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Empire and Ruins in Nineteenth-Century Egypt

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EMPIRE AND RUINS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY EGYPT

Modern Egypt began as a site for academic exploration and exploitation. Its tremendous archeological riches, indisputable centrality within the world of Islam, and complex multifaceted cultural makeup have piqued the interests of academics worldwide. For centuries, scholars have fantasized about “what lay beyond the water,” a land where they knew “colossal relics of the oldest-known human civilization were concentrated along the Nile in crumbling piles between two vast, usurping deserts, amidst a modern population that professed faith in Islam.” Absent material motives, however, Egypt long remained a land of mystery for the West, ripe for discovery and exploration. Egypt’s obscurity to the West has never, however, indicated complete isolation. Indeed, multiple dynasties, empires, and religions have laid claim to The River Nile’s fertile banks and delta, and Egyptian society has been transformed considerably as a result. Most significant is the start of Egypt’s Islamization in the seventh century; a process that significantly diminished the influence of competing cultures and religions. Thus, the demographic makeup that existed at the beginning of Egypt’s modern period in the early 16th century and which still exists today does not reflect the land’s eternal status quo.

Contact with the West: A Centuries-Long Affair

The French arrival in Egypt at the turn of the 18th century marked a critical development in the country’s relationship with the outer world. Despite its ancient recorded history, Napoleon’s arrival in 1798 signaled a new era in Egyptian politics defined by strong Western
engagement in matters of national security, international relations, and educational policy. In an address to the Indian History Congress in 1984, scholar Mahmudul Haq argued that although “the French expedition was short lived its consequence was enormous. It has been generally believed that the French occupation of Egypt is the beginning of the modernisation of the Arab world” because it constituted the “first time that an important country in West Asia came in contact with the imperialist west-a contact which continued to grow ever since.” Of course, the French contact was far from the first time that Muslim Egyptians had encountered European powers. Huq elaborates that before and “during the Fatimid period (A.D. 969-1171), the French and the British [and other European powers] entered into commercial agreements and treaties with Egypt.” Realistically, these now obsolete relationships were inevitable given Egypt’s surging influence during the Fatimid and Ayyubid dynasties as a center for intercontinental commercial activity. Indeed, Cairo had gradually become “an important importer and exporter as well as an entrepot in large-scale and long-distance trading networks.” By the end of the Fatimid era, “a group of mainly Egyptian-based Muslim traders, known as the Karimi merchants,” became the main purveyors of goods which they funneled to “merchants from Venice, Genoa, Pisa, Marseilles, and Barcelona” who often established their lives and families in Cairo. Early European contacts, however, were usually economic in nature. Not only was trade with the Fatimids profitable, but the Fatimid dynasty, which solidified Egypt’s position at the center of the Islamic world and shifted “the centre for Islamic trade and commerce from Baghdad to Cairo,” commanded a highly trained army “tens of thousands strong and made up of a bewildering assortment of corps” apt for defense of the Egyptian landscape. For the most part,
Egyptian society evolved in isolation from European imperialist intentions, save for continued trade and commerce throughout the Mamluk dynasty’s 260-year reign.

To comprehend the political circumstances that resulted in social upheaval and cultural transformation at the outset of the 19th century, it is essential to consider France’s purpose for and approach to intervening in Egypt. Napoleon’s invasion in 1798 intended to protect French trade interest and hinder British commerce. While France’s intervention was certainly economic in nature like preceding trade which took place during the Fatimid dynasty, it was distinct due to its imperialist bent. Egypt’s location at the confluence of the East and West with borders touching the Mediterranean and the Red Sea made it “one of the strategic lifelines to India, the cornerstone of Britain overseas. The French felt sure that by invading it, they would strike a blow at British prestige and commercial power.” The invasion, however, did not take place absent high minded rhetoric. Napoleon was convinced of French cultural superiority, and emphasized to his military that they “would have the glorious mission of bringing the ideals of the European Enlightenment and the French Revolution to one of the cradles of world civilization.” Thus, in addition to regional influence, the French sought to partake in a mission civilisatrice; a rationale for imperialism which purports to spread the light of Western civilization for the benefit of the indigenous inhabitants.

If Napoleon did indeed have grand notions for introducing Western culture to the Egyptians, he initially opted to conceal French motives in order to ingratiate his troops with the local population. Upon arrival, he assured the Egyptian public in Arabic that the purpose of the French occupation of Egypt was not to conquer but to liberate them from the Mamluks: “O’ people of Egypt: I have come to rescue you from the hands of the oppressors. And I worship
Allah (may He be exalted) far more than the Mamluks did.” Certainly, the French never intended to be respectful of contemporary religion, customs, or traditions. The imperial and civilizing nature of their expedition precluded the likelihood for European reverence of local culture they perceived as inferior to their own. Nonetheless, Napoleon’s approach was tactful. In the centuries prior to 1798, the Egyptian government “was in the hands of a warlike clique known as the Mamluks,” the authoritative power in Ottoman Egypt, which “had not the slightest respect for the human beings it so viciously exploited.” Mamluk rulers “monopolized all sources of power, while the masses were reduced to serfdom” and local lords frequently “demanded tribute amounting to two-thirds of the peasants’ annual produce.” Given the Mamluks’ atrocious governance over the Egyptian populace, they were especially unpopular and found it difficult to maintain consistent support. Their hold on power was best qualified as “precarious …, for they had no local power base and had to rely on their own militias, who were fickle and demanded constant bribes as the price of their support” which “increased the need to exploit the population even further.” As a result, the Mamluks were not only susceptible to being overtaken by a greater military power, but were largely detested by the majority of Egyptians not of elite stature.

Deterioration of the Egyptian state facilitated by contemptible Mamluk rule created an environment ripe for military takeover. Although the Mamluks were confident in their fighting capacity, they were wholly unprepared “to withstand the full force of a 28,000-man French force” which routed “the Mamluk forces and entered Cairo largely unopposed” in the Battle of the Pyramids. Quickly, the Mamluks lost all remaining authority in the eyes of the people. They had failed in their sole function still entrusted to them by the majority of Egyptians. In fact, the
only “reason the Egyptians put up with the Mamluks, other than they did not have the military means of getting rid of them, was a belief that at least the Mamluks would protect them from foreign invasion.”¹⁵ The French, however, were in no way ideal replacements. Napoleon may have sworn to the Egyptians that his faith in Allah was greater than that of the Mamluks, but Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, a seminal Egyptian scholar and chronicler of the 18th and 19th centuries, strongly condemned the French for their disingenuity. He explained how Napoleon’s proclamation to the Egyptian people not only contained multiple “errors in the use of Arabic,” a worrisome reproach given the significance of the imperial address in the context of the imperial project, but that the French “were hardly friends of any religion… [T]hey are materialists who deny all God’s attributes.”¹⁶ Jabarti’s warnings largely fell on deaf ears; initial excitement over the Mamluks’ defeat was pervasive. Nevertheless, the French soon proved that they were not the benevolent caretakers feigned by Napoleon at the outset of their campaