bust as an ancient Egyptian work of art belongs to neither one nor the other of the cited European art traditions," he nonetheless judges its aesthetic merit through the same deeply Eurocentric lens, finding that "certainly ancient Egyptian art is more closely related to the classical than the Romantic art movement."<sup>143</sup>

This association between the Bust's beauty and the classical tradition does more than just posit it as part of the Western canon, reinforcing, again, a Eurocentric hierarchy

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<sup>140</sup> Little Warsaw, "The Body of Nefertiti," LittleWarsaw.com, 2003, <http://www.littlewarsaw.com/nef.fanzine.pdf>.

<sup>141</sup> Dimitri Laboury, "Portrait versus Ideal Image," *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2010, 12.

<sup>142</sup> Rolf Krauss, "1913 - 1988: 75 Jahre Büste Der NofretEte / Nefret-Iti in Berlin: Zweiter Teil," *Jahrbuch Preußischer Kulturbesitz* 28 (1991): 146.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

through which the Bust-as-artifact could be seen to have been authored. At the same time, it also deploys a seemingly rigorous, scientific episteme within which its aesthetic quality could be judged, so that its popularity — and by extension, its German ownership — could be justified. As Krauss notes, German Egyptologist Walther Wolf would use these apparently objective measures of the Bust's beauty as a “side blow [...] aimed at Julius Meier-Graefe, who at the time, as a partisan of an exchange of the bust for the Ranofer statue, had attributed the popularity of the bust to an accident.”<sup>144</sup> To the extent that the Bust's classical beauty could be measured through a quantifiable visual regime, its affective power could thus be articulated through normative social structures (such as beauty and mathematical harmony) as opposed to those which emerge only implicitly in satirical media (such as racial, sexual, and national anxieties). As a result, its value could be deemed with apparent objectivity to be superior to that of its proposed substitute.

By folding the Bust into the Western canon through the structure of the ‘classical’, it could also be transformed, as **Figure 28** shows, into a decidedly *modern* part of European culture. Eckhard Leuscher, for example, examines a 1929 exhibition titled *Der Schöne Mensch in der Neuen Kunst* (Human Beauty in Recent Art), whose catalogue cover juxtaposes two images: a stylized image of a female torso by avant-garde photographer Alexander Archipenko, and an Ancient Egyptian relief of a woman's

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

silhouette.<sup>145</sup> The contrast between the two images, especially in the context of ‘Recent Art’ is startling, yet Leuschner finds they are contextualized through a shared logic:

Of these two pieces of art, the first stresses the absolute modernity of the ‘beauty’ theme, the other, as an art historical reference, the constancy of the same phenomenon throughout history. In addition to that, the modern torso and the Egyptian relief also connected the current fashion of representing the body as a fragment (e.g. lacking a head or arms) with older artistic traditions — in this case not with Greek or Roman art, but, rather, Egyptian works (Germany was still subject to Nefertiti mania).<sup>146</sup>

Appropriations such as these assert a cultural and aesthetic through-line linking Ancient Egypt with modern Germany via the medium of the female body. They form part of an *aisthesis* as formulated by Rancière; that is, “not a matter of the ‘reception’ of works of art” but rather “the sensible fabric of experience within which they are produced.” In this case, it is a fabric of experience through which Ancient Egypt in general — and the Bust of Nefertiti more specifically — could be *re*-produced as a sensible and valuable conceptual terrain for museal ends.

To this end, the Bust’s specific aestheticizations serve not only to minimize its association with Egyptian-ness, but also propose a vision of Nefertiti as a thoroughly modern — and by extension, Western(-ized) — woman. Here, Nefertiti’s fashion sense and bold lipstick comes into play, as it does in much of her media coverage: a 1933 *Washington Post* article swoons that like “some of the ladies who have been to college,”

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<sup>145</sup> Eckhard Leuschner, “Measuring Beauty : Ideal Proportions and the Human Figure ca . 1930,” in *Images of the Body in Architecture: Anthropology and Built Space*, ed. Kirsten Wagner and Jasper Cepl (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 2014), 85–86.

The image in question may be viewed in greater detail via the University of Heidelberg digital collection: <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.24097#0001>

<sup>146</sup> Leuschner, 86.

the ancient queen “had rouge on the lips!”<sup>147</sup> Erasing its decade of concealment, Jan Assmann’s assessment of the Bust’s historical impact finds that it “was, after its discovery, immediately welcomed into the world of Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden,” such that its capacity for *commercialization* (here via the cosmetics industry) is associated with its aestheticization as a marker of its acceptance within the modern German public.<sup>148</sup>

This deployment of heteropatriarchal, racial, and colonial logics as an assertion of material ownership is hardly surprising; after all, the aesthetic, semiotic and economic ‘value’ of an object may be deeply bound up with the broader social ‘values’ through which it operates. This is true within legal systems, too: John Tehranian, for example, notes that the legal process whereby ‘fixation’ is equated with authorship is hardly politically neutral — in fact, it entrenches disparities in power and reproduces patriarchal social structures.<sup>149</sup> In prioritizing the legal rights and agency of the one who ‘fixes’ a work into a tangible form at the expense of any other collaborators in the creative process — i.e., the photographer rather than the model — the artwork is, again, posited primarily as a commodity rather than a product of multiple forms of labour. This relation is both cause and effect of broader power structures, ones that make visible particular forms of labour, creativity, and subjectivity at the expense of others. As Tehranian observes,

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<sup>147</sup> Dare, “History Likes To Hand Down Lovely Woman: World Today Is Admiring Nefertiti, Beautiful Queen of Egypt.,” *The Washington Post* (1923-1954), July 16, 1933.

<sup>148</sup> Jan Assmann, “Preservation and Presentation of Self in Ancient Egyptian Portraiture,” *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson* 1 (1996): 56.

<sup>149</sup> John Tehranian, “Copyright’s Male Gaze: Authorship and Inequality in a Panoptic World,” *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender* 41 (2018): 345–92.

The authorship-as-fixation regime therefore vests property rights in the interloper, the penetrator, the watcher/voyeur. It echoes gender-ridden binaries of passivity and activity as proxies for traditional visions of femininity and masculinity, casting the woman in front of the camera in the role of the subject, the gazed, the spectacle, and the captured (image), and conceptualizing the man behind the trigger as the doer, the “master mind,” the author and, above all, the rightsholder. In short, the authorship-as-fixation regime has enabled the abstract “male gaze” to metastasize into a tangible series of intellectual property rights in a process that replicates dominant patriarchal narratives and, in the end, empowers masculine control over the female form and representations of it.<sup>150</sup>

The Bust’s public appropriations do not tidily fit Tehranian’s critique, as it is not the labour of *fixing* the Bust into a tangible, material form which is prioritized, but rather, the labour of *un-fixing* it. That is to say that while the colonial and patriarchal legacies of artforms such as painting and photography mean that the ‘fixer’ — the artist — has typically occupied a position of power relative to, say, the model, here by contrast the ‘fixer’ is a long-dead citizen of a later-colonized land. At the same time, the artist’s *work* is rendered immaterial by its reformulation as a conceptual terrain to be studied, made visible, *made known*. As a result, through the mechanics of cultural mercantilism both artwork *and* artist are transformed from raw material into a knowable, value-able good within the museum’s epistemological limits. This reversal of the typical process of fixation is a product of the museum’s particular position as a titleholder of collections of immense material value, but mostly for their capacity to be transformed into knowledge of various kinds, through study, exhibition, education, publication, etc. Just as Velthius

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<sup>150</sup> Tehranian, 345–55.

and Coslor observe,<sup>151</sup> the museum becomes a space where, in a very real sense, all that is solid melts into air.

Nonetheless, these dynamics — working on the basis of gender and racial difference — are evident here in the ways in which the Bust is re-conceptualized such that its Egyptianness is erased and its femininity is elevated in ways that conflate it with Whiteness. But, importantly, these discursive re-appropriations do not work solely on an abstract, cultural level; they serve a real, material function as part of an argument to the ownership of a tangible, *valuable* good. But while the patriarchal, gendered logic through which the Museum claims the Bust represents a significant undercurrent within the broader German discursive sphere, it is far from the only one. In fact, the Bust uncovered and in some ways exacerbated the deeply fractious issues of national identity that so deeply divided the Weimar Republic: it drew attention to the sore geopolitical issue of the state's relative weakness in relation to its European neighbors and inflamed the deeply contentious debate on German colonial expansionism in Africa. It forced the public to ask itself what kind of nation they hoped to belong to in the wake of Versailles: one that unremittingly pursues all it feels it is owed, all it *desires*, or one that concedes defeat by a despised challenger, relinquishing control of an unfairly-won beloved?

These diverging narratives take shape in the Bust's public discourse through the logics of gender and racial difference, applied differently, however, depending on the particular argument to ownership being put forth. On the one hand, we see the image of

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<sup>151</sup> Olav Velthuis and Erica Coslor, "The Financialization of Art," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Finance*, ed. Karin Knorr Cetina and Alex Preda (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 471–87.

Germany as the saviour of a fair-skinned Nefertiti from the jaws of a snarling, black Anubis (see **Figure 18**). This image evokes a visceral response to the threat of the Queen's sexual violation, as well as fears of miscegenation. With its *tarbouche* and dark skin, the racialization of this Anubis figure, like that of Egypt more broadly, straddles that of Black (**Figure 19**) and Oriental (**Figure 21**) bodies, and the particular threat to White femininity ascribed to both. Here, Germany stands as a bearer of order and safety so long as it maintains control of the Bust, but is incapable of doing so; the diminutive White men cede control over that which is "*Rechtlich Deutschland Zugesprochen*" — "legally awarded to Germany" — to the snarling beast, conjuring an image of cuckoldry such as that which Lokke observes in contemporary far-right online discourses.<sup>152</sup>

On the other hand, satirical media such as *Kladderadatsch* presents a resistant counter-argument to this fantasy of White male martyrdom in cultural terms familiar to its audience. Here, the story of the Bust becomes the story of *der ägyptischen schönen Helena*, the beautiful Egyptian Helen: a queen abducted to a foreign land, held there against her will by a desirous lover, and sought relentlessly by her husband to the point of disastrous geopolitical conflict (see **Figure 20**). As discussed, this cartoon is not the only source of this classical comparison: the allusion is implicit in numerous references to the Queen whose beauty could bring nations to war, and Richard Strauss' 1928 opera, completed at the height of the Nefertiti craze, bears the name *Die ägyptische Helena*. The comparison is noted in English-language media, too: The Manchester Guardian, for

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<sup>152</sup> Geoffrey Lokke, "Cuckolds, Cucks, and Their Transgressions," *Porn Studies* 6, no. 2 (2019): 212–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2018.1555053>.

example, would reassure its readers that while “The dispute between the Egyptian and the German authorities over the possession of this new Helen has also received a good deal of publicity,” that there in fact “has never been any danger that another siege of Troy would be provoked by this classical beauty.”<sup>153</sup> But the German-language allusions to Troy are all the more striking in their nuanced assessment of the Bust’s geopolitical value, and their implicit critique of the state’s stance on the question of its ownership. Despite widespread repression of the press at the time of its publication, *Kladderadatsch* uses the satirical mode to represent Egypt’s critique of Germany in quite an unvarnished light (“Robbers! Thieves! Kidnappers!”) whereas the German response, for all its gusto, is relatively feeble (“Kiss my ass! Liar! Come and get her!”).<sup>154</sup> The classical narrative undercuts the German claim here: Borchardt is cast in the role of Paris, the Queen’s abductor or her lover, while Fuad is Menelaus, her rightful husband. Nefertiti’s departure from Egypt, in this comic as in the myth, may be framed as either an elopement or a kidnapping: Borchardt’s desire for her is made clear as he clutches her close on a *felucca*, but, lacking arms just as Homer’s Helen lacks narrative agency, her feelings on the matter are unclear.

In some ways, this ambivalence to hegemonic German national discourses is unsurprising: Allen, for example, argues that *Kladderadatsch* represented “skeptical, dissenting, or critical attitudes among a significant segment of the general public,”<sup>155</sup> and accordingly, counter-hegemonic views found a home therein. Additionally, the use of

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<sup>153</sup> Manchester Guardian, “A Return of Nefertiti.”

<sup>154</sup> Garvens, “Nofretete Oder Das Schicksal Der Ägyptischen Schönen Helena.”

<sup>155</sup> Allen, *Satire and Society in Wilhelmine Germany*, xi.

political cartoon — a ‘low-culture’, humour-focused, and thus apparently politically non-threatening form — was permitted a greater degree of political freedom than other, more strait-laced critique. Here, as may have been evident to a broad swath of the contemporaneous German public, public opinion on the Bust’s ownership was politically multifaceted and heterogenous, in political reality and in the Homeric legend. Here, Borchardt and Germany are represented as Paris — hardly straightforward narrative heroes, in that they instigate a great deal of needless death and suffering. The German’s state’s vociferous claims to the legality of its ownership are challenged here, too: regardless of Helen’s willingness to Paris’ overtures, Menelaus is unquestionably Helen’s husband by decree and solemn oath.

Nonetheless, in both the Anubis and Helen metaphors, the ownership of the Bust is made comprehensible through gendered and racialized logics of power, authority, property, and law; that is, a complex mediation of the Bust’s value(s), broadly defined. In either case it is a trophy, a locus of desire and a territory to be conquered. Anna Tsing observes that “Trophy value requires that the experience of obtaining the thing remain in the thing;”<sup>156</sup> here, that experience is one of conquest. Its meaning, economic worth, and status would be so deeply shaped by its contestation that a century on, the Museum in which it is held still feels it must re-assert its claim through public didactic materials.

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<sup>156</sup> Anna Tsing, “Sorting out Commodities: How Capitalist Value Is Made through Gifts,” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3, no. 1 (2013): 31, <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau3.1.003>.

## 2.7 From the plaster workshop to the 3d print

If the Trojan allusion asks a question of its Weimar-era audience, it might be: Does desire justify rapine? The Museum's might answer yes, so long as that desire is accompanied by *appreciation*: that is, so long as this desire produces recognizable value. Economy and affect co-constitute one another here: art is appreciated in a museum just as art appreciates in its investment value. Its public appreciation as culture contributes to its private appreciation as capital, and vice versa. Thus, affect and desire can be seen here as fundamental building blocks in the construction of the Bust as a gendered, racialized site of desire, one that is mediated through the heteropatriarchal and colonial norms that regulate desire's excesses. We see this in the invocation of the visceral fear of the excess of Black and Brown male desire; Egyptian desire for the Bust is constructed as something despotic, violent, bestial. And like other subjugated expressions of desire, Egyptian desire for the Bust is constructed as *un-productive*; when the Museum argues that Egyptians only began claiming the Bust after it had already been made famous, it posits Egyptian desire as derivative of the value already produced by German appreciation.

It is through this framework that the Museum makes its claim not only for the *ownership* of the Bust, but its *authorship* too; that is, through the argument that the value produced by the Museum is that which is salient to the kind of object the Bust fundamentally *is*. This rhetoric extends to the Bust's function as part of interwar European geopolitics; for example, Max Sinz' letter in *Die Kunstauktion* demonstrates how it mediates the rivalry with Britain through a discursive monopoly. Sinz' plea to the Prussian prime minister speaks to what the journal identifies as a "widespread mood" in

opposition to the proposed exchange, hinging on the Bust's trophy-value; that is, the value of the power to deny another what they desire. Sinz' observes:

In the midst of its immense wealth of original works of ancient Egyptian art of all times the British Museum in London has placed a plaster cast of Nefertiti's bust (made in the State Image Moulding Works of the Berlin Museums). The bust, which stands in the center of the room, is inscribed with the following:

“The original is in some way the finest known example of ancient Egyptian portrait sculpture, and is certainly the most naturalistic, especially noticeable being the realistic treatment of the eyes. Unfettered realism was a characteristic of the art of the heretical period.”

In itself, the fact that the British Museum placed a plaster cast of this bust among its original works would be enough. From the inscription, however, it can still be seen how this particular work is appreciated by British experts. I hope that the judgment of foreign museum officials, which certainly in this case can claim the greatest impartiality, will contribute to the preservation of this gem of Egyptian art, which is the envy of the whole world, for the German people.<sup>157</sup>

Here again, German pride is amassed not only through the unfulfilled British desire for the *original*, but also, through the cultural capital attained by the *reproduction*, which, having been “made in the State Image Moulding Works of the Berlin Museums,” has been recognized as an artwork in its own right by “the British Museum [...] among its original works.” And so when, as Sinz proudly notes, the British Museum accompanies the plaster Bust by an inscription that it is “in some way the finest known example of ancient Egyptian portrait sculpture, and is certainly the most naturalistic,”<sup>158</sup> it is seized by the European canon via its judgement through classical ideals, then re-assigned again as a product of the German workshop where its reproductions have been thus perfected.

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<sup>157</sup> Sinz, “Für Die Nofretete.”

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

Accordingly, Sinz' accolades work towards the nationalism of the Bust's retention, and can be seen as less a recognition of *Egyptian* than *German* workmanship, a point made all the more evident by their direction towards the *reproduction* as much as the original.

Sinz' argument speaks to the complexity of the Bust's valuation on multiple fronts: if what the Bust basically *is* can be transformed from a crafted, material good into an image, a site of desire, or a conceptual terrain, then the Museum can have basically created it. Accordingly, it can claim not only ownership of the original, but to its image, too. By regulating access to the original while profiting from the extensive reproduction of its image, the overdetermined object becomes simultaneously ubiquitous and scarce, producing both the power of *having* and the desire of *wanting*; the appreciation of the admirer and that of the investor.

We can thus trace a genealogy of the Museum's decision to stamp the bottom of its released 3D model with a Creative Commons license requiring its users to credit the Neues Museum and the SPK more broadly as its author. This lineage is hardly coincidental: Charles Cronin, for example, draws specific legal links between the legacy of plaster reproduction and contemporary legal debates surrounding digital 3D reproduction.<sup>159</sup> Likening the assertion of copyright over such historical works to "a 'For Sale' sign attached to the Brooklyn Bridge," Jason Mazzone notes that the current legal structure incentivises such spurious claims by prioritizing 'authors' in the broad legal sense without providing similar protections for the public good that stems from

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<sup>159</sup> Charles Cronin, "Possession Is 99% of the Law: 3D Printing, Public Domain Cultural Artifacts and Copyright," *USC Law Legal Studies Paper* 16-13 (2016): 21.

unencumbered access to global cultural patrimony.<sup>160</sup> Attempting to “have their cake and eat it too,” Cronin argues that “private collectors and museums resort to contract and license to wrest authority over the replication of their works that copyright does not provide, while garnering the prestige stemming from their public display.”<sup>161</sup> Thus we see again how the means through which things such as the Bust of Nefertiti come to be mediated through a logics of economy and affect, desire and control, access and denial.

But things can also break free from the institutional bounds of regulation and control: “The more a work is exhibited,” Cronin points out, “the more difficult it is to control the creation and distribution of copies of it.”<sup>162</sup> The public reckoning with the Egyptian repatriation campaign revealed deep ideological divides on questions of ownership and authority already extant within German society: just as Nora Al-Badri and Jan Nikolai Nelles drew attention to the ongoing contestation of the Bust’s ownership, Weimar-era satirical publications mocked the aggressive national posturing against its return as a modern Trojan folly, a whim of male desire escalating to the level of potentially disastrous conflict.

Nonetheless, it becomes evident that more than just a technical oversight or a legal fiction, the Museum’s copyright claim represents a century-old discursive framework deeply shaped by the repatriative efforts that catalyzed the Bust’s rise to stardom, transforming its value on social, economic, and semiotic levels. Furthermore, it

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<sup>160</sup> Jason Mazzone, “Copyfraud,” *New York University Law Review* 81 (2006): 1038.

<sup>161</sup> Cronin, “Possession Is 99% of the Law: 3D Printing, Public Domain Cultural Artifacts and Copyright,” 12.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

represents an important model through which museum collections are publicly contested and institutionally regulated more broadly: Wenman draws attention to the incredible wealth of freely-reproducible data currently made inaccessible by institutions with mandates for exhibition and education, including such touchstones of repatriative discourse such as the Parthenon friezes.<sup>163</sup> Data, unlike physical goods, needs not be bound by the constraints of scarcity that govern traditional property law: while anti-piracy public service announcements remind audiences that they “wouldn’t steal a car,” data is more like a flame in that it reproduces itself as it circulates.<sup>164</sup> Cronin draws attention to the democratizing potential of the digital sphere, arguing that:

By facilitating the widespread and inexpensive reproduction and distribution of such public domain cultural artifacts, 3D printing technologies advance more democratic access to geographically disperse cultural works which, in turn, should promote the dissolution of divisive cultural and political hegemonies.<sup>165</sup>

Cronin — like the artist duo El-Badri and Nikolai Nelles, and the Egyptians who have maintained the century-long campaign to reclaim the Bust — speak to a material decolonization of cultural institutions that requires the dismantlement of an epistemic system founded upon a logics of acquisition and control. But things like this Bust demonstrate that the salient conflict is not one that between East and West, North and South, or colonizer and colonized; rather, the conflict is ideological, affective, and

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<sup>163</sup> Wenman, “The Nefertiti 3D Scan Heist Is a Hoax.”

<sup>164</sup> Although with recent advances in blockchain technology, it is now possible to witness “Nefertiti resurrected and entombed eternally as an NFT” such that her image may be constrained, even in digital form. See Scott L, “NeFerTiti - Original NFTs I Created,” OpenSea, 2021, <https://opensea.io/assets/ethereum/0x495f947276749ce646f68ac8c248420045cb7b5e/83913725870281962093632283320957215650966059658853363179395099020673876492289>.

<sup>165</sup> Cronin, 21.

epistemological, transforming the object into a gathering of heightened affects so that it comes to be seen as the *source* of such feelings, rather than simply their reflection. But a reparative reading of Garvens' pessimistic cartoon (**Figure 27**) might reveal that even in apparent absence, desire still remains: while the first panel represents the fulfilled desire of those to whom access has been granted, the second panel might represent the desire of those whose desire has been thwarted — at least, temporarily. It is still there, but not *there*. These multifold valuations of the Bust hold a trace of that desire, haunting the way it is publicly understood worldwide. And even though its transformations transport it through the intangible and back again, we see it constructed and re-constructed as a product of the collective human action through which it has been gathered.

## **Chapter 3: “Adorning oneself with purloined jewels”: Intra-national contestations and the transport of the Luxor obelisk**

*Even in their exile, when uprooted and deposed as guardians of the temples of Egypt, when dragged as booty or trophies of war to distant regions by foreign conquerors as monuments of their vanity or their gods, the obelisks never lost their Egyptian identity.*

- Erik Iversen, *Obelisks in Exile*. Vol. 1. The Obelisks of Rome, 1968.

### **3.1 The obelisk in the public square**

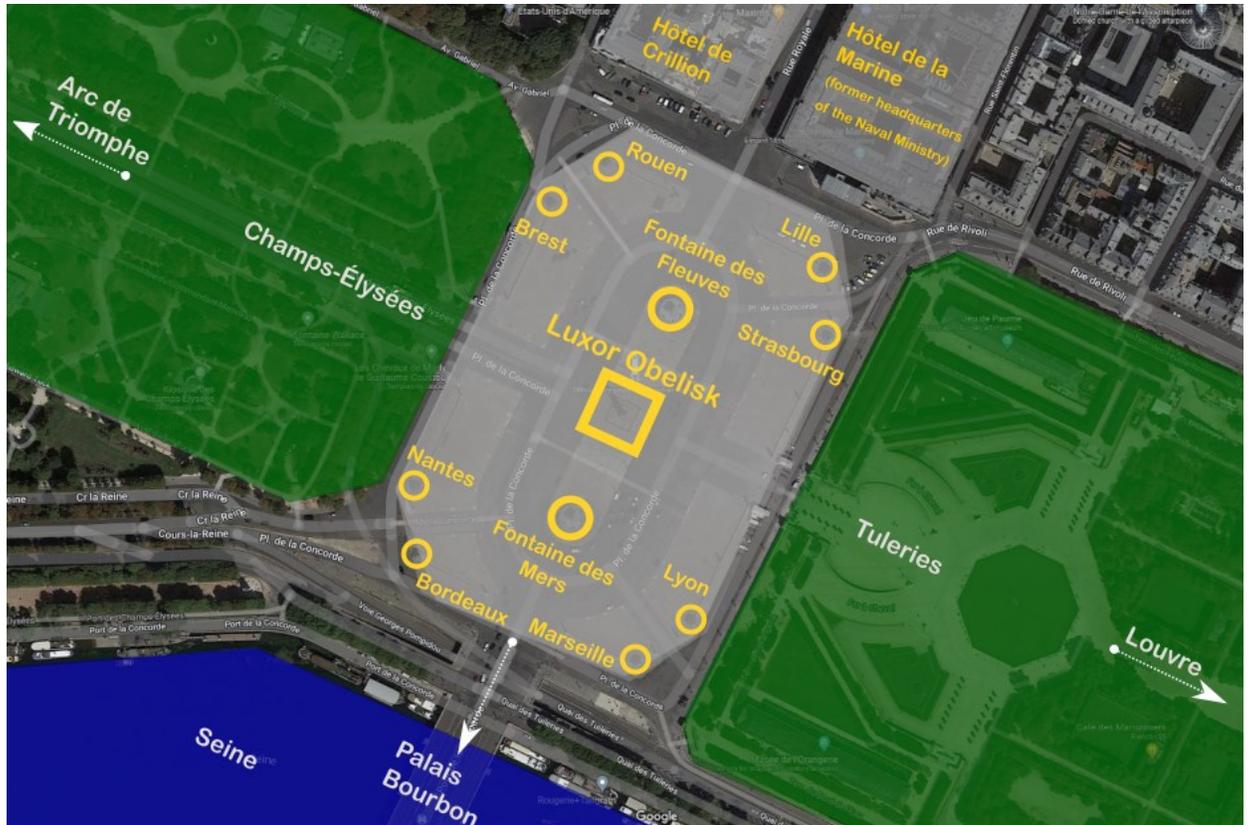
The obelisk is central to Paris in more ways than one. Geographically, it dominates at the center of the Place de la Concorde, at an intersection that marks the former location of an equestrian statue of Louis XV, one that was torn down and replaced by one of the Reign of Terror’s most notorious and active guillotines. The name of the site itself changed too; first named in honour of Louis XV, it became the Place de la Revolution, then the Place de la Concorde, changing back and forth several times in the following decades of political instability before settling on its current title.<sup>1</sup>

Along the wide Haussmann boulevards, the Champs-Élysées and Arc de Triomphe mark a clear line from the obelisk along one axis, the Tuileries and the Louvre along the other. Looking south over the Seine along the Pont de la Concorde, the Palais Bourbon can be seen, current home of the Assemblée Nationale. Looking north and west, the Eiffel tower is visible over the tree line of the Champs-Élysées, alongside the two

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<sup>1</sup> Musée Carnavalet, *De La Place Louis XV à La Place de La Concorde* (Paris: Musée Carnavalet, 1982), 1.

identical Louis XV-era palaces which served at various times as a home for the royal family and the Naval ministry.



**Figure 29: The Place de la Concorde, its monuments, and environs. Satellite map via Google Maps. Information via Musée Carnavalet. *De La Place Louis XV à La Place de La Concorde, 1982.***

Further underscoring the obelisk's centrality to the French national imagination is the decorative programme which surrounds it, conceived by Jacques Hittorf in the 1830s, which transforms the site into a symbolic microcosm of state as a whole. The octagonal boundaries of the Place de la Concorde are marked at their corners by statues representing each of France's eight largest cities, and at the north and south by massive fountains representing the rivers and seas, and French naval mastery thereof (Figure 29).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Robert Solé, *Le Grand Voyage De l'Obélisque* (Normandie: Editions Du Seuil, 2004), 145.

This nautical theme is reinforced by the presence of the Naval ministry and the pedestal on which the obelisk was seated upon its re-erection in 1836, which commemorates its transport as a feat of engineering genius. Thus situated, the obelisk and the former guillotine come to echo one another as world-building technologies of the Enlightenment: the guillotine replaces the French monarchy both literally and figuratively, making way for the *kratos* — might or authority — of the *demos* — the common populace — as part of a classical tradition, real or imagined.

Through such constructions of public space, France simulates an imagined antique Rome, whose empire too was publicly enshrined with obelisks from its Egyptian outposts. The public function of such a symbol rests not only on imperial aspirations, but epistemic ones too: the form of dominion espoused here is not one of brute force but perceived scientific merit, hard-won through military, engineering, artistic, and nautical genius. This is not the force of princes but of citizens, coming together as a *polis* in an *agora* in the heart of Paris, standing in for France as a whole. Accordingly, the obelisk's decorative programme speaks to its popular function: inscribed upon its foundational pedestal, the dedication reads:

*En presence du roi Louis Philippe 1er, cet Obélisque transporté de Louqsor en France a été dresse sur ce piédestal par M. Lebas, ingénieur, aux applaudissements d'un peuple immense, le XXV octobre M.D.CCC.XXXVI*

During this precarious period following the July Revolution of 1830, Louis Philippe, the monarch named in the inscription, would strive to enshrine his authority by aligning his administration with precepts of popularity and technological progress, in part through enormously well-attended public events such as the erection of the obelisk, which drew a

crowd of some 200,000 spectators.<sup>3</sup> The pedestal, unveiled at this event, underscores the obelisk's popularity in the commons – its transport amidst “*applaudissements d’un peuple immense*” – and as a feat of engineering success. Through such a decorative program, popular and technical success is transformed into an accomplishment of the monarchy despite its origins in the period of the French Republic.

For Louis Philippe, aligning himself with progress and the people was no small matter; his father ‘Philippe Égalité’ and great-uncle Louis XVI having been guillotined – the latter taking place on the exact same location, in the Place de la Concorde – and amidst a worsening economy, the stakes of unpopularity were all too evident.<sup>4</sup> Styling himself as ‘King of the French’ rather than ‘King of France’, Louis Phillippe sought to embody the aims of the 1830 revolution within his person, positing himself as a metonym of sorts for the nation rather than the state (**Figure 30**).

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<sup>3</sup> Apollinaire Lebas, *L’obélisque de Luxor : Histoire de Sa Translation à Paris, Description Des Travaux Auxquels Il a Donné Lieu [...]* (Paris: Imprimerie et Fonderie de Fain, 1839), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Pamela M. Pilbeam, *The 1830 Revolution in France, Angewandte Chemie International Edition*, 6(11), 951–952. (Macmillan, 1991), 6.



**Figure 30: *Érection de l'obélisque de Louqsor sur la place de la Concorde*. François Dubois, 1836.**

Thus the successive monuments of the Place de la Concorde – the equestrian statue of Louis XV, the guillotine, and the obelisk – all come to stand for the French heads of state (in a broad sense of the term). Only the obelisk, however, does so by consolidating an image of the nation across the boundaries of time and space, from Ancient Egypt, through Rome, to its present popularity and beyond, to a future that envisions the broadest expanse of French military and epistemic dominion of its global empire. The obelisk and the museum are thus not only geographically aligned, but ideologically, too: the Louvre having been founded as a royal collection liberated to the French people in the wake of the revolution, was re-envisioned under Napoleon through the same values of democracy, populism, and progress. For these reasons it was Vivant Denon – who set himself apart from the other *savants* of the Napoleonic expedition

through the enormous popularity of his *Voyages dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte*, which brought an early wave of Egyptomania to the French public – that was chosen to re-imagine the new museum of the republic.<sup>5</sup> In fact, it was Denon who first put forth the suggestion that an Egyptian obelisk be transported to Paris as a trophy of the French victory in Egypt, and many early proponents of this project proposed the courtyard of the Louvre as its location, one now occupied by the I.M. Pei pyramids.<sup>6</sup>

This relationship between the public square and the museum should come as no surprise, however; both sites serve to reflect and produce conceptions of publics and commons, nations and peoples represented within and without their bounds.<sup>7</sup> In both the Place de la Concorde and the Louvre, a universalizing vision of humanity ties modern France to antiquity while at the same time speaking to a highly singular national conception that claims the entire enterprise as a uniquely and definitively French accomplishment.

This understanding is echoed through the popular re-conceptualizations of the obelisk, which posit it as a time capsule of French power, one that links the state and its

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<sup>5</sup> Ibrahim Amin Ghali, *Vivant Denon Ou La Conquête Du Bonheur* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1986), 181–83.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. XXIII. Pei's glass pyramids themselves draw links between museum history and that of French inter- and intra-national contestations. Criticized in the French press as an exorbitant folly of "MitteRamses the 1<sup>st</sup>," the pyramids simultaneously respond to the nearby obelisk (directly aligned via wide Hausmann boulevards) and the Louvre's own Egyptian collections (housed in the adjacent Denon building). At the same time, their Egyptianizing aesthetic is minimized by Pei, who emphasizes that their "fundamental geometric form [...] belongs to no epoch". See: Chantal Cinquin and Mark Aumann, "From Kheops' Pyramid to the Pyramid of Francois Mitterrand," *SubStance* 16, no. 3 (1987): 70–71, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3685198>.

<sup>7</sup> One important examination of this public-producing function can be found in Duncan F. Cameron, "The Museum: A Temple or the Forum," *Journal of World History* 14, no. 1 (1972): 189–202.

homogenized nation with those of Egypt. Oscar Lambert's "autobiography" of the obelisk, for example, finds it to be a subject of fascination

“[...] because the Obelisk is all the key moments of our history, those which link us to ancient Egypt and its mysteries, those which made Paris tremble in the tumult of the revolutions of the 19th century, or when Ramses rubbed shoulders with Louis-Philippe without knowing it...”<sup>8</sup>

Such nationalizing popular representations include those in popular museum exhibitions such as *Le voyage de l'Obélisque, Louxor/Paris, 1829-1836*, organized in 2014 by the Musée National de la Marine (National Naval Museum). Here, perhaps unsurprisingly due to the museum's naval focus, the history of the obelisk centers the scientific and technical achievements of Apollinaire Lebas and Verninac Saint-Maur, the engineer and captain, respectively, of the expedition that transported the 230-ton monolith to France.

The exhibition promises to

[...] retrace this adventure and to design the first exhibition devoted to it, we have found, consulted and compared the numerous archives relating to these events, the reports of the main actors and the historical accounts and essays that have emerged over time. This fascinating dive into history, from which we came back with our ears ringing with the voices that were extinguished and forgotten, allowed us to reconstitute this astonishing moment of the history of France and Egypt.<sup>9</sup>

Like this exhibition, this chapter examines French and Egyptian archives for a historical account of the “main actors” (*“les principaux acteurs”*), ones whose voices have been “extinguished and forgotten” from the overarching state-centered narrative of the obelisk and its transport. It does so by reading against the archival grain in Stoler's sense of the

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<sup>8</sup> Oscar Lambert, *Moi, l'Obélisque de La Concorde* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Opportun, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Musée National de la Marine, *Le Voyage de l'Obélisque, Louxor/Paris, 1829-1836*, 2014, 2, <https://doi.org/10.7202/500640ar>.

term, working against the absences which remain visible in historical accounts of the obelisk's transport. As Alice Stevenson observes,

too often the artefacts that come to rest in museums find themselves in locations where all of that effort – the hundreds of campaign letters written, the thousands of miles travelled, the dozens of work teams employed, the weeks of arduous fieldwork, the tonnes of earth shifted, the mounting costs of packing and shipping, the months of drawing and writing, and the many hours of draining diplomacy – dissolves away into a singular accomplishment.<sup>10</sup>

While this may be particularly true of objects isolated behind a museum's glass cases, this chapter locates these processes of social alienation at work here in this public square *par excellence*. To do this, this chapter reconsiders not only who the salient 'actors' are, but what it means to act and for an act to be understood as such within historical records. In this exhibition's case, this works by drawing attention to the political processes obscured by the use of the passive tense in describing "the voices that were extinguished and forgotten" in the obelisk's history: how, for instance, do the exhibition's own representations perpetuate and reinforce those same erasures?

These typically unheard voices are the focus of this chapter, which teases apart the intra-national contestations and re-conceptualizations of the 'Paris obelisk' between 19<sup>th</sup> century Egypt and France. In doing so, this discussion strives to lend nuance to typically state-centered reparative discourses. Discussions about repatriation and restitution often use the state as a shorthand that erases meaningful difference: i.e., that "Egypt" has demanded a stolen artifact, or that it had authorized its removal. By making visible who specifically demanded, authorized, responded, interfered, aided, etc., and by

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<sup>10</sup> Alice Stevenson, *Scattered Finds and Museums* (UCL Press, 2019), 20.

rethinking which archives might reveal such acts or resistance, this examination of 19<sup>th</sup> century French- and Arabic-language texts places re-centers contestation at the forefront of repatriative discourses. In doing so, Egyptians who have been rendered historically- (and grammatically-) passive by French accounts are reframed as active agents in this iconic monument's historical narrative.

In the case of the National Naval Museum's exhibition, this is framed as a fundamentally human story, a "fascinating dive into history," from which its interlocutors

Came back with our ears ringing with the voices that were extinguished and forgotten, allowed us to reconstitute this astonishing moment of the history of France and Egypt.<sup>11</sup>

What is told in the exhibition is the story of "a handful of men, led by the naval engineer Apollinaire Lebas," who "were able to take up the challenge and achieve their goal after seven years of ups and downs, difficulties, unforeseen events and controversy."<sup>12</sup> The ability to surmount these "unforeseen events" is posited by the museum – as it is by Lebas and Saint-Maur – as a critical part of the "extraordinary technical challenges" of the "adventure" in Luxor, an engineering feat that would prove their genius and mettle.<sup>13</sup>

There is little emphasis, however, on the fact that what was likely the most significant "technical challenge" faced by Lebas and Saint-Maur, as their own accounts attest, was a shortage of laborers resulting from a cholera epidemic, spread through Egypt by the colonial infrastructure, which killed *one tenth of the population of the nation as a*

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<sup>11</sup> Musée National de la Marine, *Le Voyage de l'Obélisque, Louxor/Paris, 1829-1836*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Musée National de la Marine, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Musée National de la Marine, 18.

*whole*, a *fifth* of the Thebaid region in which their project was located, and *at least an eighth* of the population of the very city in which the French were attempting to undertake a herculean feat of transport.<sup>14</sup>

This dehumanization is entrenched as well through the exhibition's priorities and areas of focus: while "Les hommes de l'expédition" – Lebas, Saint-Maur, and several French officers – receive a lionizing tribute in a dedicated section, the men who took part in the actual physical transport are instead visually likened to the machinery with which they worked. While the markedly French bodies in blue demonstrate interiority through a diversity of tasks – conversing, considering, directing – the largely undifferentiated mass of brown bodies merely toils, and enforces the toil of others (**Figure 31A**). This is not for lack of Egyptian allies to the project whose inclusion could have enriched the exhibition's emphasis on the 'great men of history'; indeed, Léon de Joannis' notably sympathetic portrait of Youssof, the head of the Egyptian laborers, is included with little of the information that the Saint-Maur's account provides about the man (**Figure 31B**). At the same time, the exhibition's emphasis via texts and dioramas on 'les hommes de l'expédition' — the *men* of the expedition — obscures the notable role of Egyptian female labour in the obelisk's transport, which was equal to that of the men, to Lebas' marked surprise.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Raymond de Verninac Saint-Maur, *Voyage Du Luxor En Egypte, Enterpris per Ordre Du Roi Pour Transporter, de Thebes a Paris l'un Des Obelisques Sesostris* (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1835), 149–50. See also: Lebas, *L'obélisque de Luxor : Histoire de Sa Translation à Paris, Description Des Travaux Auxquels Il a Donné Lieu [...]*, 69–71.

<sup>15</sup> See: Lebas, 59

A different approach can be seen in the exhibition's representation of the French populace: noting that "urban planners, city councillors, journalists, Egypt lovers, aesthetes and poets were to argue for a long time about potential sites," the Parisian public is seen as an active participant in the obelisk's conceptualization, with diverse appreciations of its potential meanings and functions.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the exhibition's portrayal of the French masses is decidedly different from that of the Egyptian masses: whereas the former are contextualized as citizens, participants in a broader project of

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<sup>16</sup> Musée National de la Marine, *Le Voyage de l'Obélisque, Louxor/Paris, 1829-1836*, 20.

scientific and technological progress, the latter are understood as part of the machinery through which such progress is achieved.

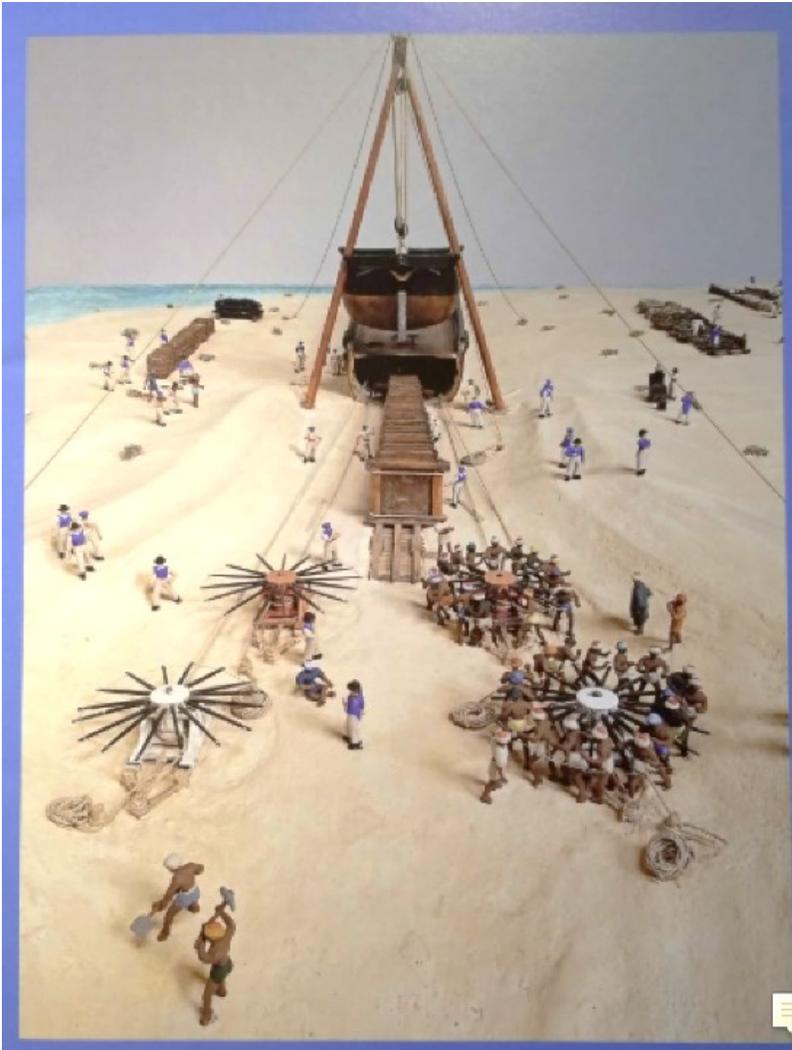


Figure 31 A: Diorama from *Le Voyage de l'Obélisque, Louqsor/ Paris (1829-1836)*. Musée National de la Marine, 2014.

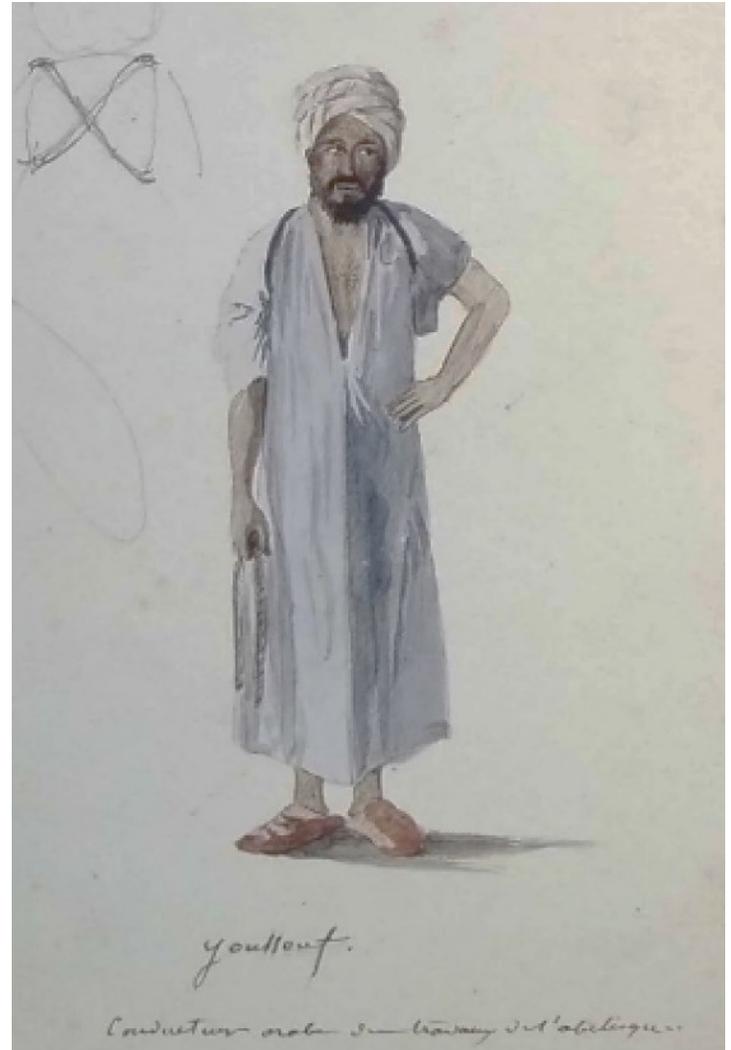


Figure 31 B: Youssef, conducteur arabe des travaux de l'Obélisque. Léon de Joannis, 1831. In *Le Voyage de l'Obélisque, Louqsor/ Paris (1829-1836)*. Musée National de la Marine, 2014.

The obelisk's meaning is constructed here through a framework of the Enlightenment's ideals of technology and progress, working towards the democracy of a very narrowly-defined *demos*. This construction may be understood along the through-line of the French Navy, which was as critical to the original mission as it was to the exhibition at the National Naval Museum. Throughout, an ideal is espoused of dominion

through merit rather than might, established through the enlightened and rational rule of an educated citizenry. The colony, however, is understood not as an extension of the citizenry but as a resource from which it may benefit. It is thus that through the exhibition, the Navy can pride itself for having constructed “a hospital, a vegetable garden, an oven and a mill”<sup>17</sup> in a region blighted in no small part by the colonial transport infrastructure itself, on a mission in which the Captain reassures his superiors that the horrific circumstances have barely slowed down the progress “*un peu,*” [a little] pleading:

If there is any merit in doing one's service in the middle of the desert, under a scorching sun, among hundreds of Arabs decimated before their eyes, I beg your Excellency to take them into account when granting some favors to the Navy.<sup>18</sup>

The obelisk, of course, is not the only such “trophy of conquest”<sup>19</sup> supposed to enact democracy in the West while extracting a steep human cost in its community of origin. The museum, too, operates through the extractive logic of ‘appreciation’ to construct a moral, affective framework in support of dispossession from particular peoples in favour of other, more ‘universal’ ones, ones willing and able to participate in the project of scientific progress. Accordingly, the transport of the obelisk can be seen to represent the intersection between the Navy and the museum, institutions that have exerted their colonial dominance through ontologies of knowledge, producing hierarchies of *those who know* and others who *are to be made known*. As Carol Duncan argues, the post-

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<sup>17</sup> Musée National de la Marine, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Saint-Maur, *Voyage Du Luxor En Egypte*, 150.

<sup>19</sup> As it is described by Denon. See: *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt, Volume 1*, trans. Arthur Aikin, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, 1st ed. (New York: Heard and Forman, 1803), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316106020>.

revolutionary Louvre (as helmed by Denon) can be understood as a point of origin for this function of the museum, “a public space [which makes] manifest the public it claimed to serve.”<sup>20</sup> For Duncan, these bounds of personhood and citizenry are critical to the taxonomic structure of the institution as a whole:

In the museum, this citizen finds a culture that unites him with other French citizens regardless of their individual social position. He also encounters there the state itself, embodied in the very form of the museum. Acting on behalf of the public, it stands revealed as keeper of the nation’s spiritual life and guardian of the most evolved and civilized culture of which the human spirit is capable.<sup>21</sup>

Who, then, is included or excluded in this definition of “civilized culture,” embodied by the modern state/museum? And upon which absences is the institution constructed? This chapter works against the archival grain to shed light on these questions.

### **3.2 Hard-won trophies**

To understand the role effected by Egyptian actants on public conceptualizations of the Paris/Luxor obelisk, it is necessary to first examine the frameworks which initially underpinned the desire to obtain it. One evident motive is a desire to emulate Rome’s imperial legacy by mirroring its most visible public trophies. Rome positively teems with obelisks: as Dibner notes, there are as many obelisks of Egyptian origin in Rome alone as there remain in all of Egypt — nine each.<sup>22</sup> The enormous effort and cost required to

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<sup>20</sup> Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 24, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203978719>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>22</sup> Bern Dibner, *Moving the Obelisks* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970), 12.

transport such enormous monoliths such great distances served a crucial public function in service of both the French and Roman imperial projects. As Sorek notes,

At first sight one might assume that these monuments were removed by Augustus as victory trophies, but two obelisks in particular indicate that he may have employed them to justify his right to rule, and possibly his right to establish a dynasty<sup>23</sup>

The obelisks provided Augustus with a powerful visual symbol linking his unprecedented seizure of power with a wide-spanning, unbroken historical lineage, extending beyond Rome and Egypt even unto the gods that provided him with a metaphysical and philosophical justification for his rule. By “signifying the cosmic representation of the new ideology of victory,”<sup>24</sup> obelisks became sought-after in Rome as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE as a visually impressive buttress to public opinion, shoring up national pride and mitigating public ambivalence about the costly and violent imperial wars. Drawing from Pliny and Strabo’s contemporaneous accounts, Molly Swetnam-Burland argues that obelisks were a crucial component of the Augustan urban program; that

Within the Campus Martius, the obelisk’s shadow projected the emperor’s future plans onto the city’s surface and, at the same time, rewrote the past by casting the civil wars fought against Mark Antony, his fellow Roman, as victories over a foreign enemy, Cleopatra.<sup>25</sup>

Just as the Augustus’ obelisk could displace the fraught memory of intra-national conflict with a more unifying image of national triumph, the ‘Paris Needle’, as Michael Follert

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<sup>23</sup> Susan Sorek, *The Emperors’ Needles : Egyptian Obelisks and Rome*, 2010, 44.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>25</sup> Molly Swetnam-Burland, “Aegyptus Redacta: The Egyptian Obelisk in the Augustan Campus Martius,” *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 3 (2014): 135, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2010.10786124>.

Additionally, Swetnam-Burland argues that the obelisk’s seizure would have been understood as a retaliation against the Kushite dismemberment of the Augustan imperial portrait in Meroë, an ongoing site of resistance at Egypt’s southern border (Swetnam-Burland, 147-8).

argues, produces a post-revolutionary *concorde* by displacing the image of the guillotine with one of military and scientific prowess.<sup>26</sup> This, again, is part of the function of the trophy, and Egyptian obelisks' capacity to enact this function is deeply bound up with their symbolic association with imperial power, and the seizure thereof. Thus, while Sorek differentiates this substantive, political function from that of a 'mere' trophy, the two functions can in fact be seen to be inextricably linked in their capacity to reflect and produce political realities.

In so doing, this form of public trophy becomes a site of concentrated social and symbolic potential, a locus that makes conceptions of nation and state visible by revealing the boundaries that define those that lie beyond them. Like the museum, it works through the public sphere by linking historical value with civilizational power, such that the possession of a particularly distinctive object becomes a metonym for dominion over the whole. Through shared imaginaries of the Roman empire, this museal function of the public trophy is reinstated by the Enlightenment: Duncan's previously quoted observation, for example, draws attention to the ways in which 'civilization' is produced in this era through the museum and framed as a precondition to 'citizenry,' the salient social unit of liberal political philosophy<sup>27</sup>. The 'public museum' as it came to be defined in France's post-revolutionary era thus became a space in which publics are both

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Follert, "Enjoyment's Petrification: The Luxor Obelisk in a Melancholic Century," in *Spectacular Death: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Mortality and (Un)Representability*, ed. Tristanne Connolly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 123–38. See also: Richard D.E. Burton, "Killing the King: Place de La Révolution/Concorde (21 January 1793)," in *Blood in the City: Violence and Revelation in Paris, 1789–1945* (Ithaca: New York Press, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, 26.

served and produced, one where hierarchies of citizenship and civilization could be enacted. Within this schema, antiquities could be understood as ‘treasures’ and ‘trophies,’ *loci* of value bound up with their material and semiotic function. As Duncan notes,

The treasures, trophies, and icons of the past became objects of art history, embodiments of a new form of cultural-historical wealth [...] Organized chronologically and in national categories along the museum’s corridors, works of art now became witnesses to the presence of “genius,” cultural products marking the course of civilization in nations and individuals. The ritual task of the Louvre visitor was to re-enact that history of genius, re-live its progress step by step and, thus enlightened, know himself as a citizen of history’s most civilized and advanced nation-state.<sup>28</sup>

The accumulation of such “cultural-historical wealth” is critical to establishing “history’s most civilized and advanced nation-state.” Insofar as this wealth is ‘cultural-historical’ it performs an ideological function, substantiating a definition of ‘civilization’ that begins with Egypt, extends through Classical antiquity, conferred finally to the French nation-state, which inherits its legacy through its enactment of Enlightenment ideals.

‘Civilization’ in this sense thus becomes the marker through which such “treasures, trophies, and icons” are collected; an identifier seen to link the objects’ creators with their viewers, while at the same time precluding those deemed unworthy of their legacy (both in terms of the French state’s colonial rivals and its relation to the lands of its colonial conquests.) What this further points to is the materiality of such “cultural-historical wealth” as *wealth*; one component of an investment, in literal terms, in a system of political economy that relies substantially on the expropriation of resources from colonized lands and peoples. In addition to bolstering a public image of Napoleon-as-

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<sup>28</sup> Duncan, 27.

Alexander,<sup>29</sup> public displays of such colonial trophies serve as a means of claims-making, much the same function in 18<sup>th</sup> century France as they did in Ancient Rome.<sup>30</sup>

This dual function can be seen to work through influential travel accounts of Egypt, one of the earliest and most popular of which was Denon's *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Égypte*, (*Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*), first published in 1802. With its rich illustrations and a less technical style than that of the other *savants* of the Napoleonic Expedition, Denon's account was republished in numerous editions in French, English, German, Dutch, Italian in the span of just a few short years, reaching a far broader audience than the Expedition's masterwork, the *Description de l'Égypte*.<sup>31</sup> His time in Egypt alongside Napoleon and the success of this subsequent text would contribute greatly to the decision to appoint him as the first post-revolutionary director of the Louvre, or its title at the time of the Musée Napoléon.<sup>32</sup>

It was during the Napoleonic Expedition, however, that Denon made the first documented proposal to transport an obelisk to Paris as an ideal "trophy of conquest," one marking the French military's (ultimately short-lived) conquest of Egypt.<sup>33</sup> As he would remark in his *Travels*,

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<sup>29</sup> A notable iteration of this can be seen on the frontispiece of the *Description de L'Égypte*, where a view of famous Egyptian antiquities extends down the Nile from Alexandria to Luxor and beyond, bordered by a frame that pairs the Classical and Napoleonic conquests of Egypt. For more on this image, see: Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to WWI*, 141.

<sup>30</sup> For a more extended discussion on the legacy and function of the Egyptian obelisks in Rome, see: Labib Habachi, *The Obelisks of Egypt* (Scribner, 1977); and Erik Iversen, *Obelisks in Exile. Vol. 1. The Obelisks of Rome*, 1968.

<sup>31</sup> Ghali, *Vivant Denon Ou La Conquête Du Bonheur*, 183–183.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 187.

<sup>33</sup> Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt, Volume 1*, 48.

We came afterwards to the obelisk, named Cleopatra's needle: another obelisk thrown down at its side, indicates that both of them formerly decorated one of the entrances of the palace of the Ptolomies [*sic*], the ruins of which are still to be seen at some distance from thence. An inspection into the present state of these obelisks, and the fissures which existed at the time even when they were fixed on this spot, prove that they were merely fragments that period, and that they had been brought from Memphis, or from upper Egypt. They might be conveyed to France without difficulty, and would there become a trophy of conquest, and a very characteristic one, as they are in themselves a monument, and as the hieroglyphics with which they are covered render them preferable to Pompey's pillar, which is merely a column, somewhat larger, indeed, than is everywhere to be found.<sup>34</sup>

Denon identifies 'Cleopatra's needles' – the Alexandrian obelisks that in fact bore little historical relation to the Ptolemaic queen herself, as Champollion would later testily complain<sup>35</sup> – as the perfect tribute to the new French state, due to their perceived links to Classical civilization. He argues here that while "Pompey's pillar" – a Roman-style column also found in Alexandria – might first appear to be the superior "trophy of conquest" due to its "somewhat larger" size, in fact, obelisks would better serve this role since their hieroglyphics render them more legible as a "very characteristic" metonym for the nation as a whole. This form of metonymy is critical to the trophy-function of an object, wherein possession of the part stands for possession of the whole; thus, an ideal trophy should both be large enough to easily capture the public imagination, and "characteristic" enough of its place of origin that possession of this object can represent the conquest of a whole nation.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Jacques-Joseph Champollion-Figeac, *L'obélisque de Lougсор : [Transporté à Paris ; Notice Historique, Descriptive et Archæologique Sur Ce Monument ; Avec La Figure de l'obélisque et l'interprétation de Ses Inscriptions* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1833).

At the same time, the trophy's symbolic function is bound up with its conception as an emblem of mastery, a display of civilizational and scientific prowess. In this case, while Denon finds that the obelisks "might be conveyed to France without difficulty," this only *immediately* follows the observation that these massive monoliths "had been brought from Memphis, or from upper Egypt." The proximity of these statements generates an implicit causal link: it is not difficult to imagine that the assumption that goes unsaid here is that *since* the obelisks "had been brought from Memphis, or from upper Egypt," that *therefore* "they might be conveyed to France without difficulty." This is, of course, to say that *since* Egypt's ancient inhabitants had mastered the technological means to achieve such an impressive feat of marine transport without the benefit of modern tools, that *therefore* there ought to be little doubt that French minds might achieve the same task "without difficulty." The assertion that the obelisk's transport ought to be easy *for France* – as it was for the Ancient Egyptians, as it would *not* be for France's rivals – is, in the context of Denon's nationalistic writing, in fact a means of positing the obelisks as *hard-won* rewards of scientific achievement. Accordingly, the act of transportation itself – in 1803 just as it would be in the 2014 museum exhibition – is marked as an arena of civilizational, *scientific* dominion, a proof of merit through which France ought to succeed the lineage of imperial rule of Egypt.

On the other hand, the mission's merit is seen in these texts to derive too from overcoming its symbolic and practical difficulties; the mission to extend the boundaries of scientific and imperial dominion is justified here, as another would be centuries hence, not because it is easy, but because it is hard. Contributing, as Donald Malcolm Reid argues, to the *post-facto* effort to re-package France's swift military defeat in Egypt as in

fact a form of civilizational success,<sup>36</sup> Arthur Aikin's 1803 translation of Denon elucidates the Expedition's broader rationale for the expropriation of such antiquities in terms that clearly center a system of epistemic dominion through which the predominant public conceptions of Egypt would later be marked:

In General Bonaparte, the republic had a citizen in whose character the soldier was but an ingredient [...] His enemies, proud of fighting with pygmies, spoke of him with contempt. He was, however, a lover of the arts, a scholar, and a statesman. Possessed of ascendancy over those with whom he was concerned, he had at his disposal the arrangements for his expedition; and he went out from France rather a Sovereign than a General. The colour of his mind was reflected in the whole armament. Learning and science were leagued with arms. He regarded that of the bayonet as the worst and least permanent of conquests. It was only by spreading civilization and assimilating manners that he hoped to retain Egypt; and, preparing to put in practice all that theory could suggest for this purpose, he invited men of knowledge and genius in every pursuit to be his companions: sensible, also, of the valuable discoveries to be made in Egypt, he prepared in like manner to bring back these to Europe.<sup>37</sup>

This view both reflects and reproduces dominant 18<sup>th</sup> century attitudes pertaining to Egypt, conquest, and Enlightenment thought. Here, conquest of Egypt is set in direct opposition to that of "pygmies," populations whose racialization sets them apart as less-worthy subjects of imperial domination. At the same time, a definite distinction is drawn between Egypt's ancient and present peoples: not "pygmies," they were nonetheless seen to require "civilization" and "manners." For its provision of such, the Expedition compensated itself with "the valuable discoveries" it ransacked at an unprecedented rate. Accordingly, the value of Egypt as a whole (and its patrimony in particular) as a trophy is

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<sup>36</sup> Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to WWI*, 32.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur Aikin, "An Account of the Invasion of Egypt." In Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt, Volume 1*, xxix.

constructed both by *distancing* it through racial and civilizational lines from other, less worthy sites of conquest, while *connecting* the Egyptian past with the French present through the ‘salvage’ of valuable knowledge and goods from an unappreciative populace.

This rationale, linking the Napoleonic project of scientific dominion with the power of public trophies to cement favourable national imaginaries, gains popularity in this era in part due to the enormous popularity of Denon’s account. There is a clear through-line that links the value of such Egyptian “discoveries” with the conquest required to obtain them; as Denon succinctly puts it, “Learning and science were leagued with arms.”<sup>38</sup> What this contributes to at this early stage is a conception of Egyptian antiquities in general and the obelisk in particular as *hard-won* trophies, the very presence of which demonstrates the merit of their possession.

A similar ideological bent can be witnessed in later travel accounts, especially those published in the buildup of excitement in France around the transport of the Luxor obelisk. One of several popular accounts of the obelisk was published in 1833 by Jacques-Joseph Champollion-Figeac, consisting of correspondences by his more famous younger brother, Jean-François Champollion, who was famed as the decipherer of the Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics and thus the father of Egyptology. In addition to his renowned work as a philologist, Jean-François Champollion – ‘*Le Jeune*’ as he was called, distinguishing him from the elder Jacques-Joseph – served as a diplomat of note during his time in Egypt. In this capacity, it was he who campaigned strongly against the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

choice of the Alexandrian obelisk in favour of the westernmost of the two obelisks that marked the entry to the Luxor Temple, which is the one we now see in Paris.

The younger Champollion's advocacy for the obelisk's acquisition would follow familiar lines, despite the passage of some thirty years from Denon's time in Egypt. Recalling the delicate subject of the French venture in Egypt, Champollion's letter to the Naval minister would promote "eternalizing the memory of the glorious triumphs of our armies during the wars of the republic," memories that evidently still occupied a fraught space in the national imagination as they "still await their consecration by public monuments."<sup>39</sup> Emphasising that "the foreigner travels through our capital without finding somewhere a single monument that recalls, even indirectly, our astonishing campaign of Egypt and the conquest of this famous country," Champollion posits the placement of such a public reminder of this failed campaign as an opportunity to reframe it as a strategic, long-term civilizational program, "in which our army has left seeds of civilization [*des semences de civilization*] that are already germinating and will develop in the future."<sup>40</sup>

To achieve this end, Champollion would argue that "No kind of monument is more appropriate [...] than one or more Egyptian obelisks, transported to the capital of France."<sup>41</sup> Notable, however, in Champollion's campaign for the Luxor obelisk is his evident concern with potential local issues related to its acquisition. For instance, while

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<sup>39</sup> Jean-François Champollion, in Champollion-Figeac, *L'obélisque de Lougсор : [Transporté à Paris ; Notice Historique, Descriptive et Archæologique Sur Ce Monument ; Avec La Figure de l'obélisque et l'interprétation de Ses Inscriptions.*

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

his description of the Alexandrian obelisk notes no impediments to his study or evident obstacles to its removal, by contrast, his initial impression of the obelisks at Luxor notes (with clear irritation) their connection to the community surrounding them:

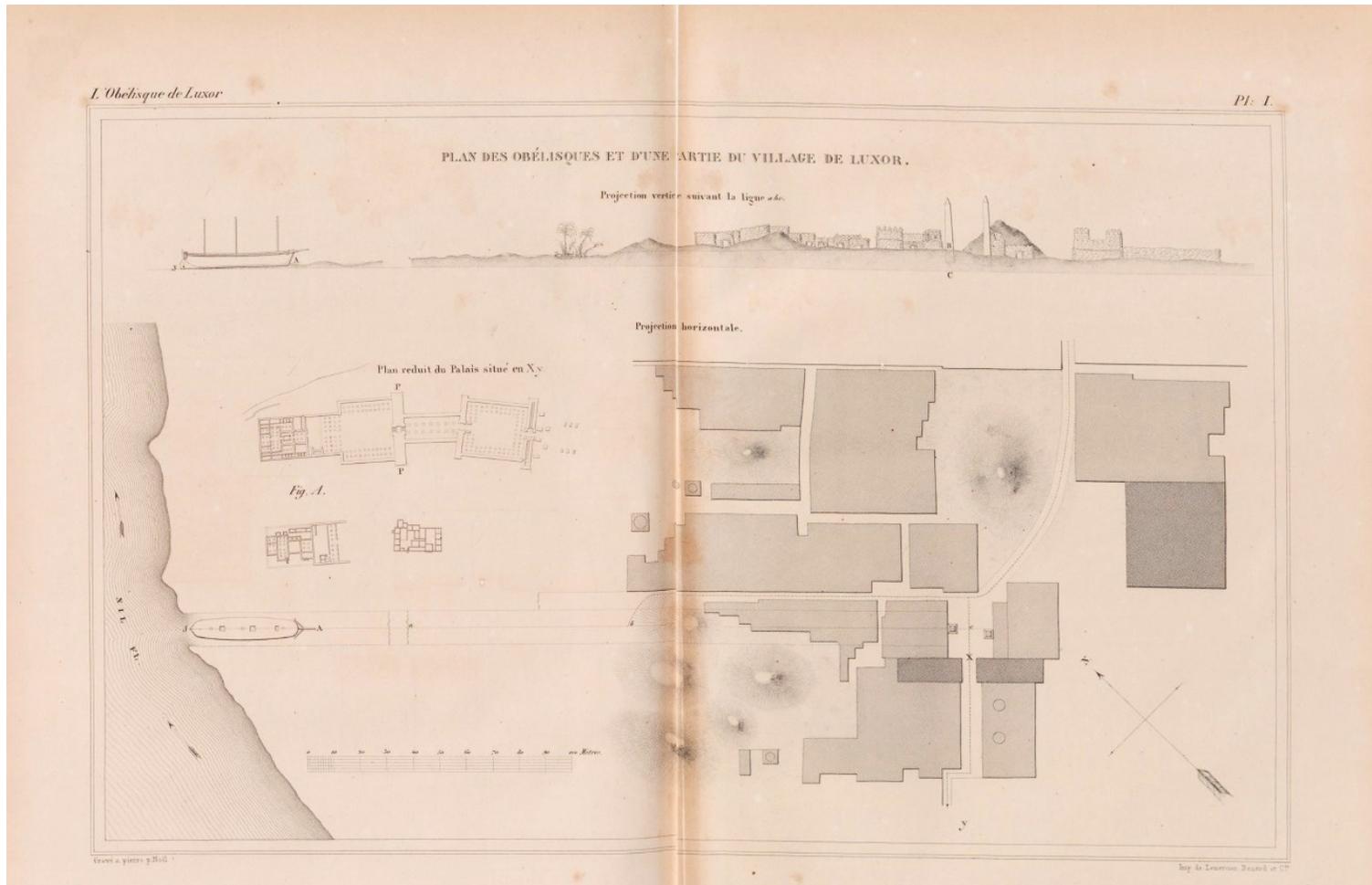
I wanted to take advantage of our boats for our work of Louqsor, because this magnificent palace – the most profane of all the monuments of Egypt, obstructed by huts of *fellahs* [peasants] which mask and disfigure its beautiful porticoes, to speak nothing of the puny house of a *bim-bachi* [Ottoman army major], perched on a platform which has been violently pierced with blows of pick to give passage to the Turk's sweepings, which fall onto a superb sanctuary carved under the reign of the son of Alexander the Great – this magnificent palace, I say, did not offer us a convenient or clean enough place to establish our household. It was therefore necessary to keep our *maasch* [large Nile boat], the *dahabié* [sail-driven passenger boat] and the small boats until the moment when our work in Louqsor was finished.<sup>42</sup>

The theme of Champollion's frustration with the habitation of the local populace in ancient sites is repeated consistently in his description of the Luxor temple and its environs.<sup>43</sup> These sites — many of which have been continuously inhabited since the Pharaonic era in which the temples were originally constructed — surrounded and overlaid the temple such that there was no clear distinction between the antique and modern (Figure 32).

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<sup>42</sup> Jean-François Champollion, *Lettres Ecrites d'Egypte et de Nubie En 1828 et 1829*, 1868, 145–46. Letter dated March 25, 1829.

<sup>43</sup> See for example his description of the colonnade (*Lettres* 176) and the temple of Medinet Habou (278 and 282).



**Figure 32: Lebas, Apollinaire. 1839. *L'obélisque de Luxor : Histoire de Sa Translation à Paris, Description Des Travaux Auxquels Il a Donné Lieu* [...]. Paris: Imprimerie et Fonderie de Fain. Pl. 1. N.B. The westernmost of the two depicted obelisks, near the location marked X at the gates of the Luxor temple, is that which was recommended by Champollion as a bequest to France. The path of the obelisk's transport to the Nile is marked by the dotted line ABC. A high-resolution scan is available via the BnF Gallica archive: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k65034333/f228.double>**

As is the case with numerous other historical sites (such as the Pantheon in Rome), this type of contemporary utilization of ancient temples was typical until the point of their ‘artifaction’; that is, their re-conceptualization as sites of tourism, preservation, and study, rather than continuous habitation.<sup>1</sup> And so while the predominant Egyptological view neatly circumscribed its disciplinary boundaries such that living Egyptians and their contributions to living traditions were neatly excised from historical relevance and the urgent call for ‘preservation’, by contrast, local conceptualizations of such sites centered less around the extraction of their historical value, and more around their capacity to sustain, mark, and protect in perhaps a more pragmatic sense. The mosque of Abu’l Haggag, for example, a still-functioning mosque in Luxor,

dominates the first court at Luxor Temple and aptly demonstrates the continuing adaption of ancient monuments to modern use. Luxor remained very much intact during the Roman Period, when the monument was incorporated within the Roman camp and devoted to the cult of the Roman emperor. Later, the temple was surrounded by churches, and by the late sixth century A.D. one had been constructed within the first court itself. Nestled within the ancient walls of the court of Ramesses II, and built on the ruins of earlier Christian basilicas, the mosque of Abu'l-Haggag *represents a tradition of continuous worship at Luxor Temple for almost thirty-five centuries*. During the festival of this modern Muslim saint, boats are paraded around the temple, perhaps an echo of the ancient procession of the barks [ritual vessels] of Amun, Mut, and Khonsu during the Festival of Opet.<sup>2</sup> [emphasis added]

This living historical continuity can be observed in many such spaces of long habitation; its specific use-case<sup>3</sup> may have changed, but sites such as Luxor never truly went out of

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the concept of artifaction, see: Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, chap. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago, *Lost Egypt: The Epigraphic Survey*, vol. III (Chicago, 1992), 3.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Use-case’ is derived here from the sense of the term as deployed in the tech field (i.e. as expanded upon by Ivar Jacobson, Ian Spence, and Brian Kerr, “Use-Case 2.0,” *Communications of the ACM* 59, no. 5 [May 1, 2016]: 61–69.), where the ways that stakeholders intend to use a technology defines what it is *for*,

use since the Dynastic era. Continuous, dynamic re-use of this kind works against the still-pervasive, atomistic view of preservation espoused by Champollion, which precludes ‘unauthorized’ use by locals (in LauraJane Smith’s sense of the term).<sup>4</sup> Preservation in the normative sense is directly tied to the degree to which the ‘heritage fabric’ is isolated from its environment;<sup>5</sup> imagined, however, as a kind of open-air museum, Luxor ‘preserved’ its antiquities not despite but *because* of their deep integration with the community that surrounded it.

Nonetheless, this conceptual disjuncture would immediately inhibit the process of knowledge-extraction attempted by Champollion, and its implications on such future efforts would quickly become all too evident. Indeed, in his first letter from Luxor in March of 1829, Champollion bemoans the presence of the local community in and around the temple, impeding his access to part of the obelisk, so that, unlike the Alexandrian obelisks that had already been cleared by the French army, here he is initially unable to document some of the engraved hieroglyphics. He complains:

Unfortunately it is impossible to obtain [copies of] the end of the east face of the right obelisk, and for the west face of the left obelisk it would have been necessary to cut down for that several earthen houses and to relocate a number of poor families of *fellahs*.<sup>6</sup>

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and by extension, what it *becomes*. Notably, the ways in which this formulation articulates community *value* intersect with the similar term ‘use value’ as coined by Riegl (1902) and deployed in heritage conservation discourses, but with perhaps a broader capacity to engage with ‘use’ as a dynamic, ever-changing quality, rather than a stable, monolithic one.

<sup>4</sup> See: Smith, *Uses of Heritage*., Chap. 5.

<sup>5</sup> See Smith, “The Discourse of Heritage,” in *Uses of Heritage*, Chapt. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Champollion, *Lettres Ecrites d’Egypte et de Nubie En 1828 et 1829*, 177. Letter dated March 25, 1829. The Arabic term *fellah* denotes a (male) farmworker.

Champollion's expedition declines to demolish the houses that obstruct the view around the obelisk, positing this choice as a humane one, borne of compassion for the "poor families of *fellahs*" inhabiting the area. More likely, the choice was at least partially a logistical and diplomatic one, taking into account the resistance they would likely face to a project of mass expulsion. This view is evidenced by Champollion's repeated subsequent assurances with regards to this precise issue. On at least two additional occasions, his official missives address the presence of the village and its inhabitants as a logistical obstacle, one worth repeated mention in his advocacy for the Luxor obelisk. In his letter dated January 4, 1830, for example, he along with the consul-general in Egypt address the minister of the Navy, reassuring him that:

It is true that it will be necessary to knock down a fairly large number [*"un assez grand nombre"*] of houses in the modern village, but these mud huts can easily be purchased at five hundred francs a dozen. So this is not a difficulty.<sup>7</sup>

Quite a specific letter in other regards (he estimates the weight of the obelisk at 400 tonnes, and the going rate for local labourers as a *quatre sous*, or one-fifth of a Franc per day), the generality with which the actual scale of this operation is described may point, perhaps, to a desire to allay a more serious concern with this issue on the Navy's part. Evidently, this reassurance did not suffice, as a second, more detailed report was requested by the Navy in September of the same year. Here, in the context of the general logistics of the proposed mission, the topic of the houses is raised again:

If it becomes necessary to knock down several [*"plusieurs"*] houses in the village, either to overturn the obelisks or to take them to the Nile, the cost of buying these

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<sup>7</sup> Champollion-Figeac, *L'obélisque de Lougsoor : [Transporté à Paris ; Notice Historique, Descriptive et Archæologique Sur Ce Monument ; Avec La Figure de l'obélisque et l'interprétation de Ses Inscriptions.*

huts, made of simple silt, will be such a small sum that it becomes almost useless to worry about it.<sup>8</sup>

Champollion employs a similar strategy as before in this correspondence: the fact that this choice of obelisk would require the demolition of a number of family residences — thirty, as was ultimately the case, a proportion of about *half the entire village*<sup>9</sup> — which occupied the space between the obelisks and the path to the Nile is acknowledged as a challenge, but one easily mitigated through a cost-benefit analysis. The solution, as Champollion sees it, is simply to reimburse the residents for the cost of their homes, which, at an estimated “five hundred francs a dozen,” would comprise only a tiny fraction of the total cost, which would likely be in the hundreds of thousands of francs.<sup>10</sup> While I will return to this point to examine it in greater depth, suffice it to say that what is notable here is the contrast between Champollion’s proclaimed ease with which this mass relocation would be undertaken, and the ultimate difficulties the actual mission would face from the locals’ steadfast refusal to give up their homes.

Setting aside the validity of Champollion’s assertions, it is evident that even at this preliminary phase, the issue of the houses was understood as a real, though perhaps minor, obstacle. Nonetheless, *this* obelisk’s capacity to represent scientific and military dominion over Egypt is seen to substantiate its “incontestable utility” to the French state.<sup>11</sup> Revealingly, however, the strategies employed in Champollion’s letters to French

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>9</sup> Justin Pascal Angelin, *Relation de La Campagne Faite Dans La Thébaïde : Pour En Rapporter l’ Obélisque Occidental De [...]* (Paris: Imprimerie d’Amédée Santin, 1833), chap. 64.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Francois Champollion in Champollion-Figeac, *L’obélisque de Louqsor*, 27.

<sup>11</sup> Champollion, *Lettres Ecrites d’Egypte et de Nubie En 1828 et 1829*, 43.

functionaries both differ from and echo those which he employs in his promotion of this cause to the Ottoman authorities of the Egyptian state. Champollion's 1829 letter to Mohammed Ali Pasha, Viceroy of Egypt, to appeal for the conservation of antiquities, speaks to these disjunctures. Emphasizing that "Europeans belonging to the most distinguished classes of society" and "the whole of learned Europe [...] bitterly deploras the wholesale destruction of a host of ancient monuments," Champollion urges the Pasha to issue a decree protecting such monuments from further destruction.<sup>12</sup> The stakes of this decree for the Egyptian state are at the forefront: such learned European travelers, with "no other desire or motive than that of knowing for themselves and contemplating the monuments of the ancient Egyptian civilization," contribute to "science, which they enrich with their observations," as well as to Egypt's coffers "by their personal expenditure, either for the works which they may carry out, or to satisfy their active curiosity, or even for the acquisition of various products of the ancient art."<sup>13</sup> Here, as before, the enemies of both scientific and economic progress are the *fellahs*, conjured here again as the primary agent of the destruction of ancient monuments:

It is urgent to issue this order so that in the future no damage be done to these tombs, whose sculptures and paintings are destroyed by the *fellahs*, either in order to house themselves and their cattle, or in order to remove small portions of the sculptures to sell them to travelers, disfiguring entire rooms for this purpose.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Champollion, 383–84.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>14</sup> Champollion, *Lettres Ecrites d'Egypte et de Nubie En 1828 et 1829*, 386.

Positing the peasant class to be motivated both by “ignorance and blind greed,”<sup>15</sup>

Champollion appeals to the Viceroy’s superior wisdom, allying himself with the administration’s intensive modernization efforts:

It is well known that these barbaric demolitions were carried out against the enlightened views and the well known intentions of His Highness, and by agents incapable of appreciating the damage that, without knowing it, they were thus causing to the country; but these monuments are nevertheless lost for good, and their loss awakens, in all the educated classes, an anxious and quite just solicitude about the future fate of the monuments that still exist.<sup>16</sup>

Drawing a distinction between unscrupulous “merchants” and “speculators” from those of “the educated classes” motivated solely by desire for contemplation (but also, the “acquisition of various products of the ancient art”), Champollion’s condemnation falls more along class lines than those of the broader geopolitical forces motivating the antiquities trade. Nonetheless, while European political and economic pressure on Egypt’s Ottoman administration is only implicitly named as a factor in such destruction, he names the excavators rather than their employees as the primary subjects of his proposed regulation:

It is in the monuments [dug and carved in the mountains] that the greatest devastations take place daily; they are committed by the *fellahs*, either for their own account, or especially for that of the antiquities merchants who hold them in their pay; I even know, without any doubt, that buildings were destroyed by these European speculators, on the hope of discovering some curious object in the foundations; but the carved or painted caves [...] are destroyed almost as soon as they were opened, by the ignorance and greed of the excavators or their employees. It is past the time to put an end to these barbaric devastations, which deprive science of monuments of a high interest, and disappoint the curiosity of the travelers, who, after so much exertion, are often left with nothing but regrets about the loss of so many curious sculptures or paintings.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 388

<sup>16</sup> Champollion, *Lettres Ecrites d’Egypte et de Nubie En 1828 et 1829*, 383.

In short, the well-understood interest of science requires, not that the excavations [*“les fouilles”*] are interrupted – since science acquires each day by these works new sureties and unforeseen enlightenments – but that one subjects the excavators [*“les fouillers”*] to regulation such that the conservation of the tombs discovered today, and in the future, is fully ensured and well guaranteed against the attacks of ignorance or blind greed.<sup>17</sup>

Notable here is the fine delineation placed between extraction and destruction; while *excavators* must be regulated, *excavations* must continue unabated. This delineation, of course, echoes Champollion’s own aims: despite his repeatedly-voiced frustration at the “disfigurement” of ancient sites, by the time he had written this letter he had already overseen the removal of a decorated wall from the tomb of Seti I despite the vocal appeals of English archaeologists,<sup>18</sup> and was in the midst of negotiating the removal of one of Egypt’s most well-preserved obelisks in Luxor, despite his own demand to the Viceroy that “no stone or brick, either decorated with sculptures or unsculpted, in the ancient constructions and monuments still existing [...] both in Egypt and in Nubia, be removed under any pretext.”<sup>19</sup>

In this light, the apparently strong words of Champollion’s letter on conservation may be somewhat tempered by the simultaneous fact of his appeals for removal permits. More generally, the call to regulate excavators without limiting excavation — to limit the destructive and merely pecuniary trade in antiquities while supporting the enlightened interests of tourists and scholars – speaks to the particular aims of Champollion’s

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ronald T. Ridley, “Champollion in the Tomb of Seti I: An Unpublished Letter,” *Chronique d’Egypte*, 1991, <https://doi.org/10.1484/j.cde.2.308853>.

<sup>19</sup> Champollion, *Lettres Ecrites d’Egypte et de Nubie En 1828 et 1829*, 384–85.

lobbying efforts in the court of Mohammed Ali, as well as his interpellation of the aims of the Ottoman court. Here, the ease with which Champollion allies himself with the Egyptian Viceroy against the nation's populace might be better understood in the context of Mohammed Ali Pasha's own political and ideological aims.

### 3.3 Orderings and re-orderings

Born in Kavala – now in modern-day Greece, then part of the Ottoman empire – as Mehmed Ali in his native Turkish tongue, Mohammed Ali only came to be known through this Arabic pronunciation after his rise to power in Egypt decades later. This rise took place at a pivotal point of political upheaval in Egypt: at the time of Napoleon's occupation, Egypt had been ruled for several centuries as a semi-autonomous province of the Ottoman empire, albeit under the auspices of the Mamluk military caste. Not only did the French occupation disrupt the centuries-long *détente* between the Mamluk and Ottoman contest for power in this politically critical region, but it disrupted the heretofore stable Franco-Ottoman alliance as well. In so doing, it shocked Istanbul into a retaliatory military response along new political lines: no longer relying on Mamluks for their long-held military support, the effort to evict Bonaparte's army was scaffolded instead by Albanian forces, and significantly, a newly-forged British alliance.<sup>20</sup>

Deployed initially as the second-in-command of a force from Kavala, Mohammed Ali rapidly rose to prominence in the Egyptian military theater by gaining allies among

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<sup>20</sup> For more on the military history of this transitional period, see: John Houghton, "The Egyptian Navy of Muhammad Ali Pasha," *Mariners Mirror* 105, no. 2 (2019): 162–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00253359.2019.1589113>.

the Albanian forces, defying his superiors among the Ottoman elites, and deftly removing the remaining Mamluks from power by positing himself as an ally of Egyptian people.<sup>21</sup> It was not only political acumen through which Mohammed Ali negotiated these alliances and betrayals, but deft financial control as well: empires are costly systems to build and maintain, and accordingly, they are often supported through steep and highly unpopular taxes. By positing himself in these early days as an opponent of a punishing tax levied on Cairo's residents by Istanbul's orders, Mohammed Ali was able to rid himself of not one but two potential claimants to Egypt's governance as sent by the Sublime Porte, strengthening his own hold on power without severing his affiliation with the empire through which he ostensibly derived his authority. But despite his control of the Egyptian *state*, his hold on the *nation* remained tenuous: with "no spoken or written knowledge of the language of this country's majority population," he remained an outsider, and, having already been nearly deposed by mass public protests in Cairo, quelling such local uprisings would be a critical focal point of his efforts to establish himself and his lineage through dynastic rule.<sup>22</sup>

These negotiations in the first years of Mohammed Ali's rise to power echo the strategy his administration would employ throughout his nearly fifty-year reign,

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<sup>21</sup> Khaled Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt*, 2009, 23.

<sup>22</sup> Fahmy, 26–29.

The question of the extent to which Mohammed Ali's administration allied itself more strongly with Istanbul or Cairo remains historically open-ended. Arguing more strongly for Mohammed Ali's self-characterized Egyptianness are historians such as Khaled Fahmy (see above, and also *All the Pasha's Men* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2002).). For works arguing more in favour of his predominant Ottomanness, see works such as those by Alan Mikhail (i.e. "Labor and Environment in Egypt since 1500," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 85, no. 5 (2014): 10–32, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547913000446>; *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt*, 2013.) and Zeinab Abul-Magd (*Imagined Empires: A History of Revolt in Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013).).

especially with regards to Egyptian antiquities. In this domain, Mohammed Ali's self-styled closeness to the Egyptian populace would wane. As Labib Habachi notes, "It was not difficult for [France and England] to gain permission to remove the obelisks, for Mohammed Ali [...] clearly desired to satisfy their demands even if it meant stripping Egypt of nearly all its major remaining obelisks."<sup>23</sup> Concerning himself primarily with their capacity to cement political alliances, such highly-prized antiquities as the few obelisks remaining in Egypt could be bestowed, in Mohammed Ali's view, as highly-prized assurances of mutual international support. Most literally, this can be seen in the fact that an Alexandrian obelisk was bestowed to the British government in exchange for a warship, a corvette named the *Africa*.<sup>24</sup>

Further distancing him from the Egyptian populace was, as has been noted, an increasingly harsh system of economic control. This took multiple forms, from a dramatic increase in the use of forced labour (also known as the *corvée*) and conscription, to punishingly high tax rates on the peasant class. These strategies were central to the rapid rate with which social, economic, and political reforms of this period (also known as the *tanzimat* or 'reorganizations') took place, ones that have contributed to the typically hagiographic portrayal of Mohammed Ali as 'The Founder of Modern Egypt.'<sup>25</sup> Here too, antiquities played a critical role, functioning *literally* as the building blocks of capitalist

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<sup>23</sup> Habachi, *The Obelisks of Egypt: Skyscrapers of the Past*, 153.

<sup>24</sup> Erik Iversen, *Obelisks in Exile: Volume II: The Obelisks of Istanbul and England*, 1968, 101–2.

<sup>25</sup> Works representing this view include Henry Dodwell, *The Founder of Modern Egypt: A Study of Muhammad 'Ali*, 2nd ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Shafik Ghorbal, *Muhammad 'Ali Al-Kabir* (Cairo: Hindawi, 2014). For an additional challenge to this hypothesis, see: Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, 1984, chap. 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/217987>.

economy: as David Jeffreys notes, the unprecedented scale and speed of these operations required readily accessible sources of quarried stone, for which Egypt's largest and most well-preserved temples were exploited.<sup>26</sup> Despite the strategic ideological alliance represented by Champollion in his campaign to obtain the obelisk, Mohammed Ali's *tanzimat* could in fact be seen as one of the most immediate, systemic threats to the preservation of antiquities — not *despite* but *because* of his commitment to modernization.<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, this view did not prevail in the early historiographies of this era. This is partially the result of the intentional Ottomanization of Mohammed Ali's regime, which conducted all its courtly business in Turkish rather than Arabic, the prevailing language of the Egyptian populace, thereby imposing a linguistic obstacle upon contemporary and future historians. It is due as well to the limited accessibility and the internal censorship of the official Ottoman records of this era, which were largely assembled by Mohammed Ali's heirs, and made available only very selectively.<sup>28</sup> For these reasons, the brutality with which these efforts were enforced has gone largely

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<sup>26</sup> David Jeffreys, ed., *Views of Ancient Egypt since Napoleon Bonaparte*, 2003, chap. 3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>. Additional observations on this point can be found in Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to WWI*, chap. 55.

<sup>27</sup> Further discussions on Mohammed Ali Pashas's politico-economic utilizations of Pharaonic antiquities can be found in: Caroline Gaultier-Kurhan, *Franco-Egyptian Relations in the Reign of Mohammed Ali 1805-1849*, 2015. and Aḥmad Shawkī, *Egyptian Antiquities Laws and Regulations, from the Era of Mohammed Ali to the July 1952 Revolution* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub, 2018)., works by Khaled Fahmy such as *All the Pasha's Men*, Mikhail's work on political economy such as *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt*, and Wendy Doyon's forthcoming work, "Empire of Dust : Egyptian Archaeology and Archaeological Labor in Nineteenth-Century Egypt" (2021).

<sup>28</sup> Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt*, chaps. 116–117. This state censorship of historical archives largely continues to this day, as Pascale Ghazaleh observes in "Past Imperfect, Future Tense. Writing People's Histories in the Middle East Today," 2019.

unremarked upon in English- and French-language historiographies until the last twenty years or so.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the recent work by Fahmy and Abul-Magd to rethink these histories, Mikhail documents the scope of this violence in the Mohammed Ali Pasha's campaign for social, economic, and environmental control:

Not only was the Mahmüdiyya the largest canal building project ever undertaken in Egypt to that point, but it was also one of the most deadly. Estimates for the canal's corvée labor range between 315,000 and 360,000 individuals. To put this number in perspective, consider that the population of Cairo in 1821 was 218,560 and that of Egypt as a whole was around 4.5 million in 1800 and 5 million in 1830. Thus more men than the total population of Cairo were forcibly moved to work on the Mahmüdiyya Canal. Perhaps more shockingly, nearly a third of these workers — 100,000 people — died during the canal's construction. This was two percent of Egypt's overall population. The equivalent number of relative fatalities in the United States today would be 6 million people.<sup>30</sup>

By reading against the grain of the official Ottoman archives, recent challenges such as those by Mikhail to Mohammed Ali's dominant historiography have accounted both for the ways in which the Ottoman *tanzimat* were imposed on an unruly nation, and the ways in which the Egyptian populace organized and rebelled. Fahmy and Abul-Magd, for example, describe some of the diverse efforts employed by the populace to escape and defy these harsh measures, positing such "rebellious operations against elite figures" as "an integral part of subaltern resistance."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For more on these archival issues see: Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt*, chap. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Mikhail, "Labor and Environment in Egypt since 1500," 22.

<sup>31</sup> Abul-Magd, *Imagined Empires: A History of Revolt in Egypt*, 23.

These efforts were particularly concentrated in Qena, the province of Upper Egypt that included Luxor. As “a major center of commercial agriculture,”<sup>32</sup> Qena became a vital economic base from which Mohammed Ali could derive tax-based revenues to support his expansionist efforts. Accordingly, the efforts to extract and maintain this income were notably and exceedingly violent. Abd el-Rahman el-Jabarti, a contemporaneous historian, remarks on the “intense torture” with which tax revenues were extracted from those who simply did not have them: in addition to beatings and hangings and humiliations, he notes as well that his forces “tied a man stretched along a wooden plank, held at its ends by men, who turned him over a lit fire like a *kebab*.”<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, both despite and because of this ever-present threat of violence, between the years 1820 and 1824 “a series of unprecedented massive revolts” were organized in Qena with the aim of toppling the Ottoman imperial structure.<sup>34</sup> With about 40,000 participants in a region with a population of about 750,000, these protests posed as great a threat to Mohammed Ali’s efforts at state centralization as any foreign army. A typically swift and decisive military response was thus meted out, decimating the mutineers and resulting in the deaths of more than 3000 villagers.<sup>35</sup>

But while this military response crushed the most overt efforts to destabilize the regime, it hardly quelled the underlying rebellion — in fact, it further motivated it, albeit in altered forms. Having forcibly conscripted soldiers from the very villages he was

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 31

<sup>33</sup> Abd Al-Rahman Al-Jabarti, *Aja'ib Al-Athar* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Usra, 2003), 7:292.

<sup>34</sup> Abul-Magd, *Imagined Empires: A History of Revolt in Egypt*, 16.

<sup>35</sup> Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt*, 67.

attacking, some 700 of Mohammed Ali's troops mutinied and joined the rebels.<sup>36</sup> More generally, the means of rebellion took on more subtle forms that operated within and against the new and strictly centralized bureaucracy. These forms centered more around refusal, avoidance, and evasion, means through which the peasant class could deny the administration access to its wealth and labour without arms and with some measure of plausible deniability. These strategies took multiple forms: one was for whole communities "to try to leave their villages as soon as they heard of the impending visit of a conscription gang," or to desert the conscript army in droves.<sup>37</sup> Fahmy notes the effectiveness of this tactic, estimating that "for every two conscripts, one soldier had managed to escape."<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, potential conscripts would "maim themselves deliberately so as to be declared medically unfit for service" by "chopping off the index finger, pulling the front teeth and/or putting rat poison in one's eye so as to blind oneself hopefully only temporarily."<sup>39</sup> Such resistance efforts extended beyond the evasion of conscription, too: prison records note the heavy penalties for peasants uprooting their fields of cotton (mandated by the state and destined for export) to replace them with maize (which they could use for their own subsistence and that of their starving communities), or, in what appears as a strikingly typical Egyptian strategy, simply pretending not to understand clear official orders.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men*, 95.

<sup>37</sup> Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt*, 67–68.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>39</sup> Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men*, 101–2.

<sup>40</sup> Fahmy, 136.

These records, garnered from resistant readings of Egypt's Ottoman archives, reveal a different perspective of Mohammed Ali's administration from that of older historiographies such as those of Dodwell, which frame Mohammed Ali as a man who "desired freedom in order that a new and better form of administration might be framed," one who, though "capable of acts of cruelty [...] was not a cruel man."<sup>41</sup> In fact, the very processes of modernization for which Mohammed Ali has been so lauded were in fact foundational to his administration's violence, as they deeply relied upon the alienation of the populace from the land and their own labour, commodifying heretofore communal resources and extracting them at a brutal speed and scale. As Mikhail observes,

Those projects were crucial steps in the transformation of the organization of Egyptian labor from the intimate locality that so characterized it at the end of the seventeenth century to the violence that overwhelmed it at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup>

As Fahmy and Abul-Magd have argued, this violence and the rebellion and resistance through which it was countered can be understood as a significant component of the relationship between Ottoman imperial administration and the Egyptian populace, particularly in the province of Qena. As a result, these political negotiations inform the local context through which the resistance and contestation for the Luxor obelisk took place, as we will see later.

These negotiations inform as well the context in which Champollion wrote his oft-cited letter to Mohammed Ali. While it may seem imprudent for a foreign diplomat – a representative of a nation so recently unburdened of its colonial control – to readily ally

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<sup>41</sup> Dodwell, *The Founder of Modern Egypt: A Study of Muhammad 'Ali*, 263–64.

<sup>42</sup> Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt*, 194.

himself with a governor while denigrating the nation's populace, in fact, this rhetoric would have deftly echoed that which Champollion observed in his time in Egypt. Having witnessed firsthand the newly-centralized state's unyielding administration of its peasantry,<sup>43</sup> there is good reason to believe that he would have understood the political value of scapegoating the *fellahs* despite his own cognizance that in at least a few significant and recent cases, temples had in fact been wholly destroyed by the government's orders.<sup>44</sup> Thus, when Champollion pleads to Mohammed Ali from a position of apparently shared regard for those "sculptures and paintings ... destroyed by the *fellahs*, either in order to house themselves and their cattle, or in order to remove small portions of the sculptures to sell them to travelers,"<sup>45</sup> he wittingly or unwittingly interpellates to his ends a conception of an unruly populace, intransigent in their unwillingness to cede to the regent that which is his rightful due, taking for their own use that from which the state could otherwise benefit. And so, while the regulations ultimately proposed by Champollion's are in fact directed more towards foreign excavators rather than their local employees, the rhetoric used by Champollion in fact capitalizes more on Mohammed Ali's domestic, not foreign policy. Indeed, this view is supported by fact that his letter only mentions the "*fouilleurs*" themselves at all in its very conclusion, despite its references to the destructive capacity of the *fellahs* throughout **(Appendix 2)**.

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<sup>43</sup> See for example the letter dated 11 September, 1829 in Champollion, *Lettres Ecrites d'Egypte et de Nubie En 1828 et 1829*, 111.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 620, dated 6 July, 1829.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

Beyond the ways that it was utilized to negotiate the acquisition of the obelisk, this construction of a shared French-Ottoman ideological allyship with regards to antiquities is startling in its contradiction to public conceptions in France of the obelisk as being *hard-won*, a trophy of blood and military conquest rather than ink and diplomatic courtesy. In addition to the technical challenge of its physical transport — a domain which is itself deeply tied to conceptions of dominion and control — it is consistently constructed as a symbol of the great French conquest of Egypt, a civilizational triumph as much as a military one. In the foreword to his younger brother’s published letters, Champollion-Figeac makes evident the obelisk’s intended network of historical, political, and affective associations:

And will it not come to the mind or to the heart of any of the persons whose voice has some authority in the councils of the prince or in those of the nation, that this stone can be animated by illustrious memories, consecrated by a religious and national feeling to the memory of the children of France who died for her glory in this same desert from which the obelisk has just been snatched [*arraché*]? Everyone would understand very clearly this pious resolution of France which, at the price of its blood, having delivered from a mortal oppression and raised forever the ancient fame of Egypt, would consecrate its relics on the banks of the Seine to the spirits of its heroes abandoned on the banks of the Nile?

I propose [...] that, by law, the obelisk be raised in memory of the French expedition to Egypt, the most memorable undertaking of modern times, by its object, its means [...] and by its many results, some of which are already so useful to the prosperity of France, to the return of the peoples of the Levant to civilization, and others of such a high interest for the veracity of the annals of human philosophy.<sup>46</sup>

For Champollion, the obelisk is not only a testament to victories past, but present, too: having been “snatched” (*arraché*) from the same theatre of war as that which claimed so

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<sup>46</sup> Champollion-Figeac, *L’obélisque de Lougсор : [Transporté à Paris ; Notice Historique, Descriptive et Archæologique Sur Ce Monument ; Avec La Figure de l’obélisque et l’interprétation de Ses Inscriptions.*

many French lives in the imperial mission, the very process of its transport carries with it an imprint of that sacrifice which lends it its present symbolic potency. Champollion-Figeac's use of *arraché* with regards to the obelisk's transport is especially striking here.

The past tense of *arracher*, it implies a measure of force: stemming from the Latin *eradicare* from which 'eradicate' also derives, it carries with it as well an etymological connotation from *radix* of pulling up a plant by its roots.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, it carries with it as well the connotation of extraction, deracination, dislocation, and 'uprooting' in a more general sense. This implication of force is evident in the term's use in these 19<sup>th</sup> century texts: for example, in phraseology nearly identical to that which Champollion the Younger uses in his appendix on Egyptian history to Mohammed Ali Pasha, Saint-Maur explains that "After having wrested [*arraché*] absolute power from the hands of the Barbarians, the Pharaohs had kept it in all its extent."<sup>48</sup>

This implication of force is typical of the obelisk's 19<sup>th</sup>-century representations,<sup>49</sup> yet it stands in stark contrast with more contemporary discussions which emphasize, conversely, a much more genial, diplomatic relation. Ghali, for example, posits it in terms quite opposite to those of Champollion-Figeac, arguing that "What the war did not succeed in wresting away, friendship willingly granted [*Ce que la guerre n'a pas réussi à*

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<sup>47</sup> See: Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, "ARRACHER, Verbe Trans.," CNRTL, 2012, <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/arracher.>, Ghali, *Vivant Denon Ou La Conquête Du Bonheur*, XXIII.

<sup>48</sup> Saint-Maur, *Voyage Du Luxor En Egypte*, 244. Compare here with Champollion, *Lettres Ecrites d'Egypte et de Nubie En 1828 et 1829*, 367.

<sup>49</sup> It is echoed, for example, by Lebas, who recounts that "The Parisian population followed with a lively interest the meticulous operations of the unloading and the installation of this monolith, visited with a curious solicitude [for] the ship which transported it, and was moved at the thought of work, of fatigues and real dangers which were necessary to overcome to tear away [*arracher*] this admirable monument from the sands of the Thebaid, and to bring it until the banks of the Seine." (12)

*arracher, l'amitié l'a volontiers accordé..]*"<sup>50</sup> However, those involved most directly in the decision to transport the obelisk represent it *precisely* as a symbol of military conquest. We see here that the elder Champollion, championing his younger brother's project following his early demise, makes use of poetic, martial imagery to repackage the obelisk as a trophy of war won by France "at the price of its blood." Such a trophy would embody not only the grand civilizational goal of "[returning...] the peoples of the Levant to civilization,' but also, by holding as relics do in the Catholic tradition some portion of "the spirits of its heroes" which would otherwise lay "abandoned on the banks of the Nile."<sup>51</sup> This imagery is echoed in other publications at this time when the French public interest in the obelisk was at its peak. An 1836 pamphlet written in the voice of the obelisk itself attaches the memory of its removal with that of the French ousting of the Mamelukes, an event that it describes with delight as having roused it from "*une tristesse mortelle*."<sup>52</sup> This conception is echoed by the most prominent members of the mission for the obelisk's transport: Apollinaire Lebas, the chief engineer, opens his account by attributing the entire project to the Napoleonic mission:

Napoleon is credited with the first idea of having one of the obelisks of Alexandria transported to France. If the great man did not carry out this project, he must have conceived it. After having carried our victorious arms to the homeland of the Pharaohs, the victor of Egypt [...] ought indeed to have made it a point of honor to endow the country with a similar trophy, and to leave behind him an irrefutable witness to our astonishing campaign of 1799.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ghali, *Vivant Denon Ou La Conquête Du Bonheur*, XXII.

<sup>51</sup> Figeac, IX-X.

<sup>52</sup> *Mémoires de l'obélisque de Louqsor, Écrits Par Lui-Même et Dédiés Aux Parisiens* (Paris: Beaulé et Jubin, 1836), 9.

<sup>53</sup> Lebas, *L'obélisque de Luxor : Histoire de Sa Translation à Paris, Description Des Travaux Auxquels Il a Donn  Lieu [...]*, 11.

Like Rome before it, French possession of obelisks becomes a testament to defeated foes, “immortal monuments of its victories and the only remains of its conquests.”<sup>54</sup> The overarching merit of the achievement is bolstered not only by such conquests of the past but the present, too: as described by Raymond de Verninac Saint-Maur, the naval captain of the operation, who recounts his narrative as a

journey, whose solution of continuity is due entirely to obstacles in the midst of which neither will nor knowledge had any power, but which were overcome by the resigned patience of one hundred and twenty Frenchmen, jealous of endowing their country with a new trophy of its ancient victories.<sup>55</sup>

Responding perhaps to contemporaries who criticized the obelisk’s isolation and its lack of historical context in Paris,<sup>56</sup> these authors worked to consistently associate its acquisition with the nobility, hardship, and sacrifice of the French conquest of Egypt. The affective tenor of these associations would perhaps be dimmed somewhat by the particular circumstances of its acquisition: rarely-mentioned in the writings of that era is Mohammed Ali Pasha’s own role in its bequest, which required, as it seems from Champollion’s letters, little more than a polite request. As Susan Sorek notes, “the Pasha’s lack of interest in the history and monuments of his country, coupled with his eagerness to gratify all foreigners, meant that it was unlikely that he would object.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Saint-Maur, *Voyage Du Luxor En Egypte*, 4–5.

<sup>56</sup> For example, as in the anonymous pamphlet whose author complains:

“I know nothing sadder and more insignificant than these obelisks, which, in Rome, in St. Peter’s Square and opposite St. Mary Major, rise, surmounted by a cross, in the middle of a paved square [...] As for the isolation [of the obelisk in the Place de la Concorde,] it is complete: there the obelisk does not have a hold on anything; it rises alone on a bare and immense square, it is thinned out itself and shrunken: because it is by comparison only that you could appreciate its height and its force, and where there is no comparison, there is no judgment.” *L’Obélisque de Luxor Au Terre-Plein Du Pont-Neuf. La Statue d’Henri IV à La Place de La Fontaine Desaix* (Paris: Imprimerie de C.L.F. Panckoucke, 1833), 2.

<sup>57</sup> Sorek, *The Emperors’ Needles : Egyptian Obelisks and Rome*, 118.

Indeed, despite deteriorating relations between Mohammed Ali's administration and that of France, largely "it was taken for granted that no objections would be raised on his part."<sup>58</sup> If, therefore, the very status of the obelisk as a trophy hinged so deeply on the conquest through which it was won, what actual contest for power underlay this assessment? To what was Saint-Maur referring when he declared his triumph over "obstacles in the midst of which neither will nor knowledge had any power," ones requiring the "resigned patience of one hundred and twenty Frenchmen, jealous of endowing their country with a new trophy of its ancient victories"? From what resistance, precisely, was the obelisk "snatched," as Champollion-Figeac describes it?

I argue that in fact an under-examined constituent of narrative of the obelisk's transport – an event that has been the subject of intense interest for now close to two centuries – is the local resistance to the project. Looking to accounts by Lebas and Saint-Maur, I will consider the ways that this resistance affected the expedition and contributed as a result to the way the obelisk has henceforth been understood, both in Egypt and in France. Reading against the grain of these texts, the implicit networks of power, coercion, and agency that lay within rise to the surface, re-conceptualizing the obelisk as a site of heretofore little-acknowledged world-building potential.

### **3.4 "This famous scene of the sale of the houses"**

Departing from Toulouse in the winter of 1831, the specially-designed ship, appropriately named the *Luxor*, sailed from Toulon towards Alexandria. There, it was

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<sup>58</sup> Habachi, *The Obelisks of Egypt: Skyscrapers of the Past*, 156–57.

planned to navigate southwards during the Nile's flooding season, landing in Luxor in Egypt's south before the end of the season to transport the obelisk onboard the ship, then sailing back to France with its heavy load when the waters rose once more. At the head of this dangerous naval operation was Raymond de Verninac Saint-Maur, recommended for the position for having previously brought back Champollion the younger and his compatriots from their Egyptian expedition not long before. Overseeing the engineering operations was Apollinaire Lebas, a military engineer whose responsibilities included logistics as well as the bureaucratic and diplomatic functions of the operation. Also serving as the mission's public face, Lebas corresponded with the project's French funders, as well as with Jean-Francois Mimaut, the French consul-general in Alexandria.

Armed with a budget of approximately 300,000 francs and a host of correspondence from the French Naval ministry, the court of Mohammed Ali, and those initially written by Champollion proposing the plan for the Luxor obelisk's removal, the expedition's heads were provided with a wide berth to carry operations out as they saw fit. Assisting them on their arrival in Cairo was Joussouf, an "old French Mameluk" of "imperturbable phlegm," he served as interpreter in more ways than one: most literally, he translated between Arabic, French, and likely Turkish. Additionally, he served as an interpreter of broader cultural mores: mollifying an impatient Lebas, Joussouf encourages him to take time to enjoy the local sights as his planned meeting with the director of navigation would, as per the Egyptian custom of endless delays, likely not take place

until sometime in the afternoon at the earliest.<sup>59</sup> Finally and perhaps most importantly, Joussof served in a diplomatic capacity as the official mouthpiece of Mohammed Ali's court, communicating the governor's desires to the directors of the French operation, acting more broadly as a direct link between the authorities in Egypt and the proceedings of the operation.<sup>60</sup>

In this dual role, Lebas and Saint-Maur's views of Joussof were mixed: Lebas, for one, largely seems to trust his perspective, directly quoting his assessments of events and positing them to be credible overall. Saint-Maur, by contrast, has little good to say about him. Finding him to be "tiresome by dint of his attention" and devoted to Mohammed Ali "to the point of fanaticism," this frustration would reach its peak in the situation of the sale of the houses, where he remarks:

It is in these circumstances that a good interpreter is useful. Ours, to whom a long habit, much more than his apostasy, had made him forget his origin, was never among our interests. The Consul General had given him to us like a pearl picked up in the streets of Cairo. Nothing in him justified this good opinion.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, among the named actors is Ibrahim, an interpreter with a less ambiguous role: dispatched by the Ottoman governor of Upper Egypt, his role was simply to resolve the crisis in Luxor — in Lebas' words, "*à la turque*, which is to say through the use of the *courbache*," or the long whip.<sup>62</sup> In this sense, the two interpreters served broader

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<sup>59</sup> Lebas, *L'obélisque de Luxor : Histoire de Sa Translation à Paris, Description Des Travaux Auxquels Il a Donné Lieu [...]*, chap. 32.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 20. It is Joussof, for example, who communicated Mohammed Ali Pasha's official approval of the obelisk's removal, adding in the same correspondence "I am flattered to be the interpreter of the wishes of my prince on this occasion, and I beg your excellence to accept the assurance of my very distinguished consideration."

<sup>61</sup> Saint-Maur, *Voyage Du Luxor En Egypte*, chaps. 64, 139.

<sup>62</sup> Lebas, *L'obélisque de Luxor : Histoire de Sa Translation à Paris, Description Des Travaux Auxquels Il a Donné Lieu [...]*, chap. 47.

diplomatic ends as well as more literal interpretive ones: while Joussof mediated the relationship between the Ottoman court and the French, Ibrahim mediated that between tenuously-Ottoman-controlled Upper Egypt and the Egyptian population.

How did the transport of the obelisk come to the use of the *courbache*? For Saint-Maur, the critical incident in fact took place earlier in the expedition, on Lebas' journey down to Luxor ahead of the ship. This voyage had "been marked only by one single accident, in which he was almost lost along with Messrs. Jaures, first class student, Pons, surgeon, and Joussof-Cachef."<sup>63</sup> For Lebas and Saint-Maur both, this journey to and from Luxor spoke not only to the direct aims of their mission, but to a broader French ethnographic mission of Egypt's Orientalization, the production of knowledge that supported and entrenched the existing geopolitical relation between the two states. Saint-Maur observes, for example, that

Like us, M. Lebas had seen the present misery of Egypt, and the remains of her past greatness. He had compared the mud of modern constructions to the rocky quarters which enter the ancient buildings, and which seem to doom them to immortality in spite of the ravages of man and time. Oppressed by the painful feeling of present misfortunes, he would have liked to quickly cross the road from Rosetta to Thebes; but, delayed in his course by the slow march of his flotilla and the ill-will of the *Reys*, who found their profit in saving time, he arrived at Luxor only on July 11, thirty-five days before the ship.<sup>64</sup>

Several points emerge here: first is the assessment of present Egypt's "misery" with respect to its ancient greatness, a perspective shared in Saint-Maur and Lebas' accounts (although it is articulated in stronger terms by Saint-Maur), as well as the broad disciplinary consensus of the Egyptological profession at this time. Such an assessment

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<sup>63</sup> Saint-Maur, *Voyage Du Luxor En Egypte*, chap. 137.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

is, as has been noted, hardly value-neutral: within it is the implicit justification for imperial control, put forth as a boon to the Egyptian nation. Second is the related and consistent observation of deep and fundamentally Arab greed; here, responsibility for the delays (despite the noted nautical dangers of this route) are attributed to the *Reys* – the Arab heads of manual labour – whose own profit motivation is posited to have overshadowed the imperative for haste. Finally and most practically is Saint-Maur's assessment of the project's status up until the arrival in Luxor: that is, of the delays that began from nearly the start of their journey, threatening a timeline bound firmly by the Nile's annual pattern of rise and fall, upon which the *Luxor* depended for its safe travel. This urgency would affect the subsequent negotiations with the local community, which used deferment, delay, and circumvention as a significant point of bargaining leverage.

Arriving in Luxor, Lebas immediately set to work on overseeing preparations for the difficult task of the obelisk's transport. From the earliest of these interactions, a clear relation is established between the members of the French expedition and that of the local population, mediated through the obelisk as a point of contention. As Lebas observes, this relation is underscored by an Egyptian cognizance of the intertwined aims of Egyptology and the European colonial presence in Egypt:

The view of our ship waving the French colours and the hope of being provided with a few *paras* by the Europeans brought to the beach a party of inhabitants of Karnak and Luxor. There, like in all of Egypt, we were assailed by a crowd of the poor, requesting *bacchis* (alms); after these cries of misery, [...] the Arabs, encouraged by the donation of some cash, inquired with our interpreter about the goal of our voyage.

The idea of felling an obelisk and transporting it on a ship from France seemed to them so bizarre, so unreasonable that, despite the assertions of our interpreter, they persisted in assuming that we had other intentions. To them, we had come to

the *Saïd* [Upper Egypt] to explore the lands, to survey the spirit of the people, (*sonder l'esprit du peuple*), returning later *en force* to seize the country.<sup>65</sup>

Lebas dismisses this view to be a paranoid one, despite evidence to the contrary; indeed, his own avowed nostalgia for the Napoleonic conquest speaks to this expedition's aim to recapture a modicum of its associated glory.<sup>66</sup> However, what this initial meeting establishes the underlying relation between the French and Egyptian forces through which subsequent interactions would be mediated. The imbalance of wealth and power is not enough to silence the obvious suspicion with which the populace of Luxor seemed to regard the expedition's goals, seeing with alacrity the ways in which archaeological and military interests were seen to be intertwined, making this view known through Joussof to Lebas.

For Lebas, this incident further cements his view of French scientific reason in the face of Oriental backwardness, reiterating as well a view of the basic underlying greed of the Egyptian population, as consistently repeated by him and Saint-Maur both. These convictions would guide the expedition's subsequent proceedings, underscoring Lebas and Saint-Maur's surprise when they failed to predict the actual response to their demands almost as soon as work on felling the obelisk. As Lebas describes it,

The day after our arrival in Luxor, the interpreter had gathered some *fellahs* who in the meantime had been working to clear the foot of the obelisk, whose shaft was partly buried in the sand [...] This work and the subsequent operations required the prior demolition of more than thirty houses, or to put it more accurately, thirty bad huts. However wretched they were, the sight of gold, usually so powerful on the Arabs, could not induce them to sell; I did not know

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<sup>65</sup> Lebas, *L'obélisque de Luxor : Histoire de Sa Translation à Paris, Description Des Travaux Auxquels Il a Donn   Lieu [...]*, chaps. 44–45.

<sup>66</sup> See for example Lebas' reminiscences at the inscription left by Bonaparte's forces in Nubia, *Ibid.* 105.

then that they were trying to gain time, in order to find ways of removing, during the night and without the knowledge of the Turks, the foodstuffs which they are accustomed to steal in the fields at harvest time.

Informed of these difficulties by a dromedary courier carrying a detailed report, the governor of Saïd dispatched to Luxor his interpreter Ibrahim and the *cawas-bachi* [Pasha's officer], with formal orders to carry out at once all that I would ask. These, having arrived at Thebes, wanted to end the discussion *à la turque*, that is to say by using the *courbache*. I formally opposed it; it was agreed that a commission presided over by the *nazher* [overseer] and composed of the *cadi* [judge], the head of the village, the *cawas-bachi* and the two interpreters, would settle the indemnities to be granted to the owners. This commission met on July 25, 1831.<sup>67</sup>

Several points may be surmised from this initial description: first is the implicit temporal relation between the obelisk and the land. Luxor's surrounding farmland, which until only a generation before had been largely managed under the local control rather than that of the centralized Ottoman state bureaucracy, still functioned by the Nile's inexorable annual pattern of rise and fall. This pattern dictated the dates when crops would be reaped and sown, but also, it dictated a deadline after which gleaners could no longer surreptitiously make use of the residual crops. Furthermore, this same pattern dictated the temporal constraints of the expedition itself, which, due to the massive weight of the ship's load, hemmed its possible return dates only within the period when the Nile was at its highest. Having already been delayed by the earlier accident, speed was critical at this point — thus, it was not only the villagers who “were trying to gain time.” Rather, both parties' interests seem deeply bound up with their respective time-scales, so much so to the villagers that remuneration holds little sway; this fact seems to deeply destabilize the strategy Lebas and Saint-Maur intended to use to navigate the issue

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<sup>67</sup> Lebas, 46-47.

of the demolition of the houses, the success of which Champollion had repeatedly assured. Offers of money, even large sums of it, seemed to have little effect, much to the frustration of both heads of the expedition. What followed was a drawn-out proceeding, helmed by the families whose homes were in jeopardy, utilizing the mechanics of state bureaucracy to collectively communicate their more general grievances about the planned demolition:

In support of their demands, the Arabs presented a survey of the houses to be demolished, followed by an estimate amounting to more than ten times the real value. At Ibrahim's remarks, all those present seemed strongly affected; the youngest complained that they were being expelled from their family home [*“toit paternal”*] without being given the time or the means to build another house. The older ones complained in a pleading tone that they were wrongly supposed to have *felous* (money), that they had no other resources to live on than their little pigeon coop. The eldest [...] kept a dull silence, but his contracted lips, his hand convulsively clutching the tip of his foot (he was sitting in the oriental style), revealed the lively agitation to which he was prey [...] A poor blind woman covered with rags humbly asked for two *thalaris* for any indemnity. Her accent, her calmness, testified to her sincerity; I immediately gave her three times the amount she asked for, with a promise to replace her mud hut with a brick house. Quite the opposite of what might have been expected, this act of humanity produced a very bad effect. The Arabs persisted more than ever in their exaggerated claims, and this time they backed them up with the valuation of the poor blind woman's home.<sup>68</sup>

Insisting on the creation of this commission to justly mediate the issue, the homeowners utilized the structure of the *majlis*, or council, to settle the conflict.<sup>69</sup> Wavering somewhat from his earlier view that the basic motivation at hand was that of the fundamental need for access to harvest, Lebas posits these expressions of fear, anxiety, and grief as cynical

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<sup>68</sup> Lebas, 47.

<sup>69</sup> For more on the role of the *majlis* in Ottoman-era Egypt, see: Rudolph Peters, “Islamic and Secular Criminal Law in Nineteenth Century Egypt: The Role and Function of the Qadi,” *Islamic Law and Society* 4, no. 1 (1997): 70–90.

performances for still-higher sums in a protracted, circular dispute. Saint-Maur, for his part, identifies that the time taken up by this dispute was a critical factor in its ultimate outcome, contending, however, that this was merely a haggling tactic, an attempt to extract a higher price due to the expedition's time constraints:

Three hundred other *fellahs* had cleared the foot of the obelisk of about thirty houses, paid 4,000 fr. This price was enormous for the country, but it was justified by the urgent need to act immediately, and even more so by the inexperience of the first moments. It is in these circumstances that a good interpreter is useful. Ours, to whom a long habit, much more than his apostasy, had made him forget his origin, was never in our interests. The Consul General had given him to us as a pearl picked up in the streets of Cairo. Nothing in him justified this good opinion.<sup>70</sup>

Saint-Maur's conceptualizations of success and failure here are instructive of the lens through which he and Lebas approached this negotiation. Regardless of the evidence presented against their presumption of Arab greed, the incompatibility of the French offer with the Egyptians' desires seems bound by epistemological demands of the expedition's project, which required the production of a fully Orientalized subject population. The homeowners' evident desperation, posited earlier as evidence of the cruelty of the Ottoman regime, is conveyed here as evidence of underhanded self-interest, aims in which they succeeded by impeding the expedition's progress. Their success is, accordingly, posited as the expedition's failure, so responsibility for the failure is placed squarely with the interpreter, Joussouf, who, by dint of his Armenian origin, is presumed capable of closing the gap between what are seen to be two sets of merely financial

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<sup>70</sup> Saint-Maur, *Voyage Du Luxor En Egypte*, chap. 139.

demands. Saint-Maur's essentialization of the parties' desires and allegiances, however, obfuscates the intra-national tensions that were plainly perceptible to the villagers:

After having discussed at length about the price of a *pic* [volume] of brick masonry, about the length of the pole which had been used as a measure, Ibrahim announced to me that he was going to strike the *coup de grâce* and to finish the discussion. Indeed, from the end to the middle of the compound, waving arms and legs, one saw his long and lean figure, which was made more characteristic by the enormous protuberance of his nose, successively take on a serious and threatening air, apostrophize each owner and expose the grievances of the government against the village. It was an overflow of guttural sounds mixed with various inflections, of piercing cries impossible to describe. Finally, this petulant Armenian spoke more words and made more gestures in a quarter of an hour than a Turk usually does in a whole year.

Then, taking a calmer, more moderate tone, Ibrahim placed himself alternately next to the oldest Arab and the *cadi*, spoke in their ears, made a thousand grimaces, got angry again, then listened to them sympathetically, and finally promised a *bacchis*, the *pot-de-vin*, an argument which never fails to produce a magical effect on the Arabs. At the same moment, the families interested in the sale of the houses appeared *en masse* before the commission; the women only let their eyes and foreheads be seen, on which one could easily read the symptoms of pain and anger; they made a few reproaches, and then sobs prevented them from continuing. This incident caused the *nazher* and the *cawas-bachi*, who until then had smoked their pipes without uttering a single word, to cry out at the same time "*Rou-barra*" (go away).<sup>71</sup>

Ibrahim, deployed to facilitate Franco-Ottoman relations and wielding the full might of the state's administration, razes the impasse through two means: first, by "[exposing] the grievances of the government against the village," a real threat of violence is issued, evoking the military strength with which earlier rebellions against Ottoman authority had been put down. Second, by expelling the homeowners and negotiating solely and directly with the judge and eldest villager, the interpreter breaks through the bargaining power of the collective, leveraging the incisive power of the traditional patriarch against the

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<sup>71</sup> Lebas, 47-48.

bureaucratic entanglement which had heretofore so deftly been utilized by the families. In so doing, he undermines the legal structure which, as Rudolph Peters argues, was critical to the newly-centralized Ottoman administration of Egypt.<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, as Fahmy as shown, the collective modes of resistance utilized by Egyptian publics frustrated authorities by negotiating and evading the interstices of these structures, slipping past their barricades to unruly ends. Here too, we see this strategy at work: breaching the lines of patriarchal privilege along which Ibrahim's final negotiation took place, families bound by circumstance, geography, and kinship ["appear] *en masse*" before the same commission they had instigated. Through a contrapuntal reading of Lebas' account, the village's women can be seen to affirm that the stakes of the negotiation in fact exceeded the financial domain, openly repudiating the whip-holders before "sobs prevented them from continuing." Perceived in this thrice-translated account as an act of refusal, these cries communicate a final abrogation of the legal-bureaucratic edifice through which the crisis had heretofore been strategically mediated; though it silences the women's own capacity for speech, the cry functions instead as a speech-act, speaking to the affective register which had in fact motivated the entire proceedings. But, in so doing, it signals the end of the ostensible negotiation, catalyzing the final speech-act of those whose power permitted them silence through the entire proceedings. The *nazher* and the *cawas-bachi*, silent until now, speak with a military finality, in Arabic broken perhaps by its translation through Turkish then French: "*Rou-barra*," which might more

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<sup>72</sup> Peters, "Islamic and Secular Criminal Law in Nineteenth Century Egypt : The Role and Function of the Qadi."

specifically be translated as “get out” rather than “go away,” signals the mechanism of authority over *place* that would determine the outcome of the proceedings. Just as they were authorized through the power of the viceregent to permit or deny entry to the *majlis* —the location, the social structure, and the actual assembly<sup>73</sup> — the same power could authorize the razing of thirty homes. With the assembly thus disbanded, the demolition could proceed, permitting the transfer of the obelisk as planned.

### 3.5 Translations and absences

Insofar as ‘translation’ can suggest movement across spatial and linguistic divides, the acquisition of the Luxor obelisk might be understood as an act of translation between Egypt and France. Just as the translation of the Rosetta Stone facilitated the comprehension and control of a nation and its history – that is, the capacity to *grasp* it – the translation of the obelisk too can be understood as part of the mechanisms through which the Egyptian land and populace could be controlled. I argue that many accounts of the obelisk’s history insufficiently account for the Ottoman role as the primary imperial power through which Egyptian life was mediated in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; after all, the orders to demolish the houses were translated, in more senses than one, from Turkish both to Arabic and French.

The nuances of this geopolitical relation shaped in turn the most common strategies of grassroots resistance against state control. In addition to the more readily

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<sup>73</sup> For an analysis of the multiple roles of the *majlis* in the social history of the Muslim world, see Dominic P Brookshaw, “Palaces, Pavilions, and Pleasure-Gardens: The Context and Setting of the Medieval Majlis,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 6, no. 2 (2003): 199–223, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1366616032000091367>.

identifiable strategies of open rebellion and protest, such resistance also took the form of clandestine acts of denial, suspension, circumvention, and evasion. These acts, enacted both through and against Mohammed Ali Pasha's newly-established structures of central state bureaucracy, could occasionally sidestep the brutal violence with which the regime exerted its power, as noted by contemporaneous accounts. This resistance did not go unnoticed; as Abul-Magd notes, "throughout the nineteenth century this province was a hot spot for southern rebellion against a rising centralized state," to the extent that "it took Muhammad Ali Pasha [...] many long years of war to subjugate the south and bring it into his nascent modern government, before he finally conquered Qina in 1811."<sup>74</sup>

Nonetheless, such acts of resistance did not always succeed in their most immediate goals: in this case, though the villagers succeeded in gaining some time and money, they were still deprived of their households, one of the central organizing structures of their networks of kinship and lineage,<sup>75</sup> for which they evidently held great emotional significance.

For the heads of the French transport expedition, the erasure of this resistance, both in its potential and actual forms, was a significant ideological goal: in his advocacy for the Luxor obelisk instead of the Alexandrian one initially offered, Champollion repeatedly minimizes the extent of the significant Egyptian presence around the obelisk,

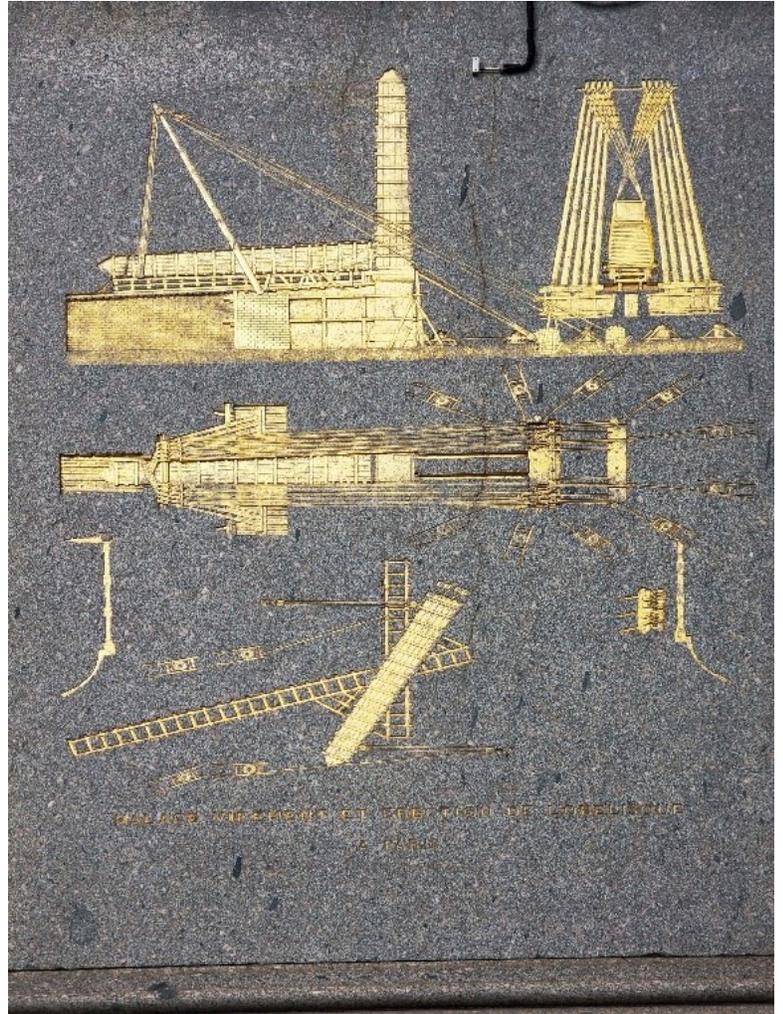
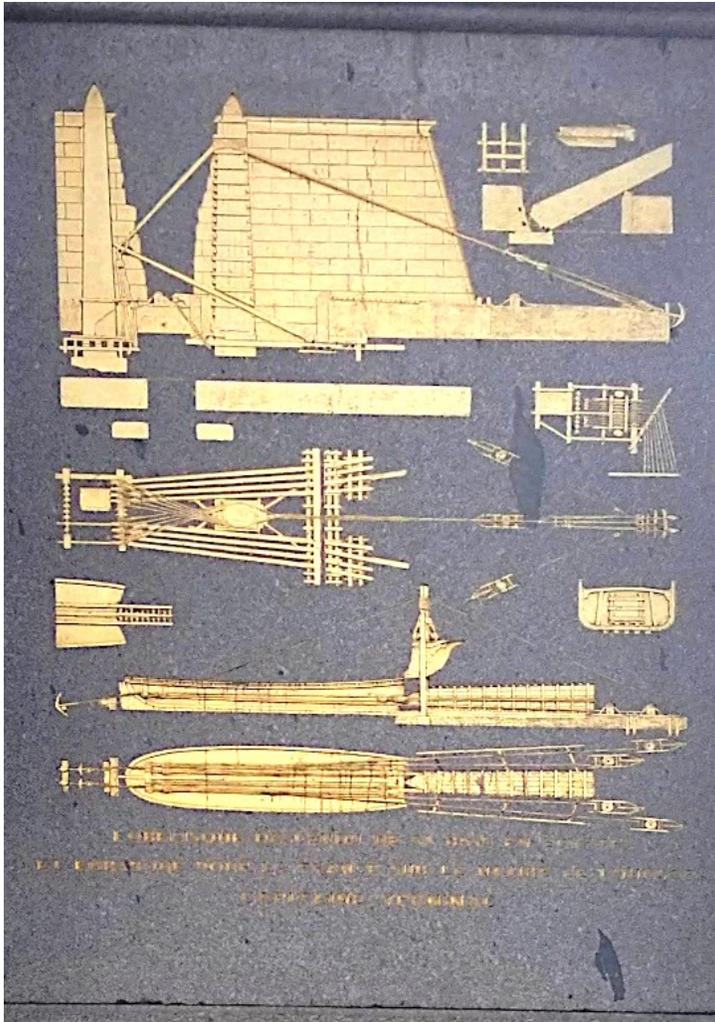
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<sup>74</sup> Zeinab Abul-Magd, "Rebellion in the Time of Cholera," in *Imagined Empires*, 2016, chap. 712, <https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520275522.003.0006>.

<sup>75</sup> For further discussion on the organizing structures and politics of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century rural Egyptian household, see: Kenneth M. Cuno, "Joint Family Households and Rural Notables in 19th-Century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 4 (1995): 485–502; Maha A Ghalwash, "Peasant Women and Rights to Land in Nineteenth Century Egypt: Sites of Resistance?," *Journal of Social History* 52, no. 1 (2018): 26–53, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shx041>.

positing it as an easily and cheaply surmountable obstacle. Armed with this conviction by the very Father of Egyptology, Lebas and Saint-Maur are frustrated by the ineffectiveness of their initial negotiation strategy, and, in the context of their accounts aimed at producing Orientalized subjects befitting French rule, the strategic effect of the villagers' resistance is repackaged as further evidence of Arab avarice.

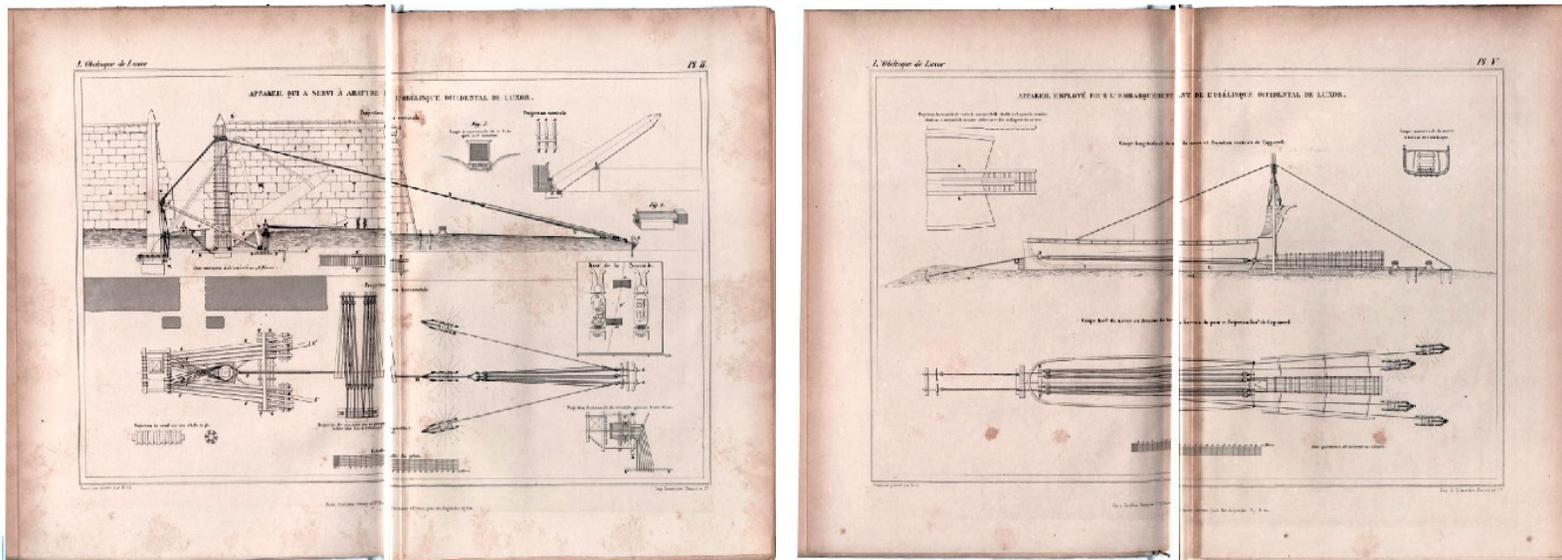
If, however, the work to resist the demolition of the houses is seen *as* work – if, indeed, it is seen at all – it may make visible further absences that lay at the foundation of how the obelisk is now understood in the public square. We see echoes of these absented presences at the actual foundation of the obelisk itself, which bears gilded, engraved versions of Lebas' diagrams, showing schematics of the obelisk's felling, transport, and re-erection (**Figure 33**).



**Figure 33: The foundation of the "Paris" obelisk, bearing engraved diagrams depicting the obelisk's transport.**

The clean, technical diagram lines function as an apt metaphor for the dominant French narrative of the entire operation; a scientific product, devoid of the organic human disarray that could hint at the social, cultural, and political life that existed all around it. Neither do they show the millennia-old historical monument that was destroyed by the operation; not the obelisk, of course, but the village itself in which it had stood. Accordingly, these diagrams have become an oft-reproduced representation of the obelisk's historical narrative: they accompany Gorrings's 1882 text on the transport of

the obelisk,<sup>76</sup> Bernadette Menu's 1987 book marking its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary,<sup>77</sup> again by Robert Solé in 2004,<sup>78</sup> and of course, in the 2014 exhibition at the Musée National de la Marine. In these diagrams, the clean lines denote the trajectories of tension along which it was methodically tipped and painstakingly dragged by hundreds of Egyptian labourers, men and women both, but their bodies are erased so that the obelisk and its scaffold seem to move themselves, surrounded by a void (Figure 34).



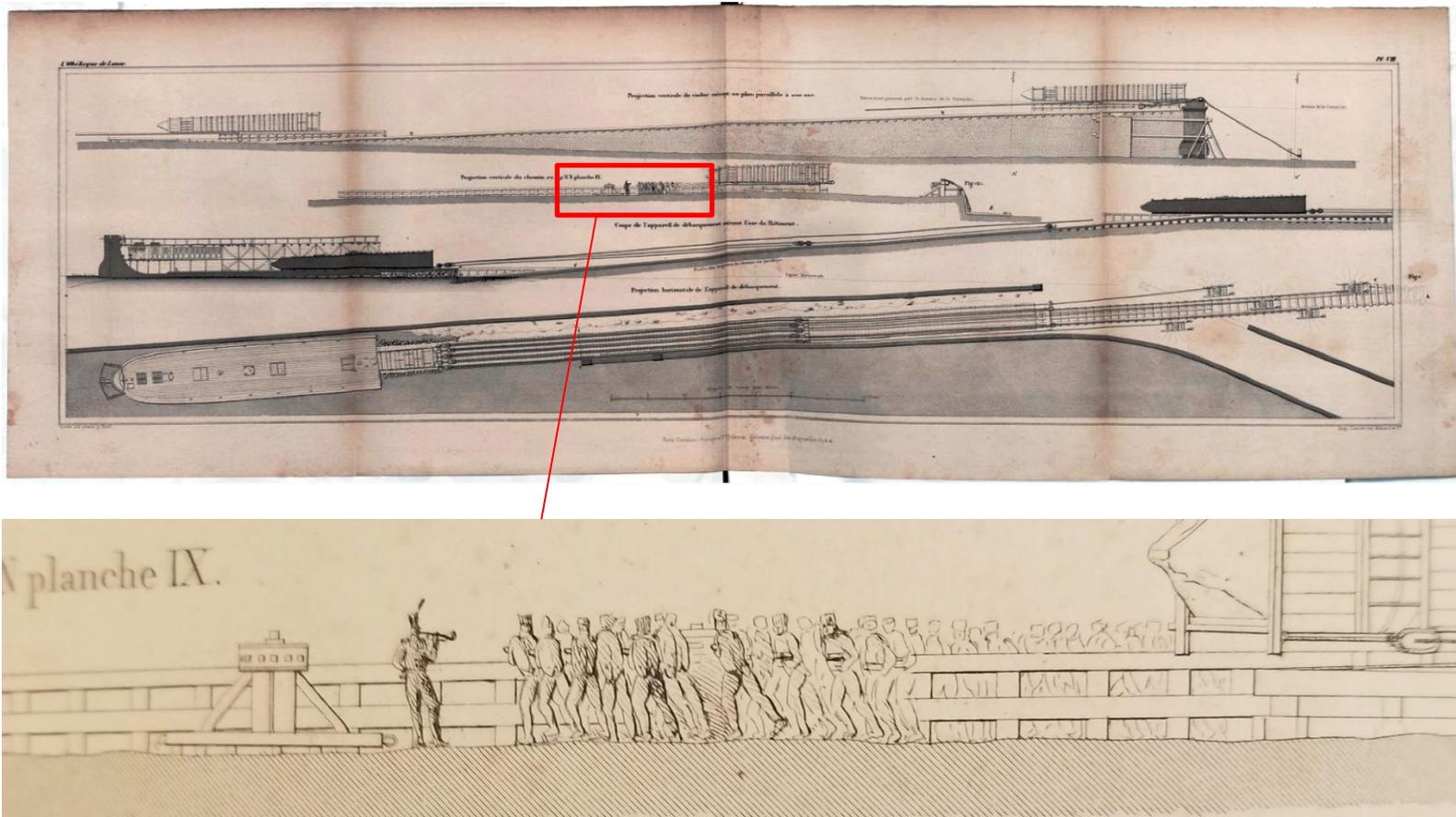
**Figure 34: Pl. 2 & 5. Lebas, Apollinaire. 1839. *L'obélisque de Luxor : Histoire de Sa Translation à Paris, Description Des Travaux Auxquels Il a Donné Lieu [...]*. Paris: Libraire des Corps Royaux des Ponts et Chaussées et des Mines. High resolution scans are available via BNF Gallica: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k65034333/f232.double.r>**

<sup>76</sup> Henry H. Goringe, *Egyptian Obelisks* (New York: Goringe, 1882), 85.

<sup>77</sup> Bernadette Menu, *L'Obélisque de La Concorde* (Versailles: Éd. du Lunx, 1987), 85.

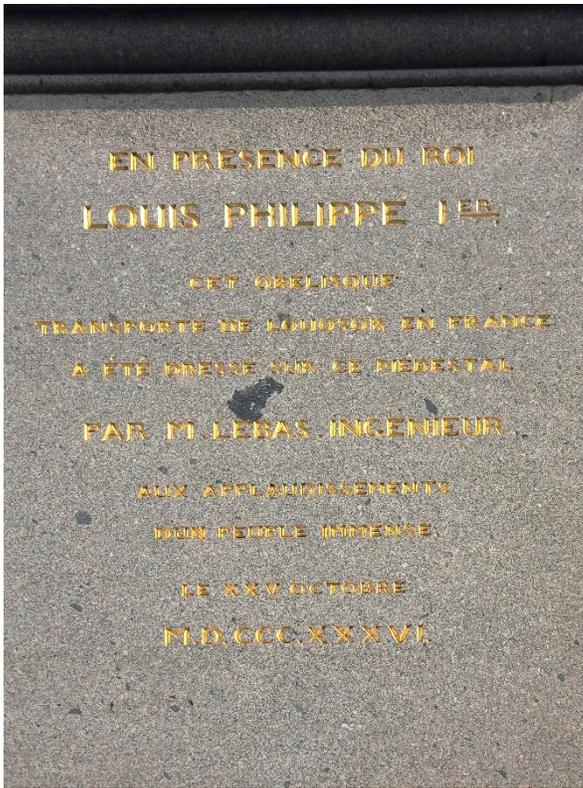
<sup>78</sup> Solé, *Le Grand Voyage De l'Obélisque*, 182.

The diagrams of the Egyptian portion of the transport are not Lebas' only ones, however: he illustrates as well its erection in Paris with the aid of French labourers. Here, their bodies *are* represented: the crowd of workers, pulling lines among the equipment, makes evident the actual source of the obelisk's locomotion in that instant (**Figure 35**).



**Figure 35:** Pl. 8, Lebas, Apollinaire. 1839. *L'obélisque de Luxor : Histoire de Sa Translation à Paris, Description Des Travaux Auxquels Il a Donné Lieu [...]*. Paris: Libraire des Corps Royaux des Ponts et Chaussées et des Mines.

The human presence here connects the obelisk with Paris' contemporary, urban life, making visible the French portion of the labour its local presence required, symbolically documenting some of those who would have been seen by the crowd of thousands that gathered when it was raised in the Place de la Concorde. The crowd itself



is documented too upon the obelisk's foundation, its inscription making note of their cheers (Figure 36).

**Figure 36: "In the presence of King Louis Phillippe the 1st, this obelisk was transported from Luxor to France, to be placed upon this pedestal by the engineer, M. Lebas, amidst the applause of an immense crowd. October 24, 1836."**

Here in the public square, the obelisk is deployed to make visible a relation between the democratic aims of the Parisian populace – indeed, the French populace as a whole, as interpellated by the surrounding decorative program – and those of Louis-Philippe, King of the French. In the same way, the absence of the Egyptian

populace – or rather, their absented presence – from the same program marks a productive void through which its historical meaning in the Place de la Concorde has been written. Just as in the gilded diagrams on the obelisk's foundation, the obelisk's dominant historical narrative can be thought of as network of lines of tension, leading into a void.

This tension is ever-present in its narrative, where the difficulty of the transport overarches its framing, contributing to its semantic and political value as a hard-won trophy. But the forces effecting the tension — its actual human actants — are rendered invisible, transforming it into both as a symbol of a brutal yet heroic military victory, *as well as a* strangely vacant prize, emptied of the context that would lend it its power. But implicit within the images themselves is an impetus of collective action; the lines of tension *must* strain together to realize the action they describe, and so the presence of

labouring bodies is never wholly erased. Similarly, the very presence of the obelisk bears with it a trace of the collective action borne by its origins.

### 3.6 Purloined Jewels

In 1826, as part of the *tanzimat* through which he sought to reorganize the country's social and political life according to European principles, Mohammed Ali Pasha sent a contingent of forty-four students to study in Europe and report back on that which may benefit the court and the state. Most were of the higher classes typically appointed by the Ottoman court for official roles: Turks, Circassians, Greeks, Georgians, and Armenians.<sup>79</sup> Of all the students, however, only one's account would be published: Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, an Arabic-speaking Egyptian, one of the first in this period to be trained for official office in Egypt. Tahtawi's first-hand account of his studies in France have come to serve as an invaluable historical document of not only this scholarly mission, but also, on the social views of an Egyptian of humble origins and wide-reaching academic interests. With his deft poetic style and incisive philosophical insights, he is considered one of the founders of the *nahda* – the 'Awakening' or 'Renaissance' – of Arab thought.<sup>80</sup>

The timing of al-Tahtawi's trip to France was a fortuitous one: arriving in 1826 in the Egyptomanic heyday that followed Champollion's translation of the Rosetta Stone and departing in 1831 after the outbreak of revolution, Tahtawi had an opportunity to

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<sup>79</sup> Rifa'a Al-Tahtawi and Daniel L. Newman, *An Imam In Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826-1831)*, trans. Daniel L. Newman, 2004, 27.

<sup>80</sup> Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, 124.

observe and comment upon some of the most important events upon which Western conceptions of Egypt have come to be based. Accordingly, his comments on the French interest in Ancient Egypt speak with and against the contours of the structures through which his diplomatic role was mediated. He notes, for example, that in the Louvre

[There] are many precious objects taken from Egypt, such as the stone painted with the signs of the Zodiac from Dendera, which has enabled the French to understand ancient Egyptian astronomy. They take such things without giving anything in return, even though they are well aware of their value. Instead, they keep them and draw various gains and general benefits from them.<sup>81</sup>

These observations serve as more than just a personal record: the audience for which they were written is Mohammed Ali Pasha, and so an implicit legal call to action is contained therein. Just as Champollion's letter to the Pasha urged the Egyptian state to preserve its archaeological patrimony on the basis of its potential value, here too al-Tahtawi offers an economic incentive for such legislative action. But while Champollion equivocates on the issue of European culpability in the theft and destruction of antiquities, here al-Tahtawi places the blame squarely on French shoulders. Notably, considering his audience, he places a measure of culpability upon the viceregent himself, particularly when it comes to the dispossession of the obelisk:

In his *Mushtaha al-uqool*, al-Suyuti states that he is astonished at scholars claiming that the most amazing things in Egypt are the pyramids, even though the *Barabis* of Upper Egypt are more amazing. The *Barabis* are better known to the common people as obelisks. Because of their strangeness, the Franks [Westerners] transported two of them to their countries. One of them was taken to Rome in ancient times, while *the other was recently taken to Paris, bequeathed as an over-generous offering by our ruler*. [emphasis added]

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<sup>81</sup> Al-Tahtawi and Newman, *An Imam In Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826-1831)*, 267.

I say: since currently Egypt has taken to urbanization and education in the European style, it is more entitled and justified in re-claiming the splendors and crafts that were left her by the ancestors. Pillaging [looting, pilfering] these objects, one by one, is considered by sages akin to adorning oneself with purloined jewels. It is an act tantamount to coercion [extortion; usurpation], and proving this obvious fact does not need evidence.<sup>82</sup>

Al-Tahtawi's words differ here in one important respect, I would argue, from Daniel Newman's translation, still the only full English version of this text to date. Newman translates a key passage to say that "one [obelisk] was shipped to Rome in ancient times, whereas the other was taken to Paris not that long ago, marking the abundant beneficence of our ruler."<sup>83</sup> However, in describing the bequest of the obelisk, al-Tahtawi uses the word *fāyid* – a word that shares its root with *fāyaḍān*, or flooding – to denote, albeit subtly, a distinct *over* abundance of generosity.

This implication is not evident in Newman's version, which implies a positive attitude toward the ruler's "abundant beneficence," but this subtle shift in meaning is of critical import. Given that his patron and primary audience member held enormous power and wielded it with brutal might, al-Tahtawi's words might be understood as a critique of Mohammed Ali Pasha's recent decision to grant the obelisk to France, though framed not as a direct corollary of the violent theft he ascribes to the European archaeological project, but, diplomatically, to a less malicious error of judgement, a mere over-abundance of generosity. Regardless, the critical intent remains apparent; as McLarney notes, al-Tahtawi works through the tradition of *adāb* to bring together literary and poetic

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<sup>82</sup> Rifa'a Al-Tahtawi, *Takhlīs Al-Ibrīz Fī Talkhīṣ Bārīz*, 1834, 198.

<sup>83</sup> Al-Tahtawi and Newman, *An Imam In Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826-1831)*, 359.

form with a motive of social reform, such that the content and function of such a critique can be understood as part of the school of thought of which he was a pioneer.<sup>84</sup>

These words appeared to have an immediate effect: in 1835, within a year of al-Tahtawi's return to Egypt and six years following Champollion's missive, Mohammed Ali Pasha would issue a decree officially protecting Egyptian antiquities from despoilation, founding a collection which would become the basis of what is now the Cairo Museum – the first museum of Ancient Egyptian antiquities in Egypt – and appointing al-Tahtawi as one of its two founding co-directors. Though the enforcement of this decree proved politically and financially difficult, and though support for it waxed and waned with the Pasha's successors, its institution put Egypt at the global forefront of antiquities protection law. As Colla notes,

Had the plan taken hold, Egypt would have been neck and neck with Greece — whose national museum dates from 1829, archaeological service from 1833, first antiquities law from 1834, and archaeological society from 1837—in asserting national control over antiquities and putting them on display. Indeed, Egypt would have barely trailed France and would have led Britain by half a century in extending official protection to historic monuments.<sup>85</sup>

In line with the dominant view of Egyptological historiography, inspiration for this early antiquities protection decree is often credited nearly solely to Champollion and his 1829 letter to Mohammed Ali Pasha.<sup>86</sup> And while it is impossible to ascertain specific motives for the 1835 decree, and in any case, there were likely many contributing factors, several

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<sup>84</sup> Ellen McLarney, "Freedom, Justice, and the Power of Adab," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48, no. 1 (2016): 25–46, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743815001452>.

<sup>85</sup> Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to WWI*, 56.

<sup>86</sup> See for example: Reid, "Pharaonic Heritage in Modern Egypt," 473. For additional discussion, see Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, 101–4.

important differences arise between Champollion's advocacy and that of Tahtawi. Most importantly, while Champollion ascribes the bulk of the blame upon the greed and ignorance of the *fellahs*, Tahtawi's critique, much like the language of the 1835 decree itself, find European archaeological efforts to be the primary culprits of the destruction of Pharaonic heritage. The opening lines of the decree, for example, state that:

Although the remarkable buildings and the admirable monuments of art and antiquity of Saïd (Upper Egypt or the ancient Thebaid) attract unceasingly many European travelers in these regions, it is necessary to agree however that of the taste and the passionate research of the latter for all the objects which they designate under the name of antiquities, resulted for the old monuments of Egypt a veritable devastation. Such has been the state of things up to now, that one can fear with good reason that these monuments, pride of the past centuries, will soon disappear from the soil of Egypt, with their sculptures and all the precious objects they contain, to their very last, to enrich foreign lands.<sup>87</sup>

Here, the language can be seen to echo both that of Champollion and al-Tahtawi. While the opening lines of the decree closely follow those of Champollion,<sup>88</sup> the final lines speaking to the enrichment of foreign lands differ markedly from the Frenchman's rhetoric. These lines come much closer to those of al-Tahtawi's, particularly his complaint that "[the French] take [antiquities] without giving anything in return, even though they are well aware of their value. Instead, they keep them and draw various gains and general benefits from them," as well as his statements comparing the obelisk's acquisition to "adorning oneself with purloined jewels."<sup>89</sup> In this view, some historians

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<sup>87</sup> Translated and quoted from Khater, *Le Régime Juridique Des Fouilles et Des Antiquités En Égypte*, 37.

<sup>88</sup> Who states that "Among the Europeans who visit Egypt, there is, annually, a very large number who, being brought by no commercial interest, have no other desire or motive than that of knowing for themselves and contemplating the monuments of the ancient Egyptian civilization [...]" Champollion, *Lettres Ecrites d'Égypte et de Nubie En 1828 et 1829*, 382.

<sup>89</sup> Al-Tahtawi and Newman, *An Imam In Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826-1831)*, 267., 198.

differ from that which has historically been established. Newman, for instance, argues that the al-Tahtawi's passage critiquing the obelisk's removal was "hugely important [...] and one that would not have gone unnoticed in Cairo."<sup>90</sup> The link, he notes, between this critique and the writing of the 1835 decree should not go unacknowledged:

The task of preserving ancient Egyptian artefacts found was entrusted to al-Tahtawi, who was to store the items in the Language School until such time as a museum would be built! In light of his views, there is little doubt that he played a key role in the creation of the legislation and may even have had a hand in the actual writing of the decree.<sup>91</sup>

If a portion of the inspiration for the 1935 decree can be credited to al-Tahtawi's advocacy, and, more specifically, his critique of Mohammed Ali Pasha's donation of the obelisk, perhaps it may include the impetus to restitution as part of its historical narrative. Indeed, part of al-Tahtawi's motivation for centering his critique upon this object in particular – rather than, say, the also-famously-purloined Dendera Zodiac, which he saw in the Louvre and commented upon – speaks to the affective power bound up by its millennia-old history. Al-Tahtawi, born in the Upper Egyptian city of Tahta just as Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign came to its end, spent some of his earliest years in Qena and Nag Hammadi, not far from Luxor. Could he have seen the temple in person, before the obelisk was removed? He would certainly have grown up around other Pharaonic ruins – Tahta itself is founded upon the site of a temple to Horus.<sup>92</sup> And so when he tells of the wonder of the obelisks as well-known among the local populace, he is speaking on

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<sup>90</sup> Al-Tahtawi and Newman, 359.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Al-Tahtawi and Newman, *An Imam In Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826-1831)*, 29.

behalf of a demographic to which he himself belongs. That which beautifies the land, lending it historical significance and meaning, would have resonated with him personally, too: this period, as noted, saw unprecedented rebellions and violent suppression at the hands of the Ottoman regime, as well as land reforms and expropriations which left al-Tahtawi's own family penniless.

And so while he could not have known of the contestation and resistance taking place in Luxor while he was away in France, he would certainly have lent a personal charge to his statement that Egypt "is more entitled and justified in re-claiming the splendors and crafts that were left her by the ancestors."<sup>93</sup> The "purloined jewels" with which he sees Paris adorned are, in this sense, his own and that of his kin. Perhaps it is in this sense that we might understand his statement that such larceny "is an act tantamount to coercion, and *proving this obvious fact does not need evidence* [emphasis added]."

But for whom is such a statement actually self-evident? That is, for whom is the fact of colonial possession and dispossession mediated internally, viscerally, and for whom is that process external, abstracted? Through what logics do different bodies relate to thing and place? Demonstrably, this fact is not obvious within the structures of the Ottoman court that relinquished it, nor to the French Orientalist tradition in and against which al-Tahtawi was studying. Rather, finding the coercion implicit in such dispossession to be obvious suggests a visceral relation to it, one mediated through bodily logics rather than legal ones. It speaks to an epistemic structure imperative that breaks away from the dichotomy of that-which-is-to-be-made-known and those who wrest the

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<sup>93</sup> Al-Tahtawi, *Takhlīṣ Al-Ibrīz Fī Talkhīṣ Bārīz*, 198.

benefits of such study from it. Instead, it speaks to the thingness of the thing, its *being* as a gathering, a network of feeling. Indeed, something of the thingness of *this* thing seems to have demanded a call to action, a gathering of unruly bodies, unbound by force.

Crucially, this gathering takes place in local space; the fact of where the dispossessed thing is taken *to* is as critical as where it is taken *from*. The place *from* can be seen here to mediate the material and affective logics through which the obelisk has come to be constituted – *as* rather than merely *part of* – a public square. Its very foundation sits atop a network of labouring bodies, visible and invisible, which continue to re-enshrine its symbolic function. In this sense, the obelisk ‘worlds’ in Pheng Cheah’s sense of the term, acting as more than its mere substance but rather as “a force that subtends and exceeds all human calculations that reduce the world as a temporal structure to the sum of objects in space.”<sup>94</sup>

Follert and Burton locate the obelisk’s political function in its capacity to displace Parisian memories of revolutionary violence through a kind of symbolic void, “offering the public no recollection of the past [...] chosen purely for its meaninglessness.”<sup>95</sup> Yet two centuries of political contestation, utilization, and re-appropriation recall, again and again, the networks of labour, place, and affect through which it has come to gain its overdetermined symbolic value. From the inscribed foundation upon which it sits to more recent exhibitions through which its trophy-value is re-inscribed, these representations

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<sup>94</sup> Pheng Cheah, *What Is a World? : On Postcolonial Literature As World Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 8.

<sup>95</sup> Follert, “Enjoyment’s Petrification: The Luxor Obelisk in a Melancholic Century,” 130. See also: Burton, “Killing the King: Place de La Révolution/Concorde (21 January 1793),” 64.

open up a means of conceptualizing 'place' that need not be understood as immutable fact. Places, perhaps, like things, can move and be moved, bound by networks of labour and affect, pulled along by lines of tension acting with and against a collective force. If the 'public square' is a site of communal history, labour, affect, and representation, then that square from which it originated remains part of its valuative regime, seen still in its ongoing re-deployment as national trophy. In this sense, the obelisk might be thought to occupy more than one public square: those of its current and original places, and those around and in between which have been opened up by its translation through time and space.

## Conclusion

### 4.1 "We are the crocodiles:" the Gurna relocation and competing valuations in practice

Following in the footsteps of 18<sup>th</sup> century European travellers such as Sonnini, Pococke, and Norden, William George Browne's 1792-1797 travels in Egypt sought to document portions of Egypt hitherto unknown by Europeans. Still before Napoleon's occupation and the publication of the *Description de l'Égypte*, this unknown portion extended to many regions outside Egypt's urban metropolises, particularly in the south. Of particular interest to European travellers were the dramatic temples, tombs, and monuments of Upper Egypt, such as those within and around Luxor and its Theban environs. Landing nearby in Gurna<sup>1</sup> on the west shore of the Nile in search of tombs described by Pococke, Browne is forced instead to reckon directly with its residents, who maintain close control of both its land and its antiquities:

On landing with my Greek servant at *Kourna* no male inhabitant appeared; but two or three women were standing at the entrance of their dens. As we passed, in quest of the *sheck-el-ballad* to request a guide, one of the women said, in Arabic, 'Are you not afraid of crocodiles?' I replied in the negative. She said, emphatically, 'We are the crocodiles', and proceeded to depict her own people as thieves and murderers.

They are indeed a ferocious clan, differing in person from other Egyptians. Spears twelve or fourteen feet in length are deadly weapons in their hands. In the temple of *Medinet-Abu* we observed a large quantity of blood, and were told by peasants

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the vagaries of translation, romanization and dialect, this village's names in English are astonishingly variable: these include Qurna, Kurna, Gurna, Qourneh, Qournah, Kourna, Gournou, Kûrnû, even Gourney and nearly innumerable variations thereof, with or without the preceding definite article *al-*. While a standard Library of Congress transliteration would render its pronunciation in its local dialect as *al-Gurnah*, this is by no means definitive nor consistent. Accordingly, this text will use the spelling 'Gurna', as this aligns with its pronunciation with the local dialect and reflects recent scholarship that aims to center the subjectivity and personhood of the Gurnawi (the residents of Gurna).

of Beirat that the Kournese had there murdered a Muggrebin [nomadic traveller] and a Greek, travellers passing from Assuan to Kahira [Cairo], who had strayed thither from mere curiosity, or perhaps with a view to finding treasure, in which the Muggrebins pretend to superior skill.<sup>2</sup>

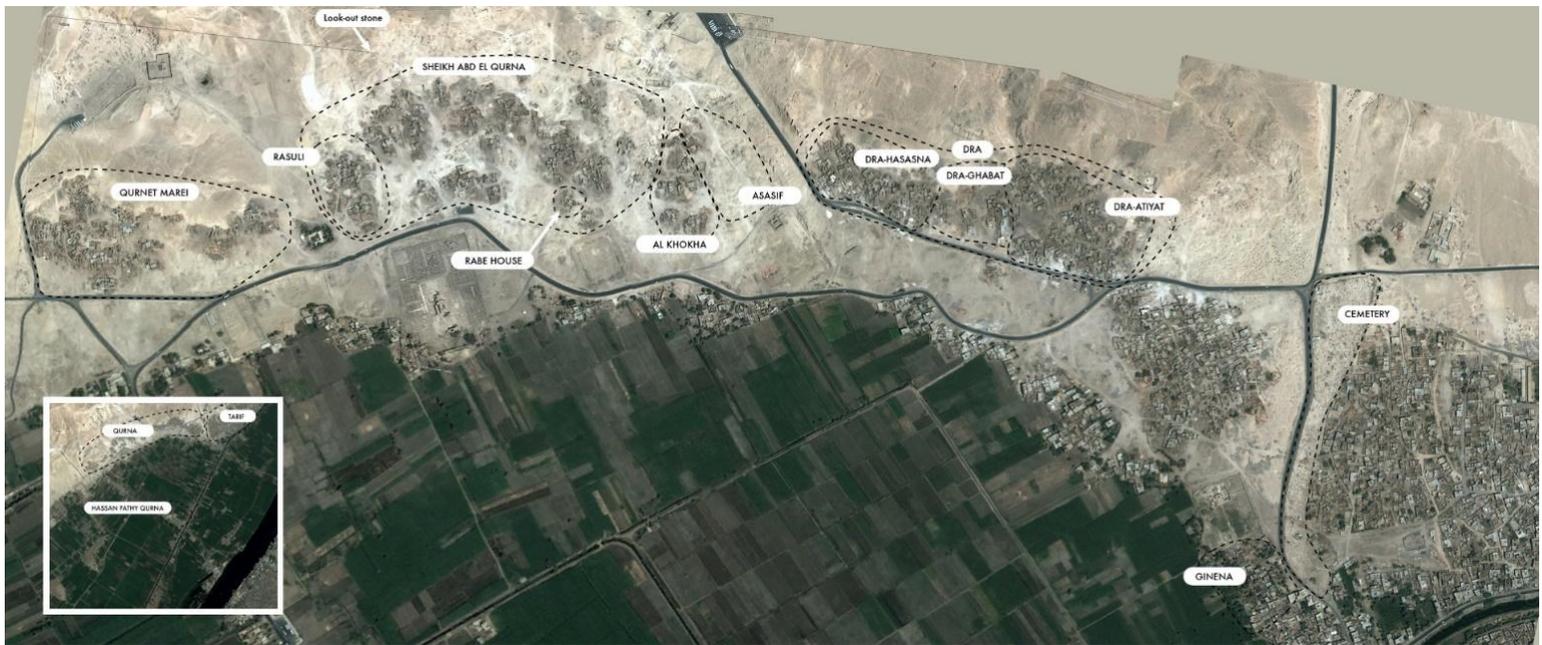
Interrupting Browne's search for a "male inhabitant" cognizable to him as an agential subject, the unnamed Gurnawi woman's threat articulates in short order a broad set of local concerns and practices: the tombs of the Theban west bank serve not only as sites of potential treasure, but as homes, strongholds, a source of fiercely-guarded identity and pride. This guardianship is regulated here beyond the reaches of the state; not *without* it but *against* it. As is the case with the contestations for both Tutankhamun's treasures and for the Bust of Nefertiti, the claim for both the land and antiquities is mediated in Gurna both through *de jure* and *de facto* approaches. Here, the structures of legitimization from Egypt's north upon which Browne relies get him as far as Gurna's shores, but no further. The state monopoly on violence seems to falter here, and Browne's confidence in the protections of national governance and policing is shaken. He is taken aback not only by the aggression of his female interlocutor but by the overdetermination of meaning in this space he had heretofore envisioned in idyllic terms; though he may have anticipated finding human remains in the ancient tombs and temples, he does not seem to have anticipated finding ones quite so recent. In Gurna, he finds the inhabitants having been "recently in open rebellion against the Mamlûks," using the tomb-studded mountainside as an integral part of their defensive strategy:

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<sup>2</sup> Browne, "Travel. Africa, Egypt, Syria from Year 1792 to 1798 /," 138.

The Troglodytes of the caverns remained tumultuous, and sometimes opposed the troops of the Bey, by firing from their recesses; at other times they would retreat to the mountains, and leave all pursuit behind.<sup>3</sup>

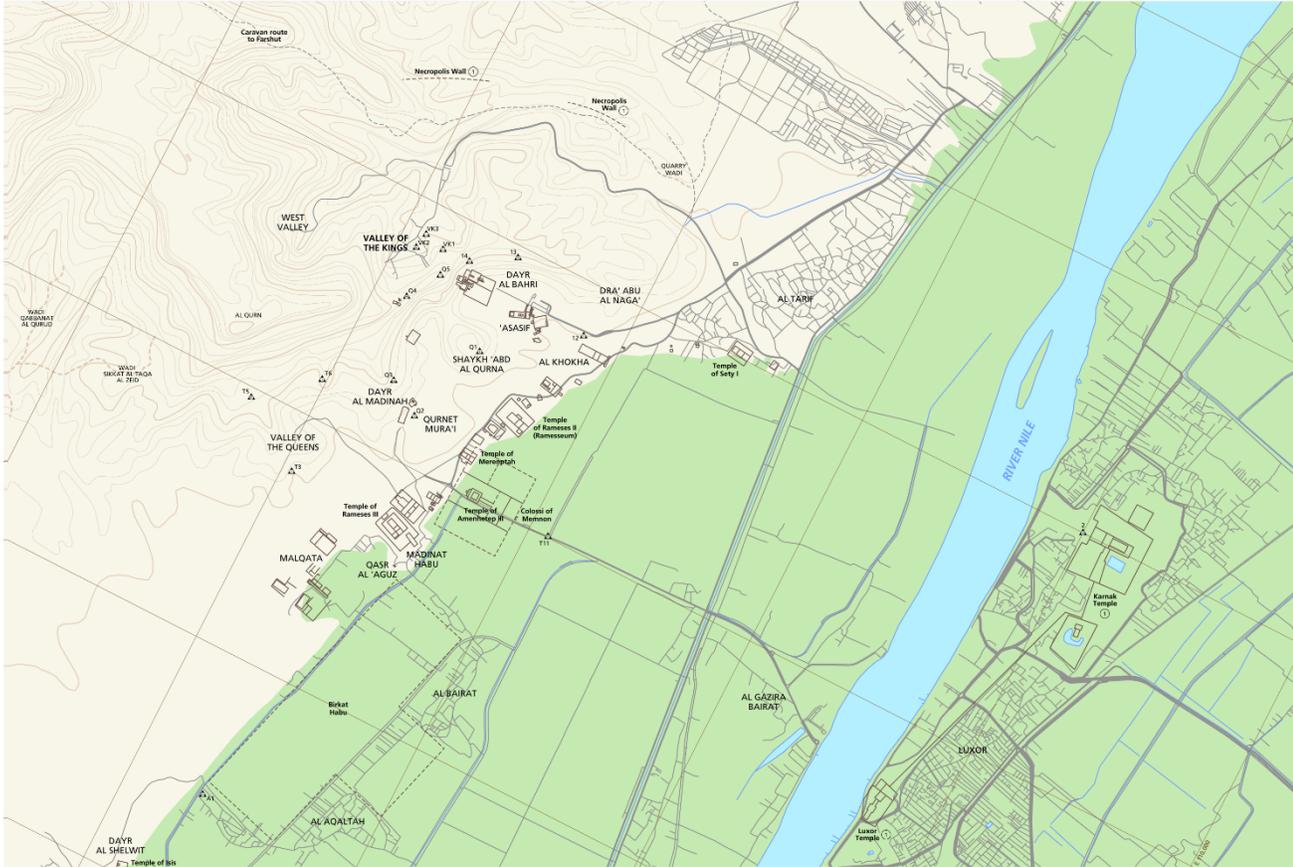
The dissonance between Browne’s expectation of a serene land of dead antiquity and the reality of a land whose history and present are in constant – sometimes violent – contestation permeates not only representations of Gurna, but Egypt as a whole. Gurna, however, offers an illustrative point due to the physical proximity of its ancient and contemporary utilizations, a proximity that makes evident the material and epistemic disparities through which processes of artifactual valuation have been negotiated.



**Figure 37: Satellite map of Gurna’s neighborhoods, which take the names of some of their originating families. Map from Caroline Simpson’s <http://www.qurnainthesky.org> project, © DigitalGlobe.**

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 134.



**Figure 38: Overview of the Theban west bank; ‘Gurna’ is the collective name for the interconnected neighborhoods among the Pharaonic antiquities on the mountainous region west of the Nile’s fertile plain. Adapted from The Theban Necropolis Map © Theban Mapping Project, <https://thebanmappingproject.com>.**

## 4.2 “The most unruly people in Egypt”

These materially disparate yet physically proximate approaches to land and antiquity result in two related and long-abiding representations of Gurna: first is that of a village fiercely defensive of its independence and resistant to state authority. Second is of

a village of thieves and bandits, committed to a lawless life supported through the destruction and sale of antiquities.

One of the earliest of these representations derives in the mid-eighteenth century from Richard Pococke's influential account of his travels in Egypt, where he describes a harrowing attempt to copy tomb inscriptions, before being threatened into leaving by a group of locals "strongly possessed with a notion of a power that Europeans have of finding treasures, and conveying them away by magic art."<sup>4</sup> Though this incident is hardly the most perilous of such encounters described in Pococke's text, its influence extends two centuries hence to influence Howard Carter's famous expedition in the same locale. Following in Pococke's footsteps by just a few months, Fredrick Norden visits the temples of Thebes and the Colossi of Memnon — then, before Belzoni's adventures, both heads could still be seen *in situ* — and he describes the particular dangers posed by these villagers with "such a character of being villains," destroying and pillaging the region "only on account of their obstinacy and rebellion."<sup>5</sup>

This is one of the earliest of such representations framing Gurna as a site of particular danger to Europeans. Travellers in the late eighteenth century such as Browne would more fully integrate this theme of Gurna's threat to the practice of antiquarian study and observation. Gurna features dramatically in Denon's widely-read account of the Napoleonic campaign in Egypt; assuming the tombs would be an "asylum of peace and silence," Denon and General Desaix are driven away "with javelins and stones, by

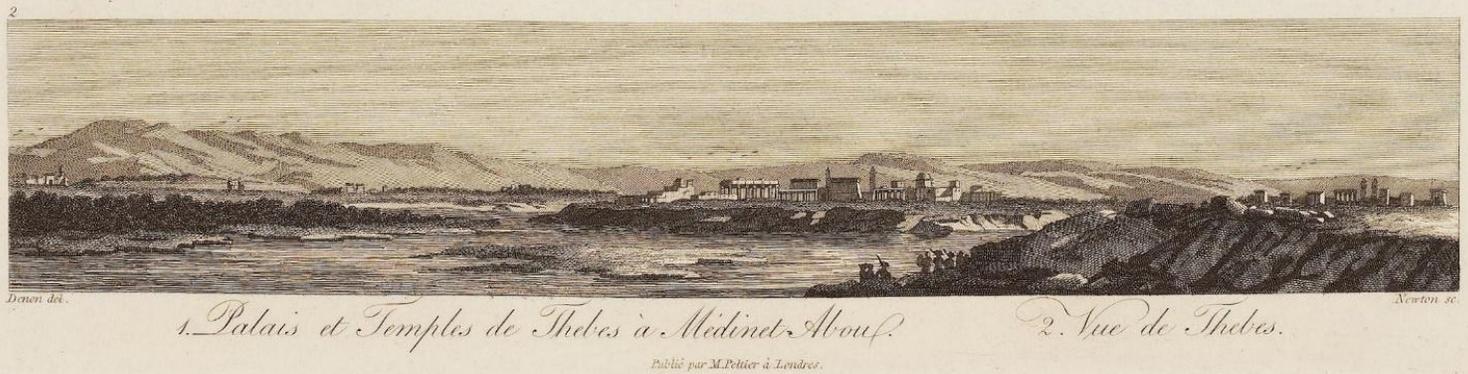
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<sup>4</sup> Pococke, *A Description of the East and Some Other Countries*, 105–6.

<sup>5</sup> Frederik Lewis Norden, *Travels in Egypt and Nubia*, trans. Peter Templemen (London: Davis & Reymers, 1757), 83.

enemies whom we could not distinguish.”<sup>6</sup> Learning that the locals were “almost always in rebellion with authority, and had become the terror of the vicinity,” Denon is determined to return and complete his observations.<sup>7</sup> With military matters at the forefront of Desaix’s mind, the French fleet is unwilling to expend the resources for the confrontation, and the return is even less observationally fruitful:

I again found the inhabitants of Kurnu disputing our entrance into the tombs, which they had taken as their asylum. We must have killed them before we could persuade them that we did not mean them any harm, and we had not time to enter into dispute; we therefore contented ourselves with blockading the openings, whilst we took a short repast on the spot, and I took advantage of this halt to finish my drawing of the desert, and the outer view of these habitations of the dead. (See Plate XXI.-Fig. 2.)<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 39: The plate to which Denon refers. This shows a view of the Theban west bank, including the Colossi of Memnon, the Ramesseum, and the mountains in which both Gurna and the Tombs of the Nobles are located**

Accordingly, Denon’s descriptions of this region (such as this rendering of the westward view) are framed in his viewer’s imaginations by the accompanying assails of a populace

<sup>6</sup> Denon, *Travels In Upper And Lower Egypt Vol. 2*, 86.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>8</sup> Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt Vol. 2*, 196–97.

unwilling to be made visible, to have their history made known. But the same is true of the knowledge which *fails* to be extracted; he is unable to complete his drawing of the Memnon Colossi of Memnon as his colleagues move ahead without him and he is forced to leave and rejoin them, passing as well the temples of Medinet-Habu, Luxor and Karnak.<sup>9</sup> The price in bloodshed for the acquisition of this knowledge is never far here from the reader's mind; Denon reminds us that with "access to these tombs being always made by violence, I could not observe how they were intended to open and shut" or other details of their inscriptions, decorations, or architecture.<sup>10</sup> "This," writes Denon, "was the only place in Upper Egypt which held out against our government," and thus warranted a concentrated counter-effort by General Belliard to "surprise them; take their flocks, blow up their retreat, expel them, and carry off their sheik."<sup>11</sup> Even then, "it was like making war with the gnomes" in caves, and the French effort is largely unsuccessful.<sup>12</sup> But with the stalemate comes an offer to pay Gurnawi locals to guide French officers through the subterranean passages, and it is only then that diplomatic inroads permit Denon access to papyri which would star in later collections, and information such as "the manner in which [mummies] were laid within the tombs, which the inhabitants had always

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 96, 195.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>11</sup> Vivant Denon, *Travels In Upper And Lower Egypt Vol. 3*, trans. Arthur Aikin (London: Longman and Rees, 1803), 31, 47–48. In contrast with Aikin's 1803 translation, Denon's original French implies that it is the *inhabitants themselves* that were to be blown up, rather than their retreats: "Il s'occupa d'organiser une expédition contre eux, pour les surprendre, s'emparer de leurs troupeaux, miner leur repaire, les faire sauter, et emmener leur cheikh." Denon, *Voyage Dans La Basse et La Haute Égypte, Pendant Les Campagnes Du Général Bonaparte, Tome 1*, 323.

<sup>12</sup> Denon, *Travels In Upper And Lower Egypt Vol. 3*, 51. Making note here that "The clink of money, that universal language before which all hatred ceases, especially among the Arabs, had procured me friends with the fugitive inhabitants of Kurnu," Denon draws attention to an essentializing view which would come into later significance with the resistance against French efforts to remove the obelisk in Luxor." For more on this, see **Chapter 3**.

obstinately concealed from us, as the situation of their village had given them almost an exclusive trade in this singular article of commerce.”<sup>13</sup>

This slippage between the *knowledge* and the *objects* of antiquity as Gurna’s “exclusive trade,” and the violent context of its acquisition can be traced too to the ‘artifaction’ of the Memnon head which Denon failed to capture.<sup>14</sup> Documented in several travel accounts in the early nineteenth century,<sup>15</sup> this site of struggle, study, and acquisition features prominently again in the Giovanni Belzoni’s widely-read account of his transport of the Memnon head to the British Museum, where it now prominently features.



**Figure 40: Denon’s illustration of the Memnonium, which Colla argues “further fixed the Memnonium—and Ozymandias—as one of the most prominent monuments in this literary and pictorial tradition of describing Egypt.” (*Conflicted Antiquities*, p. 30)**

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<sup>13</sup> Denon Vol. 3, 60-81.

<sup>14</sup> Colla, “The Artifaction of the Memnon Head.,” *Conflicted Antiquities*.

<sup>15</sup> See Colla 30-31 for descriptions of early nineteenth-century attempts to transport the Memnon head such as those by Hamilton, Light, Burckhardt, and Banks, including assessments of the relationship with local labour required to do so.



**Figure 41: Belzoni's illustration of the transport of the Memnon head, the arrival of which to London inspired Shelley's *Ozymandias*.**

Commissioned by the British consul Henry Salt to obtain the monumental stone statue when so many rivals had failed, Giovanni Belzoni, the former circus strongman arrived in Upper Egypt armed with a *firman* (decree) from Mohammed Ali Pasha in addition to his pistols and his imposing physical stature. Here, his primary travail relates to the acquisition and organization of labour: despite his *firman*, the local governor offers him with “smooth-faced protestations of friendship and partiality” assurances of the availability of the workforce, who continuously fail to appear for different reasons each day. These reasons include the Nile waters’ low level, the difficulty of the requisite work,

the fasting requirements of Ramadan, the greater priority of a different task, and more. In line with Fahmy and Abul-Magd's analysis of grassroots resistance to state efforts of forced labour,<sup>16</sup> Belzoni regards these protestations as a strategy of deferral, of indirect refusal. Unlike Fahmy and Abul-Magd, Belzoni frames this refusal as an essential quality of the duplicitous Arab and of the particularly intransigent Gurnawi,<sup>17</sup> but he is ambivalent with regards to the true motive for this subterfuge. The governor, he observes, was a long-time resident of Gurna and an ally of Drovetti, the French consul and Belzoni's rival.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, he concedes that an element of the refusal may stem from the workers' own valuations of their labour and its outputs, since

Some of them have accumulated a considerable sum of money [from the trade in antiquities], and are become so indifferent, that they remain idle, unless whatever price they demand be given them; and it is to be observed, that it is a fixed point in their minds, that the Franks [Europeans] would not be so liberal, unless the articles were worth ten times as much as they pay for them.<sup>19</sup>

Although Belzoni frames this refusal, again, as a facet of the "effeminate indolence [which] is born with the Egyptian,"<sup>20</sup> if in fact Gurna's workers negotiated both their labour and materials with the assumption that antiquities held considerably considerable financial value for Europeans, then this view would have been demonstrably accurate.

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<sup>16</sup> See for example: Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men.*, and Abul-Magd, *Imagined Empires: A History of Revolt in Egypt.*

<sup>17</sup> The moralizing essentialism of such travel accounts does not seem to have been lost on the British public, and appears congruent with its broader reception. Belzoni adapted his narrative to a children's moral tale interspersed with frequent ethnographic observations from the perspective of an English child, such as: "Papa says that, although the countenances of the Greenlanders are displeasing and their manners savage, they are not treacherous, like the Arabs who attended Belzoni. Giovanni Battista Belzoni, *Fruits of Enterprise, Exhibited in the Travels of Belzoni in Egypt and Nubia.*, Ninth (London: Harris, 1841), 124.ss

<sup>18</sup> Giovanni Battista Belzoni, *Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries within the Pyramids, Temples, Tombs, and Excavations, in Egypt and Nubia* (London: John Murray, Albemarle St., 1820), 42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511711534>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>20</sup> *Fruits of the Enterprise*, 46.

Belzoni's chief complaint in this case appears the Gurnawi's refusal to permit the exploitation of their labour and the antiquities to which they held sole access; reading against the grain of Belzoni's complaint, however, is a counterpoint to the still-pervasive view that the Gurnawi have never *appreciated* — again, in a broad sense of the term — the value of the heritage surrounding them. Nonetheless, deeming Gurna to be the home of “the most unruly people in Egypt,”<sup>21</sup> Belzoni moralizes the inaccessibility of native labour to Europeans (via the Ottoman system of *firman*s) as a deep civilizational failure, a refusal implying the anarchic rejection of modernization efforts:

The people of Gournou are superior to any other Arabs in cunning and deceit, and the most independent of any in Egypt. They boast of being the last that the French had been able to subdue, and when subdued, they compelled [the French] to pay the men whatever was asked for their labour; a fact which is corroborated by Baron Denon himself. They never would submit to anyone, either the Mamelukes or the Bashaw [Pashas]. They have undergone the most severe punishments, and been hunted like wild beasts, by every successive government of Egypt.<sup>22</sup>

Belzoni's evident agitation by the Gurnawi workers' capacity to negotiate both the labour and antiquities to which they hold a monopoly can be seen in contrast with, for example, the *fellahs* of Karnak whom he describes in glowing terms as being so ardent in their desire for work that they would argue over it to the extent that “sometimes this dispute ended in blows.”<sup>23</sup> This appraisal points to the underlying politico-economic mechanisms through which such archaeological work was undertaken: that its mode of value-production is deeply predicated upon both the availability of local labour to actually acquire its objects, and the simultaneous alienation of a ‘source community’ from the

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<sup>21</sup> *Narrative of the Operations*, 158.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

objects of exchange. Gurna's steadfast monopoly over these two inputs puts a bottleneck on supply without diminishing European demand, and accordingly, Belzoni observes the resultant increase in its overall market value:

Could it but be accurately known, with what a wretched set of people in these tribes travellers have to deal, their mean and rapacious dispositions, and the various occurrences that render the collection of antiquities difficult, whatever came from thence would be the more prized, from the consideration of these circumstances.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4.3 “More than three thousand years of the pilfering trade”

This view, which associates the value of antiquities to the resistance surmounted in the process of their acquisition is echoed again through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly through the accounts of Gurna's Abdelrasul family and their notorious 1871 discovery. Despite pre-existing narratives associating Gurna with banditry and lawlessness, this moment would be a pivotal one: indeed, Kees van der Spek finds that “no other incident has contributed more to the common understanding that the people from Gurna are ‘tomb robbers’ than the ‘Abd al-Rasul discovery.’”<sup>25</sup> Nearly a century on, John A. Wilson recounts this now near-mythological history, following Gurna resident Ahmed Abdelrasul's discovery of a hidden desert tunnel:

Investigation at the foot of this pit quickly showed him that he had stumbled upon materials of tremendous value. He later stated that he took only two brothers and his son into his confidence about the discovery and that he was very cautious in his exploitation of the treasure: in ten years they went into the burial cache just three times and took out only objects easy to conceal [...] At any rate antiquities bearing royal names gradually began to appear on the market. Maspero claimed credit for the effective detective work of locating the place of discovery and the

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<sup>24</sup> Belzoni, *Narrative of the Operations*, 155.

<sup>25</sup> Kees van der Spek, *The Modern Neighbors of Tutankhamun: History, Life, and Work in the Villages of the Theban West Bank* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2011), 48.

criminal family[...] Meantime, the brothers had had a quarrel over the distribution of the sudden wealth, and this squabble became known to the Luxor police.<sup>26</sup>

When it is revealed that the Abdelrasul family's primary patron was in fact the well-connected consular agent Mustafa Agha, the matter becomes an issue of international diplomacy due to the rivalries with the Antiquities Service's French leadership, and Agha's protection by diplomatic immunity.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, Ahmed Abdelrasul himself becomes the primary target of the intense questioning, a process aimed, in Maspero's words, at "wresting from the fellahs, by trickery or by force, the secret that they had faithfully kept until then."<sup>28</sup> Describing it as a scene of "medieval tragicomedy," Wilson narrates:

On April 6, Abd er-Rasul Mohammed and his brother, Hussein Ahmed, were sent in chains to Qeneh to be examined. The delicacy of official reports draws a veil over the inquisition, and Maspero reports laconically that Daud Pasha examined them "with his habitual severity." [...] The accused were flung upon the ground and beaten with the *bastinado* [cane] on the soles of their feet, just as Theban tomb robbers had been "examined" three thousand years earlier.<sup>29</sup>

This investigation, though it is alleged to have resulted in the deaths of one of the brothers, produces little effect. Several accounts attest that "the entire village of Gurna turned out to give evidence on [Abdelrasul's] behalf, proclaiming him the most honest of men, and he was released for want of evidence."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the entire affair must have

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<sup>26</sup> Wilson, *Signs and Wonders Upon Pharaoh*, 81–82.

<sup>27</sup> Gaston Maspero, *Les Momies Royales de Deir El-Bahari*, 1889, 513.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* The violent details of this investigation are notable in that they have been left out of other widely-read subsequent accounts. Howard Carter, for example, describes Daoud Pasha's methods as "unorthodox but effectual." Indeed, if Wilson is to be believed, the severity of these methods were in fact "habitual" and thus far from "unorthodox" in their context. (Carter and Mace, *The Discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen*, 70.)

<sup>30</sup> H.V.F. Winstone, *Howard Carter and the Discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamun* (London: Constable & Co., 1991), 84..

been cooperatively concealed from state forces by a significant portion of the village's populace, as Maspero notes that

The burial chambers could only be accessed through a deep well, and in order to empty them of their precious contents, it was necessary to install an apparatus of beams and ropes above the gaping opening, which was impossible to conceal. One would have had to trust the neighbors, to share the treasure with them, and still one could not have been certain that none of the associates, dissatisfied with his lot, would go to reveal all to the *moudîr* of the province or to the director of the excavations.<sup>31</sup>

The end, in fact, would come from within, when following the episode of torture one brother would return to Qena's pasha to reveal the location of the hidden cache. Armed against "the real dangers of the situation" in part by the translation abilities of Ahmed Kamal Pasha,<sup>32</sup> the only Egyptian in its higher ranks, The Antiquities Service's agents would return to clear the trove of its royal mummies, including those of "Thut-mose III, Seti I, Ramses II, Ramses III, and about thirty others."<sup>33</sup>

Referencing Maspero, Jill Kamil describes the scene of the mummies' removal along the Nile, when "the riverbank was lined, as for a formal funeral procession, with men firing shots into the air and women in black keening and casting sand on their hair."<sup>34</sup> The source of the grief, however, differs between accounts: For Wilson, "They were not mourning the pharaohs; they were mourning the defeat of one of their men by the government," but conversely, Peter France speculates that "perhaps they were

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<sup>31</sup> Maspero, *Les Momies Royales de Deir El-Bahari*, 65.

<sup>32</sup> Emil Brugsch and Gaston Maspero, *La Trouvaille de Deir-El-Bahari* (Impr. française F. Mourès, 1881), 9.

<sup>33</sup> Wilson, *Signs and Wonders Upon Pharaoh*, 84.

<sup>34</sup> Jill Kamil, *Labib Habachi: The Life and Legacy of an Egyptologist*, 2007, 21.

mourning the riches they had lost.”<sup>35</sup> On this matter, little can be surmised from Maspero’s account, except that the brother who revealed the tomb’s location was rewarded with five hundred pounds sterling and a position as the head of excavations at Thebes for his service to the Museum.

The story of the Abdelrasul family’s discovery and the state’s subsequent investigation and expropriation would resonate through the following decades, through to the renewed Egyptomania of the 1920s following Howard Carter’s discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb in the nearby Valley of the Kings. Carter’s own account draws frequent attention to Gurna’s reputation in general and that of the Abdelrasuls in particular. Informing his readers that “It was in the thirteenth century B.C. that the inhabitants of this village first adopted the trade of tomb-robbing, and it is a trade that they have adhered to steadfastly ever since,”<sup>36</sup> Carter constructs a sort of black-market historical continuity between Gurna’s living populace and those of the Pharaonic era. Accordingly, for Carter, such tomb robbery is deeply intertwined with his understanding of Egyptian history, and of his own labour within it. Recounting his own moonlit encounter with such “local native tomb-robbers,” Carter ties his own Egyptological labour with that that of Pococke, finding, like his forbear, that “The Valley was not a safe spot to linger in, [having] given place to a horde of bandits, who dwelt among the Kurna

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<sup>35</sup> See Wilson, 84., and France, *The Rape of Egypt*, 167.

<sup>36</sup> Howard Carter and A.C. Mace, *The Discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen* (New York: Dover, 1923), 70. In Thomas Hoving’s bestselling account, this legacy is even longer. For him, “The village of Kurna may have the distinction of possessing the longest-lasting tradition of high thievery of any human habitation in world history. The citizenry of that place had become adept thieves as early as the thirteenth century B.C. and had carried on highly successful thefts right down to 1875 and beyond—more than three thousand years of the pilfering trade!” Hoving, *Tutankhamun: The Untold Story*, 44.

hills, and terrorized the whole country-side.”<sup>37</sup> It is through that context that Carter recounts the narrative of the Abdelrasul family’s discovery, so that by its conclusion, its function is clearly articulated in both moral and material terms:

One moral we can draw from this episode, and we commend it to the critics who call us Vandals for taking objects from the tombs. By removing antiquities to museums we are really assuring their safety left in situ they would inevitably, sooner or later, become the prey of thieves, and that, for all practical purposes, would be the end of them.<sup>38</sup>

Absent from Carter’s popular account, however, is the significance of his own role in the apprehension of the Abdelrasuls,<sup>39</sup> and of his reliance on the very labour this moral framework would criminalize. As Van der Spek notes, “all of Carnarvon and Carter’s workmen came from the various hamlets that make up larger al-Qurna,”<sup>40</sup> and that their labour was more than just solely physical. Although most accounts stress that the Abdelrasuls discovered their infamous cache by accident (a point that they themselves may have underscored so as to minimize their culpability), their emplacement in and through the land should be considered an important contributor to the discovery, since “Qurnawi in-depth knowledge of the landscape surrounding them will have alerted them to the possibility of hidden tombs in the crags and chimneys of the escarpment.”<sup>41</sup> And so

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<sup>37</sup> Carter and Mace, *The Discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen*, 64-80.

<sup>38</sup> Carter and Mace, 73.

<sup>39</sup> Van der Spek’s important investigation describes Carter’s role here, while pointing suggestively to its possible true extent: “Howard Carter, who was then chief inspector for Upper Egypt, subsequently established their culpability by using a tracker who followed the trail to Ahmad’s house, while Carter himself matched photographs of Muhammad’s footprints taken in the royal tomb with those obtained elsewhere. Despite all this, Carter could still comment in his official report that even though the bandages of the royal mummy had been ripped open, the body had not been broken and only those places were searched where usually jewelry was hidden, the work having “evidently been done by an expert.” (van der Spek, *The Modern Neighbors of Tutankhamun: History, Life, and Work in the Villages of the Theban West Bank*, 212.)

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

while the actual “discovery of antiquities was probably often fortuitous, there is a systemic quality in the way local landscape knowledge constitutes the ‘cultural capital’ that informs, at least in part, the identity and worldview of Qurnawi.”<sup>42</sup> This ‘cultural capital’, Van der Spek finds was adeptly utilized by Carter’s own expeditions, allowing him to gain an advantage over other archaeologists who missed important discoveries “by their failing to tap into local knowledge, by not accepting the reality of local illicit activities, and by not negotiating outcomes that left something for both sides.”<sup>43</sup>

The contested status of such local capital — including the refusal to acknowledge its function *as* capital — aids in the construction of significant archaeological finds such as that of Tutankhamun’s tomb as the work of individual Western genius, embarked upon as projects of salvage and preservation. It contributes, accordingly, to the valuative structures through which such antiquities are represented and exhibited: Thomas Hoving’s bestselling account — written in the wake of the record-breaking *Treasures of Tutankhamun* tour of the 1970s — paints the magnitude of Carter’s discovery in the context of “the greedy and arrogant bandits of the Theban hills,” who “molested and even fired upon” Napoleon’s *savants*. Carter, working in this “‘world capital’ of thieves,” persists despite objections that “What foreign archaeologists and savants had not found in modern times, no doubt the villagers at Kurna probably had.”<sup>44</sup> Hoving’s narrative builds an affective context — a legal, moral, and geopolitical drama — through which ‘Treasures’ can be constructed as such. Their value in the Western public imagination is

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 130, 46.

thus associated with the find's contestation; not only by Egyptian political authorities, but by such subaltern publics too.<sup>45</sup>

#### 4.4 Architecture against the poor

In the decades that followed Carter's discovery, state efforts to control Gurnawi labour and land hardly diminished; in fact, what followed was a nearly sixty-year campaign to demolish the entire village and relocate its populace to other sites less directly associated with the acquisition of antiquities. This campaign, as Timothy Mitchell argues, came to be bound up with another project of national self-conceptualization; that of Hassan Fathy's quest to define a modern yet authentic visual language of vernacular Egyptian architecture.<sup>46</sup> The normative history of these two intertwined projects is typically recounted as follows:

In 1945, the Egyptian Department of Antiquities commissioned the renowned architect Hassan Fathy to design and construct a new settlement to which the inhabitants of Old Gournaw were to be relocated, in an effort to curtail looting at the nearby Pharaonic sites and facilitate tourism development. This misfortune of the Gournawi provided Fathy with an opportunity to create a model village, which he hoped would provide a basis for changing the living conditions of all of Egypt's rural poor. Fifty acres of agricultural land were purchased as a site for the new village to which seven thousand Gournawis were to be relocated. In the course of preparing his design, Fathy consulted extensively with the villagers themselves, studying their habits and the social and physical organization of Old Gournaw. Valorizing the humanity of the rural poor, Fathy designed each house individually and sought to infuse the village with "Egyptian" culture [...] However, New Gournaw was at once his greatest achievement and most profound disappointment. Though Fathy's project was ultimately meant to shelter up to

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<sup>45</sup> Additional popular heritage re-appropriations in subaltern Egyptian publics are examined in Diane Singerman and Paul Amar, *Cairo Cosmopolitan*, 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity, Rule of Experts* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002), chap. 6, <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520928251>.

20,000 inhabitants, only part of the plan was realized due to political and financial complications and opposition on the part of the residents to relocation.<sup>47</sup>

This account of the New Qurna project, as recounted here by the World Monuments Fund, echoes a common contemporary consensus on Fathy's legacy; that of an artistic genius thwarted by the same ignorant masses whose plight he strove to alleviate. "His is a triumph of ideas," recent reviews of his legacy argue, foiled because, "despite the studies and research that Hassan Fathi had accomplished in the course of his work for the new village, Old Gourniis rejected the new project and they were never satisfied."<sup>48</sup> Fathy's challenge to Modernism's universalizing rationalism came at a critical juncture, offering a visual language that combined traditional forms with environmentally-conscious construction methods and an ethos of community consultation just as modernity's global failures were gaining increasing attention.<sup>49</sup> Published in multiple languages in the 1970s, Fathy's *Architecture for the Poor* — his landmark account of the New Qurna project — catapulted his star status. But amid the adulation, there remained a vein of critical discomfort with Fathy's romanticization of an imaginary, idyllic countryside. Moshe Safdie, for instance, took issue with Fathy's denial of the village the basic amenity of running water, having opted instead for a central well on the basis of the picturesque

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<sup>47</sup> World Monuments Fund, "New Gournia Village," 6.

<sup>48</sup> Ismail Serageldin, *Hassan Fathy* (Alexandria: Biblioteca Alexandria, 2007); Randa A. Mahmoud, "Old Gournia: Redefining Sustainability in Vernacular Architecture/Urbanism," *Procedia Environmental Sciences* 34 (2016): 439–52, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proenv.2016.04.039>. See also: Khaled Galal Ahmed and Lamis El-Gizawy, "Two Versions of 'New Gournia' and the Dilemma of Sustainability in New Urban Communities in Egypt," *WIT Transactions on Ecology and the Environment* 120 (2009): 691–701, <https://doi.org/10.2495/SDP090642>; World Monuments Fund, "New Gournia Village," 2011.

<sup>49</sup> Panayiota Pyla, "The Many Lives of New Gournia: Alternative Histories of a Model Community and Their Current Significance," *Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 6 (2009): 715–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602360903357120>.

stature of the local women carrying water in jugs above their heads.<sup>50</sup> Safdie, however, is unconvinced of Fathy's priorities: "Surely there are few peasants who would not want to avoid the grinding labor of carrying water to the house."<sup>51</sup>

In fact, such moralizing valuative inscriptions of Gurnawi labour *and* resources such as land and water were a critical component of the New Qurna project. The displacement came at a time of increased state efforts to impose systems of rational order and control over such resources via massive infrastructures regulating the flows of both agricultural labour and irrigation canals.<sup>52</sup> Both of these systematized flows contributed the massive, uncontained spread of malaria and cholera epidemics in the years preceding the relocation efforts, in 1942-45 and 1947 respectively, killing about *a third of Gurna's residents* and affecting *80-90% of the population*.<sup>53</sup> While Fathy's representation of this enormity of human loss recalls that of Apollinaire Lebas and Verniac Saint-Maur in nineteenth century Luxor<sup>54</sup> — that is, as a nuisance to labour-management efforts — in

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<sup>50</sup> Moshe S Safdie, "Joy in Mudville," The New York Review of Books, December 11, 1975, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1975/12/11/joy-in-mudville/>. For more on this critique, see also Panayiota Pyla, "Hassan Fathy Revisited: Postwar Discourses on Science, Development, and Vernacular Architecture," *Journal of Architectural Education* 60, no. 3 (2007): 28–39, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1531-314X.2007.00093.x>. Fathy's specific rationale is that:

"It is hard to imagine a village in Egypt without its black-robed women, erect as queens, each with her water jar (*ballas*) carried nonchalantly on her head, and it will be a pity to lose the sight. Who knows, too, but that stooping with a bucket to a tap in the yard may destroy the magnificent carriage for which our women are renowned." (*Architecture for the Poor* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 100..)

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, 153.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-154.

<sup>54</sup> See: Fathy, *Architecture for the Poor*, 60; Lebas, *L'obélisque de Luxor : Histoire de Sa Translation à Paris, Description Des Travaux Auxquels Il a Donné Lieu [...]*, 70; Saint-Maur, *Voyage Du Luxor En Egypte*, 147.

fact, the epidemic was a critical justification for the long-planned effort to bring Gurna within the confines of state control. As Guitart observes,

Reasons for the spread of those diseases were poverty and inequality, but the government mentioned the unsanitary conditions (and again the “ignorant peasant” is brought up) in which the peasants were living, and this was due to the impetus for the relocation and the uprooting of the community. Amidst this suffering [...] Fathy, strangely enough, still questioned the strong rural opposition encountered.<sup>55</sup>

So while accounts such as those of the World Monuments Fund speak to the “misfortune of the Gournawi” as a near-immutable characteristic of the population, in fact, those very conditions of misfortune can be seen to have been set in motion — at times intentionally — by the very national institutions that would most benefit from them. The same national logics can be seen here to underlie these diverse projects of control; antiquities, irrigation, and contagion all come to be constructed as *uncontained flows*, the management of which was critical to the production of ruly, modern, productive citizens.

The crises of their management all crystallize simultaneously in Gurna: to disincentivize ‘tomb-robbery,’ it was deemed necessary for the populace to engage in agricultural labour in the fields whose irrigation was now controlled by the newly-dammed Nile, yet illness was rife in those low-lying fields, away from the relative safety from such an epidemic in the dry mountain environment. At the same time, the accompanying spread of disease is ascribed to the fundamental ignorance of the peasantry, who are then coerced to relocate both for their own safety and that of the

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<sup>55</sup> Miguel Guitart, “The Failed Utopia of a Modern African Vernacular: Hassan Fathy in New Gourna,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 68, no. 2 (2014): 175–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10464883.2014.937232>.

antiquities, since, to protect the fragile rock-cut tombs, running water is banned from the mountain, contributing to a lack of modern sanitation.<sup>56</sup> But running water is also denied in the model village to which the Gurnawi are relocated: here, it “must be introduced with care,” possibly in several generations’ time;<sup>57</sup> after all, the preservation of heritage (such as the tradition of carrying water) is paramount to development of a modern state, even those forms of it which rely on the artificial imposition of decidedly pre-modern conditions. Yet within this structure of paternalistic, moral control, moments of resistance remain possible: In 1948, as Mitchell describes,

with only a fifth of the village completed, Fathy was forced to abandon the project, partly because of bickering between government departments, but mostly because one night that winter men from the old hamlets of Gurna, whose families opposed the planned eviction and resettlement, cut the dike and flooded the low-lying village.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, as Guitart concludes, “it was thanks to the violent history of the irrigation schemes that the villagers had the power to thwart Fathy’s plans:”<sup>59</sup> but while the *infrastructure* of resistance in this case came from the re-routing of state-controlled resources to unauthorized ends, the *strategy* of this resistant act can be traced to Gurna’s long legacy of unruly autonomy, and to the same strategies of deferral seen in practice under the reign of Mohammed Ali Pasha.<sup>60</sup> Not only do they cut the dike, but, perhaps even more offensively to Fathy, they refuse to actually work on its repair. Those that had been

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<sup>56</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 164.

<sup>57</sup> Fathy, *Architecture for the Poor*, 100.

<sup>58</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 151.

<sup>59</sup> Guitart, “The Failed Utopia of a Modern African Vernacular: Hassan Fathy in New Gurna,” 177.

<sup>60</sup> For more on these strategies, see Zeinab Abul-Magd’s work such as “Rebellion in the Time of Cholera.”, and Khaled Fahmy’s work such as *All the Pasha’s Men*.

“rounded up the night before [...] had made off through the water under cover of darkness,” and even those who could be persuaded to remain “had contrived to widen the gap with their feet while ostensibly filling it in with their hands.”<sup>61</sup> Here, despite Fathy’s efforts to “to guide them toward an appreciation of beauty,”<sup>62</sup> it seems another strategic consensus was formed by the workforce: *twice*,

the district attorney descended upon us to make an investigation into the flooding. He and his assistants went round asking every villager in turn: "Did you pierce the dike?" Every villager in turn replied "No," and when the attorney had filled three sheets of legal-sized paper with these answers, he went home satisfied that the affair had been investigated.<sup>63</sup>

This supposedly entrenched lawlessness — constructed by Fathy as a lack of *appreciation*, an unruly refusal to abide by normative value-structures — is tied again, perhaps unsurprisingly, to the mythos of the Abdelrasul family, the saga of their discovery some seventy years prior, and the spectre of tomb-robbery in Gurna more broadly. Overseeing this vexatious workforce was Ahmed Abdelrasul, who had “been presented to [Fathy] as one of the notables of Gournah, a man of an influential family (son of the eminent sheikh Mohammed Abdul Rasoul) and well accustomed to engaging labor for the Department of Antiquities.”<sup>64</sup> Though Abdelrasul fulfills this role well — perhaps *too* well, insisting that Fathy, a Cairene with little experience managing such projects, pay far more labourers than is necessary<sup>65</sup> — he and the illicit trade with which his family

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<sup>61</sup> Fathy, 176.

<sup>62</sup> Fathy, 36.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>65</sup> Notably, this very same strategy of labour collectivity is deployed in the very same place many decades previous, during Belzoni’s operation to transport the Memnon head. See: Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*, 42.

had become synonymous are nonetheless blamed for the workers' later rebellion. For Fathy, the moral economy through which antiquities are valued is deeply bound up with normative conceptualizations of labour, hygiene, land, and beauty:

The patriarchal system is very strong, and everybody obeys the heads of families, who, in Gurna, were tomb robbers [...] They had no intention of giving up their nice, profitable, squalid houses in the cemetery with treasure waiting to be mined under their floors, to move to a new, hygienic, beautiful village away from the tombs.<sup>66</sup>

This revealing passage elucidates the competing valuative structures for which Gurna came to stand. Represented here is a way of life fundamentally incompatible with the construction of the modern citizen, one who values (authoritatively-prescribed) beauty, hygiene, and preservation, and is willing to submit to dangerous and exploitative conditions though virtuous labour in the fields. Conversely, Fathy acknowledges life in the mountain tombs to be *materially* superior to the one he proposes in important ways, as the antiquities trade provided an important financial base for Gurna, and New Qurna had a near-total lack of economy, providing no clear means upon which the proposed residents could subsist. But this material absence was in fact a productive one, reinforcing the state's claim to the land and antiquities both. The Gurnawi's dispossession enforced legal doctrine originating extending as far back as Mohammed Ali Pasha's 1832 decree of the state's exclusive right to all antiquities, aimed specifically and explicitly, at Champollion's behest, at deterring unauthorized local utilizations of this

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<sup>66</sup> Fathy 176.

sort.<sup>67</sup> Yet the Gurnawi assertion of the illegitimacy of the state's dominion extends even further back; as can be seen in Browne's account, the legacy of Gurna's *de facto* autonomy are documented since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Even for supporters of Fathy's work, this material absence is still regarded as one of his project's greatest failures: Ahmed and El-Gizawy, for example, find that "Fathy's only attempt to provide for the village's economy was to teach a few of the children some arts and crafts that could be sold to tourists, yet even he admitted that these projects met with little success."<sup>68</sup> In fact, imposing a kind of aesthetically-pleasing asceticism on a deeply unwilling populace seemed to have been a primary motivation for Fathy; the *economy* upon which his moral economy was founded. Arguing that "Even if they were compensated generously [for their homes], they would only spend the money to marry more wives and would then become landless and penniless vagabonds."<sup>69</sup> Fathy's assertion here that providing the Gurnawi with material resources would only, counterintuitively, render them "landless and penniless" runs at odds with the fact of modern Gurna's continuous presence since at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century CE, as attested to both by oral histories and European sources.<sup>70</sup>

Indeed, the residents' claim to the place lay in more than just the *homes* which Fathy sought to replace but indeed the *land* itself upon which the homes were built, land

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<sup>67</sup> For additional discussion on this decree, including Champollion and al-Tahtawi's diverging aims in shaping its final form, see **Chapter 3**. Champollion's letter to the Pasha emphasizes Gurna three separate times in the list of significant sites for government-mandated conservation, more than any other location.

<sup>68</sup> Ahmed and El-Gizawy, "The Dilemma of Sustainability in the Development Projects of Rural Communities in Egypt - The Case of New Gurna," 419.

<sup>69</sup> Fathy 16.

<sup>70</sup> Such as Richard Pococke *A Description of the East and Some Other Countries* (London: Bowyer, 1745), 97. Pococke, 97.

that permitted a measure of local autonomy in contrast with subsequent local housing developments where “people are not allowed to adapt or change anything in their houses as long as this might compromise the appearance of facades.”<sup>71</sup> Fathy’s artificially-imposed scarcity here works in line with this broader form of aesthetic monopoly: while the enforcement of such a value-structure seems at odds with his ethos of consultation and collaboration, it was in fact critical to his goal of producing and disciplining a virtuous, modern citizenry. So while Fathy argues that the fact

that some individuals prefer to spend money on objects of indulgence such as more wives or television sets instead of necessities like wholesome food and good housing should not deflect the planner from offering them what he thinks best for them.<sup>72</sup>

And yet,

The people should, ideally, choose wisely, but the authorities should make that choice easy and even restrict opportunities for unwise choice.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, while in theory Fathy espoused New Qurna’s full cultural and economic sustainability, this support can be seen to have been predicated upon the imposition of a deeply paternalistic set of values in the moral and economic sense. Fathy’s work, for all the accolades of its subversiveness, would find little purchase among the populations it

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<sup>71</sup> Khaled Galal Ahmed and Lamis El-Gizawy, “The Dilemma of Sustainability in the Development Projects of Rural Communities in Egypt - The Case of New Gourni,” *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning* 5, no. 4 (2010): 425, <https://doi.org/10.2495/SDP-V5-N4-407-429>.

<sup>72</sup> Fathy 136. It is striking here the extent to which ‘wives’ seem to epitomize for Fathy the kind of counter-civilizational excess his project strives to eradicate. Setting aside the ways that his ideal economy would seem to maintain the same patriarchal norms he so criticizes, a point can be made here about the ways that the broader imposition of hegemonic monogamy functioned as an important means of colonial biopower in nineteenth and twentieth century Egypt.

For more on this re-construction of the Egyptian family, see: Lila Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*, 2005, chap. 11, <https://doi.org/10.1525/var.2005.21.1-2.183>; Mona L. Russell, *Creating the New Egyptian Woman*, 2019, chap. 2.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

was aimed to benefit. Even his supporters acknowledge that “it is somewhat ironic” that a man “whose name is so closely associated with ‘Architecture for the Poor’ built so much for wealthy patrons,” associating his philosophy with a kind of “noblesse oblige.”<sup>74</sup>

#### 4.5 A matter of *maşlahā*

Ultimately, the New Qurna project was officially abandoned in 1948, and remained largely uninhabited by the villagers it was intended for. In the following decades, many of the original Fathy houses were eventually torn down, fell into disrepair, or were repurposed by new populations from Luxor and elsewhere that came to inhabit them and their surrounding region, particularly with the construction of a new nearby development and a renewed effort at relocation in the early 2000s. Even now, the same moralizing rhetorics of aesthetic, sanitation, and preservation are deployed to discipline and control its populace, as a new project has been undertaken to categorize New Qurna *itself* as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The very fact of its utilization and growth as a contemporary, urban community — arguably the very rationale for its initial establishment by Fathy — is cited as a “decline” against which heritage processes ought to act, as “many of the original [Fathy] buildings in the village have been demolished and replaced by unsympathetic high rise buildings constructed using concrete.”<sup>75</sup> Yet the tightly-clustered, larger new structures serve needs which were anticipated yet unfulfilled by Fathy’s philosophy: those of a socially-fulfilling, environmentally-responsive, urban

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<sup>74</sup> Serageldin, *Hassan Fathy*, 16.

<sup>75</sup> Abdel Tawab, “The World Heritage Centre’s Approaches to the Conservation of New Gourna Village, and the Assessment of Its Authenticity and Integrity,” 692.

space. As Mahmoud Ali Sayed — a resident of New Qurna — attests, “Hassan Fathy built for small families. People marry. The whole family living together is very important here — to have my son and grandson around me.”<sup>76</sup> Flat roofs, more typical of the countryside and in Egypt’s south,<sup>77</sup> now replace Fathy’s high domes, permitting the construction of additional upper floors to support growing families. Fathy’s wide, empty courtyards and porches have been repurposed into reception areas, stables, and working spaces, supporting the village’s growing economy.<sup>78</sup>

Nonetheless, appeals for its conservation call for “the total and partial demolition” of these aesthetically “unsympathetic developments.”<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, a framework is established within which actual Upper Egyptian urban architectural norms of which Fathy sought to emulate are deemed ‘inauthentic’, and only Fathy’s own invented forms<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>World Monument Fund, 42.

<sup>77</sup> Mitchell, 158. See also Note 77.

<sup>78</sup> World Monument Fund, 42. See also Pyla, “The Many Lives of New Gourna: Alternative Histories of a Model Community and Their Current Significance,” 720.

<sup>79</sup> Ayman G. Abdel Tawab, “The World Heritage Centre’s Approaches to the Conservation of New Gourna Village, and the Assessment of Its Authenticity and Integrity,” *Alexandria Engineering Journal* 53, no. 3 (2014): 695, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aej.2014.01.010>.

<sup>80</sup> Much has been written on this topic, especially on the supposition that Fathy’s domed structures – whose forms were inspired by Nubian mausolea – were considered by the Gurnawi to be evocative of *maqams* or shrines of dead saints, and accordingly, to be symbolically unsuitable abodes for the living. I, however, have found little primary evidence of this aside from references to Fathy Ghanim’s 1959 novel *El Jabal*, a fictional account of the Gurna relocation. On the other hand, there is evidence that Fathy’s use of indoor courtyards – a form borrowed from the Mamluk-era mansions of Cairene elites with which he would have been familiar – was negatively received by the Gurnawi as an inappropriate use of space, but that this was not a major factor in terms of the relocation efforts.

For a discussion of the implications of these domes structures, see: Guitart, “The Failed Utopia of a Modern African Vernacular: Hassan Fathy in New Gourna,” 172; Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, 158; Pyla, “Hassan Fathy Revisited: Postwar Discourses on Science, Development, and Vernacular Architecture,” 28; Hana Taragan, “Architecture in Fact and Fiction: The Case of the New Gourna Village in Upper Egypt,” *Muqarnas Online*, 1984.

On the courtyards and their reception, see: Ahmed and El-Gizawy, “The Dilemma of Sustainability in the Development Projects of Rural Communities in Egypt - The Case of New Gourna”; Pyla, “The Many Lives of New Gourna: Alternative Histories of a Model Community and Their Current Significance.”

— some of which ran deeply counter to their intended use or symbolism — are worthy of such preservation. Within this framework, “The authenticity of the materials of the various buildings designed by Hassan Fathy was considered fairly genuine,” but “the internal and external alterations carried out to these buildings have resulted in the introduction of new totally incongruent materials and thus undermined the authenticity of the materials of these buildings.”<sup>81</sup> The only one of Fathy’s original buildings in New Qurna that has been continuously, independently maintained by its community is the mosque, which, for “its ability in stimulating the local people’s religious feelings” is the sole part of his project “to which the majority of the residents are spiritually attached.”<sup>82</sup>

The contemporary continuity of these institutional initiatives which pit rhetorics of heritage conservation against the material interests of a disenfranchised populace can still be seen too in Gurna itself. Continuous efforts have been undertaken to expel its population, with several attempts in the 1990s ending in failure. This era of efforts culminated in a violent altercation, when,

On January 17, 1998 [...] a government bulldozer accompanied by two truckloads of armed police moved into Gurna to carry out demolitions. A group of about three hundred villagers gathered, later swelling to several thousand, and drove the police back with stones, pushing their bulldozer into a canal. The police opened fire on the villagers with automatic rifles, killing four and leaving more than twenty injured.<sup>83</sup>

While the negative press from this incident posed a temporary obstacle, the Egyptian state and international funders such as USAID were not to be deterred. Determined to

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<sup>81</sup> Abdel Tawab, “The World Heritage Centre’s Approaches to the Conservation of New Gournia Village, and the Assessment of Its Authenticity and Integrity,” 697.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 695-696.

<sup>83</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, 152.

transform the area into an “open-air museum,”<sup>84</sup> a new village was constructed to house Gurna’s residents. Beginning in 1997 and only completing in 2006, this second new Gurna, called Al Taref, bore a superficial resemblance to Fathy’s project but with additional amenities such as running water and electricity, though with little semblance of a process of consultation or compromise.<sup>85</sup> Thousands of identical “one-story, two bedroom house that looks like a makeshift sea side chalet” were allocated according to the exigencies of a distant Cairene bureaucracy, providing, as before, little space for individual needs or economic self-subsistence.<sup>86</sup> This time, however, the forces of the state were prepared for resistance:

In the 2000s the government applied greater pressure for residents to move, culminating in the 2006 destruction of many of the houses of Old Qurna village, whose hilltop facades had been an iconic view for generations of tourists to Luxor’s west bank. These actions produced scenes of bulldozers demolishing houses in front of despondent occupants.<sup>87</sup>

This scene — bringing to mind the Nileside display of grief and rage described by Maspero in response to the extraction of the Abdelrasul cache nearly a century and a half earlier — makes visible the affective dimension of these projects of disenfranchisement, coercion, and control. “*El ard ‘ard*” — “land is honour,” as Ahmed Sayed Hassan, former resident of the Gurna hillside impresses upon his interviewer.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, this land is

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<sup>84</sup> For a history of this effort, see van der Spek, *The Modern Neighbors of Tutankhamun: History, Life, and Work in the Villages of the Theban West Bank*, chap. 11., note 17, where he traces this plan to Gaston Maspero in the late nineteenth century.

<sup>85</sup> Ahmed and El-Gizawy, “Two Versions of ‘New Gourna’.”

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Stephen Urgola, “Partnering for Egyptian Heritage Oral History Internal and External Collaborations Pursued,” 2016, 78.

<sup>88</sup> Elnubi Hussein Abdelrasul, *Qurna Hillside Oral History Project*; Rare Books and Special Collections Library; The American University in Cairo, 2016-04-17.

repeatedly identified as a source of *maṣlaḥa* — benefit, welfare, interest, or social utility — with tangible material and legal implications, negotiated locally for centuries. Its distribution is allocated through the complex local systems of inheritance, and so its seizure dispossesses not only the present generation, but those of the past and future too. Accordingly, the dense network of Gurna’s competing value structures are deeply bound up with the bodies of those who have lived and died there, their presence constructed as excessive, unproductive, and unruly, their containment a civilizational imperative as much as that of the Nile’s waters. The abjection of the Gurnawi is more than just a symptom of Egyptology’s “lack of respect for the post-Roman eras of Theban history;”<sup>89</sup> indeed, it might be better understood as a critical discursive boundary, one circumscribing that which is deemed unsayable.

Speaking of discursive bounds: it is only here at the midpoint of this analysis of Gurnawi abjection that I have directly quoted the words of a single actual resident of Gurna, unmediated by Western authors. This, as Simpson notes, is the dismal norm: despite being one of the most historically-surveyed regions of the world, having “had the world’s largest number of professional and amateur seekers of history concentrated in one small area over nearly two hundred years,” and having been ethnographically documented to the extent that we know of a long-dead “particular cow [that] was renowned for being very strong and working for many years,” practically no work has been done to record and seriously consider the voices of Gurna’s living, human

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<sup>89</sup> Bori Németh, *Now Behold My Spacious Kingdom*, ed. Bori Németh (Budapest, 2017), 205.

residents.<sup>90</sup> Despite the millions of dollars of foreign and domestic funding to expel its residents, very basic studies — assessing, for example, the true extent of the purported tomb robbery in the region, or if alternate, less disruptive solutions to the protection of Theban antiquities may be found — have simply never been conducted.<sup>91</sup>

A rare exception to this norm can be found in the American University in Cairo's 2016 Qurna Hillside Oral History Project, helmed by Caroline Simpson, a long-time critic of the relocation efforts.<sup>92</sup> Based on a collaboration between Simpson and Abdu Daramalli and Ahmed ElTayeb, two Gurna residents with local archaeological expertise, the project involved the collection of dozens of oral histories via interviews with ageing former Gurnawi, recounting their thoughts and memories of their upbringing, displacement, and broader worldviews.<sup>93</sup> This publicly available archive documents a portion of the complexity and nuance of local reactions to the expulsion, which had been completed about six years previous in 2010.

Here, speaking (generally) individually, the diversity of Gurna's community becomes apparent: views differ, as might be expected, on memories of the displacement and its official rationale. Many were forcibly displaced as part of the government relocation efforts, but others such as Khairy Fahim Mikhail moved (comparatively) voluntarily after damage to their homes during the floods of the 1990s. For some, such as Hasaan Hassan Al-Khabir, the move has been positive overall, in part due to the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, 164.

<sup>92</sup> Rare Books and Special Collections Library, "Qurna Hillside Oral History Project." <https://digitalcollections.aucegypt.edu/digital/collection/p15795coll24/>

<sup>93</sup> Urgola, "Partnering for Egyptian Heritage Oral History Internal and External Collaborations Pursued."

improvements in sanitation and the availability of running water in the city.<sup>94</sup> For many others such as Karima Mahmoud Ahmed Omran and Nadia Ahmed Abd El Azzem, such amenities mark a major lifestyle improvement, but they still hold that life before the displacement was better for a wide assortment of reasons. Others still such as Mahmoud Mohamed El Salman see the provision of these necessities — or the *promise* of their provision, since for many they were never delivered — as a coercive tool used to facilitate the displacement. Yet even within this close-knit community, divisions emerge along familial lines such as those of the Ḥorubaṭ (among whom the Ḥašaš and Abdelrasul families feature prominently in Egyptology’s history), the ‘Aṭeyāṭ, the Ġhābāt and others. A frequent complaint is that those with more power — with more access to authorities, to social capital such as *connections*, that vital currency of Egyptian social mobility — were able to bargain for more or better land in the relocation, and have thus fared better since. Hasaan Al-Khabir ascribes the acquisition of these choice lots simply to *šaṭara* – cleverness or wiles – yet it is clear that opportunities within Gurna were never equally distributed, and that generations-old disparities in wealth and literacy contribute to the reproduction of material conditions even here in the ‘New Qurna.’

Yet despite these material disparities, most recount their memories of Gurna with fondness, citing the closeness of Gurna’s community, the lack of pollution, the comfort of the mountainside homes, and overall sense of safety as important elements that have since been lost. Muslim and Coptic residents cite comparatively little religious strife (although, again, real material disparities are present), and many speak of the *baraka* —

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<sup>94</sup> Hasaan Hassan Al-Khabir Interview, “Qurna Hillside Oral History Project.”

the spiritual presence or blessedness — embodied by the mountain itself. This *baraka* manifests itself in numerous ways; the overall well-being associated with the place, which is represented as a fountainhead of *rizq* (fortune) and *maşlahā* (benefit, good, interest, or social utility). *Maşlahā* is in this sense broader than *rizq*, encompassing all that was of benefit to Gurna’s residents, socially as well as economically.<sup>95</sup>

What emerges as well is the depth and complexity of community members’ relations to the land, the strategic resistance used to retain it, and how entangled those strategies were with the ambivalent local legacy of ‘tomb robbery’. Among those most strongly opposed to the relocation, there is a clear sense of *strategy* about it, one that challenges the view that it was a mere expression of natural, instinctual counter-hegemonic affect, of “obstructive reluctance” or a “combative attitude.”<sup>96</sup> Instead, what can be seen is an incisive analysis of the role of solidarity as a critical strategy to such resistance efforts. This is the conclusion of many of Gurna’s elders, interviewed separately: for Ahmed Sayed Hassan, for example, the recent relocation efforts entailed a fracturing of the social bonds that had supported the resistance of the 1940s. He recounts that “back when Hassan Fathy wanted to relocate the town to his model village, when the elders decided to refuse, they *all* refused, as though by one voice. But now, in this

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<sup>95</sup> The politics and semiotics of *maşlahā* are explored, albeit in a somewhat more formal sense, in Sami Al-Daghistani, “Semiotics of Islamic Law, Maşlahā, and Islamic Economic Thought,” *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 29, no. 2 (2016): 389–404, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-016-9457-x..>

<sup>96</sup> Ahmed and El-Gizawy, “The Dilemma of Sustainability in the Development Projects of Rural Communities in Egypt - The Case of New Gourna,” 413; Ahmad Hamid, *Hassan Fathy and Continuity in Islamic Arts and Architecture* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2010), xxvii.

generation, there is no *itifaq* [agreement, accord].”<sup>97</sup> Fatema Ibrahim Mohamed Khalil echoes this view, impressing upon her interviewer:

Do you know that if everyone held each other as one they couldn’t have expelled us? But some people wanted to move out and others didn’t want to move out. So in the end, everyone was relocated. And when they came here, my girl, they’ve had a difficult time.<sup>98</sup>

This sense of strategy is linked for many with broader geopolitical struggles. Ahmed Sayed Hassan and Mohamed Ahmed El-Tayeb, for example, both compare their forcible expulsion to that of Palestinian communities. Describing the day the bulldozers came to destroy their houses, El-Tayeb puts it bluntly: “Have you seen what happens between Palestine and Israel? It was just like that. Our government was like Israel.”<sup>99</sup> Critiquing the state’s monopoly on both the land and its associated antiquities, Gurna’s plight is constructed here as an anti-imperial one, legitimized, just as it is in the Palestinian case, through the material reality of long, continuous habitation. Laying bare the complex dynamics of power, violence, and dispossession *within* Egypt in this way, El-Tayeb’s position works against top-down efforts to impose an idyllic view of a monolithic Egyptian nation, over which it may impose uniform control. Part of the threat of Gurna’s claim for its part of Egyptian *heritage* — tangible and intangible — is therefore that it

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<sup>97</sup>Ahmed Sayed Hassan “Qurna Hillside Oral History Project,” (1:05:35 – 1:06:02)

<sup>98</sup>Fatema Ibrahim Mohamed Khalil, “Qurna Hillside Oral History Project,” (14:05).

<sup>99</sup> Mohamed Ahmed El-Tayeb, “Qurna Hillside Oral History Project,” (25:00). N.B.: This comment has been scrubbed from the transcript and its translation, but is retained (for the time being) in the audio recording.

Additional analysis on this point of comparison is presented in Kees van der Spek, “Another Place, a Different West Bank . . .,” *Bulletin of the Centre for Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies (CMECAS)* 4, no. 1 (1997): 3–6.

carves a space out of the monolith of the Egyptian body politic, disfiguring a seemingly age-old monument to the unitary power of the state.

What emerges as well from these analyses is a resistant praxis of opposition to the state, deftly recognizing and leveraging the fault lines in its bureaucratic structures. El Daramaly and Hassan both link their expulsion to the revolution of 2011, Hassan noting how alongside his multi-pronged legal battles with the governorate, he used Facebook and YouTube to mobilize around the injustice of their situation, just as the organizers of the national revolution did.<sup>100</sup> This counter-state approach extends to heritage conservation, with Hassan remarking that it was people, not institutions, that protected antiquities when the government fell.<sup>101</sup> This perspective is echoed by many, who assert that overall, the locals protected antiquities they lived amongst – that they were incentivized to do so since their livelihoods, shelter, and community depended upon it.<sup>102</sup>

What is striking about this assertion is that in these oral histories, it is *not* necessarily used as a defense against the single most overriding charge used to justify their forcible relocation, the one repeated to the extent that it has become near-synonymous with all of Gurna — that of tomb robbery. Instead, what is repeatedly articulated is a challenge to *reassess the entire valuative structure* wherein ‘tomb robbery’ is binaristically set apart from ‘archaeology’ as its fundamental Other, rather

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<sup>100</sup> Ahmed Sayed Hassan “Qurna Hillside Oral History Project,” (29:00 – 30:00)

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., (1:18:00)

<sup>102</sup> See for example: El Daramaly, Elnubi Hussein Abdelrasul, Hekmat Eltoham Abdelrahman and Mohamed Talaat, Mahmoud Ahmed Sayed Abdel Rahman, Mohamed Ahmed El-Tayeb, “Qurna Hillside Oral History Project.”

than a *mere extension of the same labour, markets, and structures of its knowledge-production.*

Mahmoud Abdel Rahman for example, offers a striking example. A retired antiquities worker and a descendant of the Abdelrasul family, he discusses a successful proposition of his: that the Ministry of Antiquities hire security guards (*ghafir*) for the tombs from the very families whose homes sit atop them.<sup>103</sup> “His post needs to be close to his family,” says Abdel Rahman “so that his family can help him guard it as well.”<sup>104</sup> Seeing that his neighbors already possess deep knowledge of the land and deeply associate it with their honour, (*‘ard*), the guard’s duty to his work is thus readily supported by the same knowledge and labour that was *already* being undertaken, outside and against the state. The demarcation between the *commission* and *prevention* of crimes against national patrimony is self-reflexively conceptualized as a *lateral* one: this is not an effort to enlighten an immiserated populace of a value they fail to grasp — rather, it is to deploy the entangled networks of knowledge, kin, land, and place in service of what disenfranchised families *already* do and know. Put differently: it is less an effort to remedy a sad lack of appreciation, but rather, to reinforce the appreciation *of currently-existing appreciations.*

These rhetorics are echoed by El Daramaly and Elnubi Hussein Abdelrasul, who draw attention to the hypocrisy of the ‘tomb robbery’ charge in light of its broader contexts. Abdelrasul describes his great-grandfather Mohammed’s role in the infamous

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<sup>103</sup> Mahmoud Ahmed Sayed Abdel Rahman , “Qurna Hillside Oral History Project,” (00:07:00)

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

discovery of the 1870s as ultimately an archaeological one. Though he may have stumbled on the initial find accidentally, he protected it from the thieves (it is unclear from the narrative whether the thieves in question represent those within or without state's protection), developing specific, expert knowledge relied upon by those whose names are positively associated with later famous finds: "He guided them; Mohammed Abdelrasul helped all the expeditions, all the archaeologists, like the Germans... they all used his expertise and knowledge."<sup>105</sup> Beyond that, he questions Mohammed Abdelrasul's construction as a thief in first place, since the laws as we now understand them are a recent construct:

Until 1980, the law had only been changed then by Farouk Hosny. If you had two similar pieces, you kept one and surrendered the other. How else was the whole world so enriched by Egypt? So they made a law that facilitated theft. They way they can steal, but blame it on an honorable citizen, like 'he was the one who stole.' But you [the government] were the ones doing the exporting! [...] That's how they tricked us with Nefertiti, and took her.<sup>106</sup>

The hypocrisy of the accusation of theft is underscored by the way that the Abdelrasul family's expert knowledge has been exploited by heritage institutions and professionals alike. Elnubi Abdelrasul recounts the story of how his grandfather, Hussein, assisted Howard Carter in the dig that resulted in the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb.<sup>107</sup> When its contents were uncovered and photographed, the then-12-year-old Hussein was draped with a magnificent necklace to illustrate what the boy-king might have looked like in life.

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<sup>105</sup> Elnubi Hussein Abdelrasul , "Qurna Hillside Oral History Project," (12:00).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., (11:00:12:00)

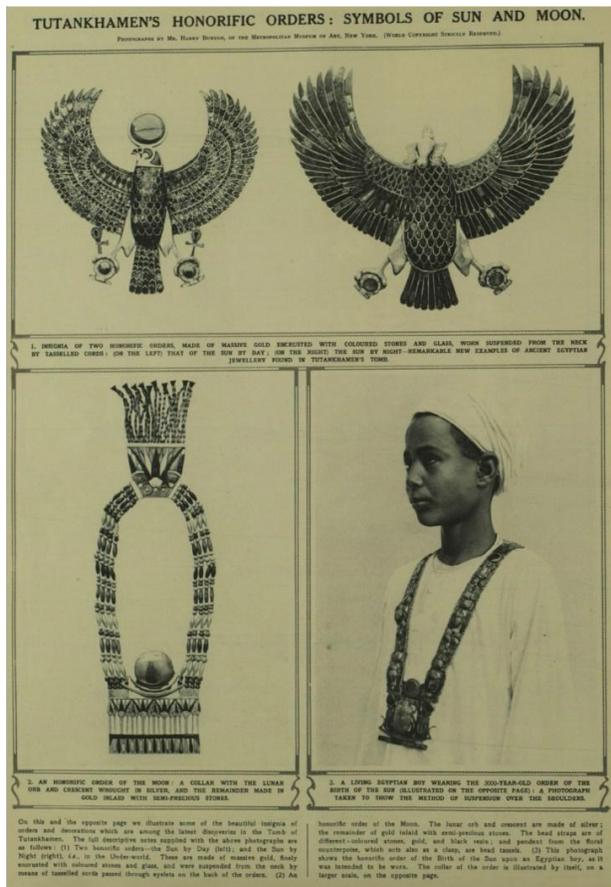
<sup>107</sup> Ibid., (28:00-29:00)

This photograph would become an iconic part of the subsequent Tutmania.<sup>108</sup> Elnubi, however, attests that when Carter initially took claim of the tomb's entire contents (this was before the end of the *partage* process), he gave the Abdelrasul family the necklace as a gift — though it only remained in the family for a week before being taken to the Antiquities Museum in Cairo.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Harry Burton, the tomb's photographer, recounts his tale of how the boy came to wear the necklace in the *Illustrated London Times*, 23 April 1927. Christina Riggs' exhibition *Photographing Tutankhamun* discusses the same subject.

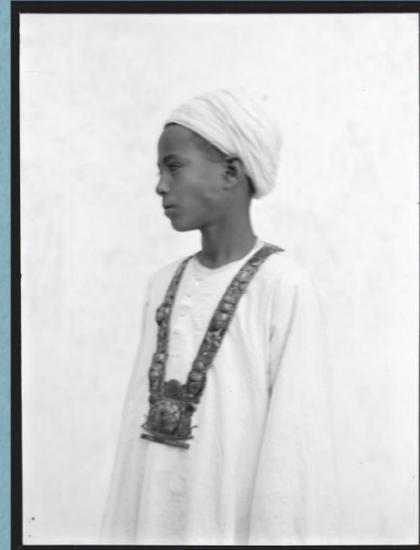
<sup>109</sup> Abdelrasul does not, however, specify the circumstances of its seizure. Elnubi Hussein Abdelrasul, "Qurna Hillside Oral History Project," (29:00)



**Figures 42 A and B: Two versions of Burton's photograph of a young Hussein Abdelrasul wearing Tutankhamun's reconstructed necklace. As is typical in this genre of archaeological photography, Egyptian bodies are utilized as mere backdrop, excising visible representations of affect such in the image on the right (4.2).**

**Figure 4.1 © *Illustrated London News*, 23 April 1927. Figure 4.2 © Christina Riggs, panel from *Photographing Tutankhamun*, held in Lincoln and Cambridge (UK), 2017-18. Both images via <https://photographing-tutankhamun.com/2020/06/20/the-water-boy-who-wasnt/>**

## STANDING STILL



We do not know whose idea it was to photograph an Egyptian boy wearing Tutankhamun's reconstructed necklace. Neither Carter nor Burton mentioned taking the four pictures. In this shot, which was never published, the boy turned away from the camera and clenched his jaw. Years later, *sheikh* Hussein Abd el-Rassul identified himself as the boy. Copies of the photograph hang in the tourist rest-house he owned near the Ramesseum temple at Luxor.

Photograph by Harry Burton, November or December 1926. A different photograph from the series appeared in the *Illustrated London News*, 23 April 1927

Figures 43 A, B & C: In his older age, Sheikh Hussein Abdelrasul — possibly the last surviving member of the Tutankhamun expedition — would operate a rest house near Gurna proudly displaying the famous photograph. Here, he would frequently recount his narrative of the discovery to visiting tourists. Accordingly, photographs of him in his older and younger years — along with his intervention upon the Egyptological canon — figure as a notable, recurring part of touristic encounters in the region. Hussein’s photograph plays a notable role in his grandson Elnubi’s oral history of Gurna, highlighting his family’s role in local archaeological history.<sup>110</sup>



<sup>110</sup> Clockwise from top left: © Sonny Stengle, *The Mysteries of Qurna*, TourEgypt, <http://www.touregypt.net/egypt-info/magazine-mag07012001-magfl.htm>. Peter Kunz @KunzPeter, Twitter, 1:34 pm · 8 Nov 2017, <https://twitter.com/kunzpeter/status/928329932148826113>. Sheikh Abdel-Rasul, © Meretseger Books, <https://www.meretsegerbooks.com/gallery/235/sheikh-abdel-rasul>

For the younger Abdelrasul, the tomb-robber is constructed as something of a constitutive Other to the Authorized Heritage Discourse,<sup>111</sup> a villain that must both be created and destroyed for the maintenance of the hegemonic order. After all, why should artifacts be removed from the sites in which they have been preserved for millennia if they were not (constructed to be) at risk of plunder there? And how could foreign nations be enriched by Egypt if regular Egyptians could be entrusted with their own heritage? This framing is echoed by El Daramaly, who draws attention to the ways that broader political structures rely on both the support *and* demonization of the ‘tomb robber’:

Interviewer: So no one stole anything? [...] What about all that’s been said about how there were families that sold and traded...

El Daramaly: Listen, even if there *was* selling ... I won’t say there was no selling. Ok? There was selling. But, let’s say I sold you something right now. Who is exporting these antiquities?

I: You mean, through the airport?

ED: There’s the airport, and there’s the security there, and there’s the inspections... When you go to the airport, they’ll know even if you’re wearing a ring, and you’ll have to remove it. So how are these things being exported?! If there weren’t important people exporting these things, they wouldn’t be getting exported.<sup>112</sup>

El Daramaly’s “*even if*” is critical here. By refusing to individualize the moral balance of the illicit antiquities trade upon those participants with the least sociopolitical power, he makes possible the refusal of the question’s most foundational terms. In so doing, he rebuffs the implication that if such a trade *were* extant, then state violence *would* be justified. This view outdistances practically all the recent critical scholarship on Gurna,

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<sup>111</sup> For an elaboration of this framework, see: Smith, *Uses of Heritage*.

<sup>112</sup> El Daramaly, “Qurna Hillside Oral History Project,” (01:16:00 - 01:18:00 )

even among scholars opposed to the community's relocation and the destruction of the associated homes. Here, the typical approach is one which strives to *recuperate* the Gurnawi via the re-inscription of normative relations to the state (and its associated valuative structures). Along these lines, Van der Spek's anthropological account of Gurna's residents — laudable as one of very few — works towards “balancing the ‘Abd al-Rasul archetype,’” presenting instead a view which “counters the perception that at al-Qurna there exists a singular illicit economic activity: tomb robbing, [offering] in its place a plurality of subsistence practices that are, furthermore, carried out as part of the rich social tapestry”<sup>113</sup> Andrew Bednarski's work to survey the ruins of the destroyed village hinges on a defence of its residents, in which he finds the “Qurnawi's entrenched reputation as rapacious tomb robbers” to be “exaggerated.”<sup>114</sup> Mitchell, critiquing the state's relocation efforts, pushes back against these framings, arguing that the accusation of Gurnawi tomb robbery has been “repeated so often that even many critics of the eviction assumed it to be true.”<sup>115</sup> Positing Gurna as only “a small part of the international network that moved the treasures of ancient Egypt to the great museums and private collections of Europe and North America,” Mitchell situates the accusations within their broader geopolitical contexts with a reminder that “it is curious that we now look back on the Gurnawis as tomb robbers, but still find it difficult to describe the British Museum in London or the Metropolitan Museum in New York as collections of

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<sup>113</sup> van der Spek, *The Modern Neighbors of Tutankhamun: History, Life, and Work in the Villages of the Theban West Bank*, 56–57.

<sup>114</sup> Andrew Bednarski, “The Ruined Hamlets of the Theban Hills: ARCE's record of the latest stratigraphic layers of Sheikh Abd el Qurna and El Khokha,” in *Now Behold My Spacious Kingdom*, 132.

<sup>115</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, 163.

stolen goods.”<sup>116</sup> Yet while Mitchell’s analysis draws attention to the structures permitting the illicit flow of antiquities, his vindication rests on the lack of evidence for tomb robbery in Gurna, rather than a critique of how the construction and abjection of the Gurnawi tomb robber in fact *undergirds* those broader geopolitics.

Critiques such as those of Mitchell, Van der Spek, and others serve as a vital intervention against national and international rhetorics which posit — with remarkable ease — Gurna as a community entirely comprised of barbarous villains. However, I would like to suggest that circumscribing such critiques within normative valuative bounds serves to whitewash a crucial aspect of Gurnawi history; that is, of a far-reaching, intentional, and strategic effort to stake an autonomous subjectivity *beyond* the bounds of state authority and hegemonic normativity. This is what is striking about Browne’s late eighteenth-century anecdote, cited at the beginning of this chapter. When he meets a local woman, he interpellates her as a victim, a damsel in distress: “Are you not afraid of crocodiles?” To which her emphatic reply serves as an assertion of autonomy beyond the bounds of state rule: “We are the crocodiles” she tells him, proceeding to “depict her own people as thieves and murderers.”<sup>117</sup> Even through Browne’s unreliable narration, it is evident that this statement is intended to discourage him from breaching the community’s sovereign bounds, denying his surveilling gaze.

This statement and others that I have highlighted from the eighteenth century onwards draw attention to a history of practiced, strategic, counter-institutional

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 163-164.

<sup>117</sup> Browne, “Travel. Africa, Egypt, Syria from Year 1792 to 1798 /,” 138.

collectivity, resisting intrusions upon community sovereignty from both the Egyptian state and abroad. This extends to the management of antiquities, as well: responding to accusations of tomb robbery, Mohamed Ahmed El-Tayeb, a resident of Gurna asserts: “if that had been the case, there’d be no antiquities. The government wouldn’t have been able to stop us: we had our own government.”<sup>118</sup> Accordingly, rather than asking, ‘are the Gurnawi really tomb-robbers, and if so, to what extent?’ instead I would like to ask: *even if* a significant portion of Gurna’s economy was derived from selling local antiquities outside of the state’s authorized networks — what *function* did their construction as a community of inveterate tomb-robbers serve as part of the aims of the very institutions that have criminalized them? Furthermore, by examining the productive function of the ‘tomb robber’, how might the markets and monopolies scaffolded by European (individual and institutional) collectors be differently understood? Shifting the terms of the inquiry in this way resists the implicit values which have undergirded the political economy of Egyptian heritage, shedding light on the productive absences in its historiography.

#### **4.6 Tomb robbers, scholars, and archaeologists**

I want to return here to the apparent oxymoron of Abdelrasul’s statement; that legal structures facilitate theft, that it is only through the criminalization of particular thieves that broader-scale theft can take place. Viewed as an argument about the function of legal and cultural institutions as part of an ideological state apparatus, Abdelrasul’s

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<sup>118</sup> Mohamed Ahmed El-Tayeb, “Qurna Hillside Oral History Project,” (25:30)

statement closely follows the observations put forth by legal scholar and former member of the Ministry of Antiquities' repatriation committee, Achraf El-Ashmawy in his book *Sariqat Mashrou'a (Legalized Thefts)*.<sup>119</sup> Viewed, however, as part of the entire timeline of Gurna's inscription within discourses of national heritage (which I have aimed to present here, in abbreviated form), it takes on a different significance. In this view, it is not legality *per se* which defines theft; the Gurnawi are described as robbers well before Mohammed Ali Pasha's 1832 decree banning the international trade in antiquities, the earliest such law in Egypt.<sup>120</sup> Instead, this evaluation seems to stem instead from a *valuative* disjuncture, one that lies at the intersection between the linguistic, sociological, and economic senses of 'value'.<sup>121</sup> For Graeber, it is no coincidence that 'value' is so semiotically overdetermined: taking a cue from Nancy Munn, he argues that these apparently incongruous *taxa* can be seen as competing symbolic orders through which action is made 'real'. 'Value' becomes "the way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves" through some kind of "socially recognized form;" however, it is the action – the *labour* – "not the forms themselves that are the source of value."<sup>122</sup> Thus it is through these symbolic constructions of labour, broadly defined, that 'value' is asserted and contested. For Graeber,

The moment we enter the world where labor is not commoditized, suddenly we begin talking about *values*. What is the most common form of unpaid labor in our society? Surely, housework. And what is the principal way in which values are invoked by pundits and politicians? "Family values." It's quite the same with art,

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<sup>119</sup> El-Achmawi, *Sariqat Mashrou'a*.

<sup>120</sup> See for example: Pococke and Denon, *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*, Vol. 1., both documenting travels in the late eighteenth century.

<sup>121</sup> See: Graeber, *Toward An Anthropological Theory of Value*, 1–2.

<sup>122</sup> Graeber, 47.

religion, politics, or social justice—or even, for that matter, those aspects of the world of work (loyalty, integrity) that do defy any calculus of profit.<sup>123</sup>

It is, I think, by excavating the productive outcomes of this slippage between the symbolic, economic, and moral domains that Gurna's particular abjection from the body politic can be understood. As Abul-Lughod observes, even within Egypt, "It is difficult to separate patriotic concern for the preservation of Egypt's heritage from desires to increase tourism and the income it generates for the state and private investors."<sup>124</sup> What heritage *means* can be seen here to be deeply tied up with what it is *worth* and the way upright citizens *ought* to feel about it. These categories are bound up with one another such that they do not simply reflect but *produce* publics, within and without the boundaries of the state. Thus, the question of *to whom* antiquities are (normatively) valued becomes a crucial battleground for both state and empire, a proving ground for the production of a disciplined citizenry.

It is through these valuative underpinnings of the archetypical Gurnawi tomb robber that we can come to understand the triumph in Denon's access to those tombs "which the inhabitants had always obstinately concealed from us, as the situation of their village had given them almost an exclusive trade in this singular article of commerce," such that "access to these tombs [was] being always made by violence."<sup>125</sup> For the *savants* of the Napoleonic expedition, the recourse to violence is a simultaneously economic and ethical imperative, predicated upon the construction of productive,

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<sup>123</sup> Graeber, "It Is Value That Brings Universes into Being," 224.

<sup>124</sup> Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*, 78.

<sup>125</sup> Denon 60, 81.

labouring bodies, ruly subjects of empire's machinery. This is why it is so galling that the Gurnawi had made an (apparently) "exclusive trade in this singular article of commerce;" this trade presents a threat to the desired French monopoly on antiquities, a challenge to their construction as a *res nullius*, a thing belonging to no one, free — indeed, *necessary* — to be taken and made productive. The same valuative claim is being made to these Egyptian bodies, dead and alive: that they *ought* to be put to work in service of knowledge-production, that a critical function of empire is to bring such 'obstinate' subjects within its grasp.

Belzoni's widely-read travel account presents a similar paradigm. Though his complaints frequently hinge on the fundamental treacherousness of Arabs in general and the Gurnawi in particular, he takes moral issue too with the labour market in which he, an employer, is clearly at a disadvantage, as

Some of them have accumulated a considerable sum of money [from the trade in antiquities], and are become so indifferent, that they remain idle, unless whatever price they demand be given them; and it is to be observed, that it is a fixed point in their minds, that the Franks would not be so liberal, unless the articles were worth ten times as much as they pay for them.<sup>126</sup>

Here, it is evidently not dishonesty but the astuteness of the analysis that so riles Belzoni. Those Gurnawi seem to have been correct: they *could* remain idle unless whatever price they demand be given them. But again, coloniality's valuative imperative imposes a set of economic, ethical, and semiotic norms upon resistant labour: the Gurnawi *should want* to work, they should *want* to participate in the machinery of knowledge-production, since

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<sup>126</sup> Belzoni, *Narrative of the Operations*, 158.

the *desire* of production is constructed as its own ends. Their failure to *want to do the right thing* is a failure to understand; to *appreciate*.

Colla's analysis sheds lights on the conflict in Belzoni's case. Recounting an incident where a *kashif* (district governor) at Abu Simbel insists that Belzoni was in search of gold and treasure rather than 'mere' carved stones, Colla notes:

What is striking about Belzoni's account of the work at Abu Simbel is how much of it revolves around the confusion between commercial and noncommercial systems of value. [...] On the one hand, [Belzoni] attempts to communicate that his desire to collect antiquities was not driven by riches and that his motivation was one of scholarly disinterest. On the other hand, to accomplish this goal, he not only introduces the notion of the wage and the workings of a monetary economy, but also encourages his laborers and their political bosses to entertain the notion that the value of the antiquities lies in the gold (supposedly) found in or near them. In Belzoni's own words, antiquities represent a source of material wealth even as their true value is said to be nonmaterial; nevertheless, even as he claims they have no value, that they are mere stones, the undertaking of acquisition inextricably links the antiquities to networks of power and motives of profit and exchange.<sup>127</sup>

Colla finds that Belzoni's strategy functions here through the imposition of a hierarchy of economy and affect: scholarly interest is transformed into pure, objective *dis*-interest, unsullied by mere economic gain. Yet economic and scholarly valuations remain closely tied, in Europe and Egypt both: Belzoni's gambit forces him to negotiate a tense alchemy as to whether his search is for "gold" or "mere stones," and once exported, perceptions of the antiquities' historical value will affect their selling price. More broadly, this conflict around the material and symbolic value of antiquities (and the labour to possess them) echoes Clifford's observations on that which is 'proper' about 'property'; that every "'proper' relation with objects (rule-governed possession) presupposes a 'savage' or

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<sup>127</sup> Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*, 43.

deviant relation (idolatry or erotic fixation).”<sup>128</sup> Citing Susan Stewart’s work, Clifford argues that “the boundary between collection and fetishism is mediated by classification and display in tension with accumulation and secrecy.”<sup>129</sup> These norms bring together the multiple registers through which such objects operate, so that their construction as deposits of potential knowledge is scaffolded by both their price tag and their status as *invaluable* loci of world heritage. But these valuations are hardly static, immutable; instead, they are continuously redrafted via broader regimes of flow and exchange. Appadurai, for example, uses the *kula* exchange system as a metaphor for the ways that such material flows contribute to accretions of object-value.<sup>130</sup> But as Henry, Otto, and Wood argue, not all such exchanges are equal; differences in sociopolitical power affect valuative accretions, such that *tension*, opposition, negotiation, and contestations can be considered a vital contributor to object prestige.<sup>131</sup> Accordingly, “it is in the very tension or contradiction between flow and fixity, thing and object, that value is created.”<sup>132</sup>

Accounting for the valuative function of tension, resistance, and contestation can shed light on Gurna’s subjugation as Egyptology’s unruly Other. Certainly, this framing accounts for the ways that early travellers such as Denon and Belzoni cast Gurna as a particularly desirable site of conquest; a trophy is, after all, more prized for the adversity

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<sup>128</sup> Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture,” 219.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> “Introduction,” in *The Social Life of Things*, 18.

<sup>131</sup> Henry, Otto, and Wood, “Ethnographic Artifacts and Value Transformations,” 35–36. Additional insights on the function of such flows in the cultural sphere can be found in Basu, “Object Diasporas, Resourcing Communities: Sierra Leonean Collections in the Global Museumscape.” More economic approaches are offered by Horacio Ortiz, “Financial Value,” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3, no. 1 (2013): 64–79., and Bruce Roberts, “The Value of Values,” *Rethinking Marxism* 23, no. 2 (2011): 180–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2011.558751>.”

<sup>132</sup> Henry, Otto, and Wood, “Ethnographic Artifacts and Value Transformations,” 35–36.

of its acquisition. Through such widely-read accounts, this value is then readily conferred upon the fruits of such conquest; as Belzoni puts it,

Could it but be accurately known, with what a wretched set of people in these tribes travellers have to deal, their mean and rapacious dispositions, and the various occurrences that render the collection of antiquities difficult, whatever came from thence would be the more prized, from the consideration of these circumstances.<sup>133</sup>

Given, however, that it is not only antiquities but *the land itself* that is subject to the mechanics of civilizing conquest, the assertion and maintenance of control over the Theban west bank becomes an associated valuative domain. Thus, the rhetorics of artifactual appreciation — the competing discourses of how heritage *ought* to be *valued* — are bound up with the consecutive efforts to displace the Gurnawi. This begins with the Napoleonic expedition's efforts to “take their flocks, blow up their retreat, expel them, and carry off their sheik,”<sup>134</sup> through Hassan Fathy's efforts in the 1940s which center rhetorics of hygiene and modernity, to the most contemporary (and ultimately successful) campaigns of the 1990s onwards which prioritize tourism, safety, and the region's transformation into an ‘open-air museum’.

The deployment of the museal mode in this context is, I believe, instructive. It points to the ways that institutional modes of ‘preservation’ can consume, Saturn-like, the very object of their efforts. Commenting on the destruction of Gurna — including several

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<sup>133</sup> *Narrative of the Operations*, 155.

<sup>134</sup> Denon, *Travels In Upper And Lower Egypt Vol. 3*, 31, 47–48. In contrast with Aikin's 1803 translation, Denon's original French implies that it is the inhabitants themselves that were to be blown up, rather than their retreats: “Il s'occupa d'organiser une expédition contre eux, pour les surprendre, s'emparer de leurs troupeaux, miner leur repaire, les faire sauter, et emmener leur cheikh.” Denon, *Voyage Dans La Basse et La Haute Égypte, Pendant Les Campagnes Du Général Bonaparte, Tome 1*, 323.

protected historical sites such as the Yanni house and the Daramali residence — one archaeologist finds that “two years of ministry bulldozing of the site likely inflicted as much damage as a century of Qurnawi living.”<sup>135</sup> As Mitchell observes, in Gurna, “the preservation of the past required its destruction so that the past could be rebuilt.”<sup>136</sup> The museal mode functions as both cause and effect here, necessitating the construction of a new, more scenic past over the old, ugly one. This new past hides the physical and intellectual work performed by Gurna’s inhabitants that made so many subsequent Egyptological discoveries possible, and in so doing, staking a not only *Eurocentric* but also deeply *Cairocentric* view of history which marginalizes such emplaced, peripheral bodies.<sup>137</sup> For Van der Spek, it is “an attempt to re-write history by presenting the sanitised foothills in an alleged ‘authentic’ state which, more than likely, never existed.”<sup>138</sup>

But El Daramali’s intervention is critical here too: *even if* residents of Gurna refused participation in normative Egyptological value-production — or even actively facilitated its destruction, recalling Hassan Fathy’s project — that would *still* be a part of

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<sup>135</sup> Peter Schwartzstein, “The Greatest Clash in Egyptian Archaeology May Be Fading, But Anger Lives On,” *Smithsonian*, December 11, 2017. Caroline Simpson discusses the Gurnawi-led efforts to preserve these sites in “Qurna - More Pieces of an Unfinished History,” *Thebes and Beyond: Studied in Honour of Kent R. Weeks*, 2010, 197–218; and “Theban Blindness - a Case History of Severe Archaeological Hypermetropia,” in *Disciplinary Measures? Histories of Egyptology in Multi-Disciplinary Context*, ed. William Carruthers (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2010), <https://egyptology.blogspot.com/2010/06/theban-blindness-case-of-qurna.html>.”

<sup>136</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, 156.

<sup>137</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the Egyptian media trope which pits “‘ignorant,’ uneducated Upper Egyptian clans involved in desecrating Pharaonic tombs and selling Egypt’s patrimony to foreigners against patriotic, educated modernizers [that] serve as models for local protagonists who, under their tutelage, eventually break with the negative traditions of their kin,” see: Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*, 58, 77–78. A manifestation of this trope might be observed in Haikal, “Egypt’s Past Regenerated by Its Own People,” 137.

<sup>138</sup> van der Spek, “Another Place, a Different West Bank . . .,” 5.

the nation's actual history, worthy of preservation. But the relationship with antiquities here has, at least since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, not been one of mere disregard or neglect; it has been one of active, practiced, and *deeply strategic* organized resistance, a praxis of self-determination. And this has not been a mere side effect of Egyptology's intense interest in the region: in fact, it has been absolutely critical to it.

#### **4.7 Thinking against monoliths**

By striving not to recuperate Gurna and offering its unruliness instead as a site of liberatory potential, I posit that new modes of collection, preservation, and historical representation become possible. What I hope to have demonstrated here is that Gurnawi resistance is part-and-parcel with the *value*, broadly defined, of the Theban west bank. This is not only true in Gurna, that place described by Belzoni as the home of "the most unruly people in Egypt," but also of the ways that iconic Egyptian antiquities have gained their respective valuations in the public eye and in popular imaginaries more generally.

The valuative contestations still taking place in and for Gurna epitomize the structures through which Pharaonic objects have more generally come to be understood through their respective publics. As is the case with many of the most iconic sites of historical value in Egypt and beyond, valuation is bound up with contestation, with public struggles to define the meaning, social role, and financial worth of the objects at stake. Mass media, protest, and more subtle forms of resistance and refusal come to shape the discursive and structural bounds through which artifacted objects are variously utilized. Such utilizations work both in service of and against colonial, imperial, and state-led efforts to impose normative, productive, ruly subjectivities upon Egyptian publics.

Moreover, the value of particularly prized objects (and lands) comes to be interlinked with their construction as hard-won trophies, constituted in no small part by the difficulty of their seizure. And while the historical roots of these contestations can be traced to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, collective Egyptian efforts to retain, return, and re-inscribe Pharaonic objects with counter-hegemonic modalities of value can still be seen in their present-day representations.

In the **Introduction**, for example, I discussed how Egypt come to figure as an important point of imaginary ‘origin’ in European public imaginings, particularly in relation to the foundation of the ‘universal’ museum as a site through which national and civilizational narratives are built. Here, Ancient Egypt becomes a kind of ‘missing link’ between civilization and barbarism, while modern Egyptians are marginalized on the basis of an insufficient or misdirected ‘appreciation’ in both the affective and economic domains. But to this point, conceptualizations of *hurma* suggest alternative, counter-extractive affective relations to the dead and their places of burial, while contemporary debates around repatriation and restitution challenge the museum’s material foundation.

**Chapter One** discussed the ways that the Egyptian government’s retention of the ‘King Tut’ find played a significant and largely unexamined role in the ‘drama’ of the tomb’s discovery, contributing to its fame and prestige. Additionally, the abolition of the *partage* system in its wake allowed, for the first time, an entire find to remain whole in a single collection, a fact that has contributed significantly to its heightened, very public sense of value.

**Chapter Two** examined German- and English-language media discourses around the Bust of Nefertiti, looking to the ways that editorial cartoons projected anxieties of

race, sex, miscegenation, and national humiliation upon the debate around the Bust's return. What becomes evident as a result is the way the Egyptian claim to the Bust's ownership contributed to its value in the German public imagination, transforming it into a national icon.

**Chapter Three** turned from the international to the intra-national, looking to the ways that French and Ottoman interests colluded to transport the Luxor obelisk from the heart of a living city that worked collectively to try to block its relocation. This grassroots historiography makes visible the hidden labour and resistance that contributed to the obelisk's construction as a 'trophy', one that gains an entangled web of 'translations' as it is viewed back from France through the eyes of the scholar Rifa'a al-Tahtawi.

Finally, in my **Conclusion**, I have focused on the centuries-long project to subjugate Gurna's autonomy, and in so doing, 'taming' those heritage practices that do not readily yield themselves to state control. In so doing, I have aimed to re-insert Gurnawi voices as part of Egyptology's historiography — but not (solely) 'recuperated' as vital participants in its regimes of knowledge-production, but as dissidents, too, producing through their resistance tangible 'anarchaeologies' in the present.<sup>139</sup>

These touchstones of Egyptological, archaeological, and museological knowledge-production move and change in the public eye, or rather, in the many eyes of their many publics. Highly public yet in many ways absolutely intangible, these objects

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<sup>139</sup> I use 'anarchaeology' here — not so much in Zielinski's sense of a historiographic methodology which "reserve[s] the option to gallop off at a tangent, to be wildly enthusiastic, and, at the same time, to criticize what needs to be criticized," — but rather, more like that of Ernst, "as an activity counter to that of digging up and exposing to view." Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media* (Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 2006), 27 and note 30..

become loci of heightened affect, targets upon which complex, centuries-old anxieties are projected and replayed. Yet they function as portals, too; opening up resistant potentialities through their unauthorized, counter-canonical histories. Such objects and their biographies become sites of ‘instituting otherwise’, with contemporary histories that all too often get erased by the museal mode to impose the authenticity of a past that, as Van der Spek observes, likely never existed. By contrast, these counter-histories center the labouring bodies that have for millennia inundated these things with the affective intensity that has made them so sought after today. This labour of un-/non-/counter-professional care might be thought of as a kind of *curare* without curators; a preservation not despite but *because* of the lack of institutional atomization through which things become objects, objects become texts, and texts become proxies for markets and nations and states.

What is critical about these histories though is that they are not only a theoretical practice but a material one too, working both on the *de facto* and *de jure* levels of national and international policy, as well as in mainstream public imaginations. Repatriative discourses are now familiar to lay publics the world over, and debates around the contested ownership of iconic Egyptian antiquities have been well-trod in mass media for a century. During this time, larger-than-life, mediagenic figures such as Zahi Hawass have emerged to rally support for the repatriative cause. But while such Indiana Jones-type figures<sup>140</sup> loom large as the ‘great men of history’, its harder-to-grasp

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<sup>140</sup> This is a major component of Hawass’ self-styled persona. See: Zahi Hawass, “The Egyptian Indiana Jones Hat,” DrHawass.com, 2017, <https://www.drhawass.com/wp/the-egyptian-indiana-jones-hat/>; Jeffrey Bartholet, “Zahi Hawass, Egypt’s Indiana Jones and One-Time Mubarak Ally, Tries to Cozy Up to Pro-

‘minor’ figures slip between the cracks: its collectives, its resisters, its criminals; those unwilling to produce, to be *made* productive through the norms of its violent valuative regimes. Yet it is through a refusal to recuperate such un-productive modes that a counter-extractive institutionality is made visible: one that allows the dead to rest and their belongings to desiccate with them into the sand, where families might live among them and shelter among their tombs and temples, transforming their stone walls into churches and mosques and homes through which echoes of their memory comes to life. Here, the intangible is mediated through the concrete, such that an unruly and vibrant historical continuity can break out of the museum and spill out onto the streets and into the homes and bodies and stories of those who cared for them then and care for them still.

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Democracy Activists,” Scientific American, 2011, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/guardian-of-the-pharoahs/>.

## Appendices

### Appendix A : Cairo - Berlin: Bust of Nefertiti, claims and responses

Via CulturCooperation, *Nefertiti Travels (2007)*. Available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20071009103453/http://www.nofretete-geht-auf-reisen.de/impresu.htm> (accessed 23 March 2021).

This overview shows, in chronological order, the ascertained requests and responses between Cairo and Berlin, voiced between 1924 and 2007.

Cairo	Berlin
1924: Cairo learns about the existence of the bust, reacts amazed and outraged and demands the immediate return of the bust.	1924: 10 years after its arrival, the bust is being presented to the public in Berlin.
1925: Cairo tries to initiate bilateral talks and suggests the installation of a court of arbitration to handle the problem.	1925: Berlin insists on its legal title of ownership and rejects a court of arbitration.
1928: Cairo offers other objects in exchange for the bust.	1929: They agree in principle on an exchange and Berlin requests three valuable objects in exchange.
1929: Cairo agrees to the requirements from Berlin.	1930: The exchange is being called off. Berlin refers to the importance of the bust for the capital
1930s: Cairo continues its efforts and turns to the German government	1933: Herrmann Göring plans the return for October 1933. Adolf Hitler disagrees and ends the plan putting down his foot in 1935. The talks with Cairo are being discontinued.
1946: The Egyptian prime minister turns to the American government, who took custody of the bust after the war. The State Department did not assume responsibility and refused to return the bust.	
1950s: Cairo continuously applies to Berlin presenting its case	1950s: No willingness of Berlin to engage in a dialog. The position of the government of the FRG is that

their ownership is not at all at doubt.

1959: Cairo offers new exchange object.	1959: Berlin refused the exchange offer.
1975: Cairo intervenes in the inner-German Conflict regarding Nefertiti and requests from both sides to return the bust to its country of origin.	1975: No response, neither from the FRG nor the GDR.
1995: The Egyptian Minister of Culture, Farouk Hosny, demands the return of Nefertiti for the planned new big Museum in Egypt. "We want back only a sparsely few witnesses of our great history... Really only a few of the most important pieces. It is not asked too much, if we ask the countries, which exhibit Egyptian antiquities, to give us one object of each thousand of objects they exhibit." (Der Spiegel, 20/1995)	1995: No public response from Berlin.
2002: The Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) initiates a massive Campaign for the restitution of ancient artefacts from international collections.	
02/2002: Hosny demands the return of the Bust to Cairo, during the repatriation of the restored Echnaton- sarcophagus to Egypt.	2002: No public reaction from Berlin.
2003: In response to the art event, during which the bust was presented on a naked bronze body, the Minister of Culture Hosny and the head of the SCA Zahi Hawass claim its immediate restitution	2003: The Egyptian Museum placed the bust at the disposal of two Hungarian Artists for an Art Event for the Biennale in Venice.
09/2003: Cairo turns to the UNESCO and asks for assistance.	09/2003: Berlin answers no inquiries and removes the announcement of the art event from its website, without further comment.
09/2003: Hawass bases his renewed claim for restitution amongst others on fraud from the German side at the division of the finds	09/2003: Dietrich Wildung, director of the Egyptian Museum, describes Hawass as uncooperative. A return of the bust "would not even be open

to discussion."(Egypt today, 09/2003)

2004: Wafaa el-Saddik, Director of the national museum in Cairo, requests for the first time a loan of the bust for an exhibit of two-month length.

2004: No public response from Berlin.

2005: Hawass presents the case in front of the UNESCO Committee for contentious restitution claims.

2005: Berlin declines any negotiation in front of the Committee, which therefore cannot take up its mediating activity. In August the bust is moved to the museum island. The description at the museum explains the importance of the bust as follows: "Old Egypt had a new Icon of symbolic value and the museums of Berlin gained a new identity."

02/2006: El-Saddik proposes a joint Nefertiti exhibition: "All Egyptians demand the restitution. ... Of course this will be very difficult. I know very well that Nefertiti is very important for Berlin. But she is Egyptian. Maybe it will be possible to organise together an exhibit. I thought we might join our Nefertiti with her. ... The fear we would keep Nefertiti in Egypt is baseless." (Berliner Zeitung 18.02.06)

2006: No public response from Berlin.

05/2006: During the opening of the Exhibit 'Egypt's sunken treasures', Hawass asked in the presence of President Mubarak and President Köhler for "a visit of queen Nefertiti" in the framework of the exhibit of the DAI in Cairo in November 2007 and offers all international guarantees to ensure its proper return after three months, as well as "a beautiful piece from Egypt" in exchange for the meantime. (Die Welt, 13.05.06)

05/2006: A speaker of the Egyptian Museum of Berlin responded with the words, "after 3000 years the lady is not willing to travel any longer". (Die Welt, 13.05.06)

06/2006: Hosny demands toward Wildung the restitution of the Bust, at a conference in Rome.

06/2006: Wildung responds to Hosny with the remark: "You want to take Nefertiti's bust ... So what

can we do? Shall we close the museum?" (Al-Ahram 797/2006)

09/2006: Hawass expresses in an interview his regrets regarding the blockading approach from Berlin and announces renewed repatriation claims: "In front of the president of Germany, I said, 'I hope, Mr. President, that we can have the bust of Nefertiti as a loan for three month. In return, we will give Germany a masterpiece- perhaps even better than this one- for three months.' They refused! This is why next year I will make it an international mission with the support of the archaeological community. I was not asking for everything to come back- not at all. I was asking for the unique pieces to come back on loan, so that the Egyptian people who never travel can see them. Because I was refused, my strategy now is not to have it for a loan but to have it back." (Egypt Today, 09/2006)

12/2006: El-Saddik presents again the wish for a loan of the bust: "We would like to show her with our Nefertiti. The colleagues in Berlin claim, the bust cannot be transported. But transport techniques are very advanced nowadays. Regarding the fear, we would keep her over here, I can only say: It is without base. There are governmental treaties. Claims for restitution we hold for objects that left the country illegally." (Berliner Zeitung 22.12.2006)

03/2007: At a panel discussion Wildung cites the Egyptian ambassador Al-Orabi: "Nefertiti is the permanent representative of Egypt in Germany." Before he always had called her "the best ambassador" of Egypt.

4/2007: Hawass criticized Neumanns response in front of the Egyptian parliament and announced sanctions to be taken in case that the loan will be inhibited by Germany. He will request the loan of the bust for the opening of

4/2007: Cultural Minister Bernd Neumann refused a loan demand reasoning the bust can't be

the new museum in 2012 in a letter to the German Cultural Minister.

Cultural Minister Hosny commented: Germany is making a "mistake", if it refuses the loan. "The Egyptians have the right to admire the rare examples of their antiquities, located in foreign countries."

transported for conservatory reasons.

A parliamentary initiative in the Bundestag asks questions regarding the actual base of the conservatory state of the bust.

**Appendix B Letter from Jean-Francois Champollion to Mohammed Ali Pasha,  
concerning the conservation of Egyptian Antiquities**

N<sup>o</sup> II

NOTE REMISE AU VICE-ROI POUR LA CONSERVATION DES MONUMENTS DE  
L'ÉGYPTE

Alexandrie, Novembre 1820

Parmi les Européens qui visitent l'Égypte, il en est, annuellement, un très-grand nombre qui, n'étant amenés par aucun intérêt commercial, n'ont d'autre désir ou d'autre motif que celui de connaître par eux-mêmes et de contempler les monuments de l'ancienne civilisation égyptienne, monuments épars sur les deux rives du Nil, et que l'on peut aujourd'hui admirer et étudier en toute sûreté, grâce aux sages mesures prises par le gouvernement de Son Altesse.

Le séjour plus ou moins prolongé que ces voyageurs doivent faire, nécessairement, dans les diverses provinces de l'Égypte et de la Nubie, tourne à la fois au profit de la science qu'ils enrichissent de leurs observations, et à celui du pays lui-même, par leurs dépenses personnelles, soit pour les travaux qu'ils font exécuter, soit pour satisfaire leur active curiosité, soit même encore pour l'acquisition de divers produits de l'art antique.

Il est donc du plus haut intérêt, pour l'Égypte elle-même, que le gouvernement de Son Altesse veille à l'entière conservation des édifices et monuments antiques, l'objet et le but

principal des voyages qu'entreprennent, comme à l'envi, une foule d'Européens appartenant aux classes les plus distinguées de la société.

Leurs regrets se joignent déjà à ceux de toute l'Europe savante, qui déplore amèrement la destruction entière d'une foule de monuments antiques, démolis totalement depuis peu d'années, sans qu'il en reste la moindre trace. On sait bien que ces démolitions barbares ont été exécutées contre les vues éclairées et les intentions bien connues de Son Altesse, et par des agents incapables d'apprécier le dommage que, sans le savoir, ils causaient ainsi au pays; mais ces monuments n'en sont pas moins perdus sans retour, et leur perte réveille, dans toutes les classes instruites, une inquiète et bien juste sollicitude sur le sort à venir des monuments qui existent encore.

Voici la note nominative de ceux *qu'on a récemment détruits*:

1° Tous les monuments de Cheïk-Abadé; il ne reste plus debout que quelques colonnes de granit;

2° Le temple d'Aschmouneïn, l'un des plus beaux monuments de l'Égypte;

3° Le temple de Kaou-el-Kébir; ici le Nil a autant détruit que les hommes;

4° Un temple au nord de la ville d'Esné;

5° Un temple vis-à-vis Esné, sur la rive droite du fleuve;

6° Trois temples à El-Kab ou El-Eitz;

7° Deux temples dans l'île, vis-à-vis la ville d'Osouan, Géziret-Osouan.

Ce qui fait une perte totale de treize ou quatorze monuments antiques, du nombre desquels trois surtout étaient du plus grand intérêt pour les voyageurs et les savants.

Il est donc urgent et de la plus haute importance que les vues conservatrices de Son Altesse étant bien connues de ses agents, ceux-ci les suivent et les remplissent dans toute leur étendue; l'Europe entière sera reconnaissante des mesures actives que Son Altesse voudra bien prendre pour assurer la conservation des temples, des palais, des tombeaux, et de tous les genres de monuments qui attestent encore la puissance et la grandeur de l'Égypte ancienne, et sont en même temps les plus beaux ornements de l'Égypte moderne.

Dans ce but désirable, Son Altesse pourrait ordonner:

1° - Qu'on n'enlevât, sous aucun prétexte, aucune pierre ou brique, soit ornée de sculptures, soit non sculptée, dans les constructions et monuments antiques existant encore dans les lieux suivants, tant de l'Égypte que de la Nubie:

- 1° EN ÉGYPTTE:

San, sur le canal de Moez.—Basse-Égypte. Bahbeït, près de Samannoud.—Basse-Égypte. Ssa-el-Hagar.—Basse-Égypte. Kasr-Kéroun, dans la province de Faïoum. Cheïk-Abadé, pour le peu qui reste. El-Arabah ou Madfouné, au-dessus de Girgé. Kefth. Kous, Kourna et environs. Médinet-Habou et environs. Louqsor (El-Oqsour). Karnac et environs. Médamoud. Erment. Tâoud, vis-à-vis Erment, sur la rive droite. Esné, Edfou. Koum-Ombou. Osouan, quelques débris. Géziret-Osouan, quelques débris.

- 2° EN NUBIE, AU DELÀ DE LA PREMIÈRE CATARACTE:

Géziret-el-Birbé. Géziret-Béghé. Géziret-Séhhélé. Déboude. Gkarbi-Dandour. Beit-Ouali, près de Kalabschi. Kalabschi. Ghirsché-Hassan ou Gerf-Hosseïn. Daké. Maharraka. Ouadi-Essébouâ. Amada ou Amadon. Derri. Ibrim. Ibsamboul ou Abou-Sembil. Ghébel-Addèh. Maschakit. Ouadi-Halfa, quelques débris, sur la rive gauche.

- 3° AU DELÀ LA SECONDE CATARACTE:

Sennèh, Sohleb, Barkal, Assour, Naga, et autres lieux où existent des monuments antiques jusqu'à la frontière du Sennaâr, où il n'en existe plus.

2° - Les monuments antiques creusés et taillés dans les montagnes sont tout aussi importants à conserver que ceux qui sont construits en pierres tirées de ces mêmes montagnes. Il est urgent d'ordonner qu'à l'avenir on ne commette aucun dégât dans ces tombeaux, dont les fellahs détruisent les sculptures et les peintures, soit pour se loger ainsi que leurs bestiaux, soit, afin d'enlever quelques petites portions de sculptures pour les vendre aux voyageurs, en défigurant pour cela des chambres entières. Les principaux points à recommander sont, en particulier,

Les grottes (magarah) des montagnes voisines de: Sakkarah. Béni-Hassan et environs. Touna-Gébel. El-Tell. Samoun, près de Manfalouth, El-Eitz ou El-Kab. El-Arabah. Kourna et environs. Biban-el-Molouk, près de Kourna. Gébel-Selséléh.

C'est dans les monuments de ce genre qu'ont journellement lieu les plus grandes dévastations; elles sont commises par les fellahs, soit pour leur propre compte, soit surtout pour celui des marchands d'antiquités qui les tiennent à leur solde; je sais même, à

n'en pas douter, que des édifices ont été détruits par ces spéculateurs européens, sur l'espoir de découvrir quelque objet curieux dans les fondations; mais les grottes sculptées ou peintes, et que l'on découvre chaque jour à Sakkarah, à El-Arabah, à Kourna, sont à peu près détruites presque aussitôt qu'on en a fait l'ouverture, par l'ignorance et l'avidité des fouilleurs ou de leurs employés.

Il serait plus que temps de mettre un terme à ces barbares dévastations, qui privent à chaque instant la science de monuments d'un haut intérêt, et désappointent la curiosité des voyageurs, lesquels, après tant de fatigues, n'ont souvent ainsi que des regrets à exercer sur la perte de tant de sculptures ou de peintures curieuses.

En résumé, l'intérêt bien entendu de la science exige, non que les fouilles soient interrompues, puisque la science acquiert chaque jour, par ces travaux, de nouvelles certitudes et des lumières inespérées, mais qu'on soumette les fouilleurs à un règlement tel que la conservation des tombeaux découverts aujourd'hui, et à l'avenir, soit pleinement assurée et bien garantie contre les atteintes de l'ignorance ou d'une aveugle cupidité.

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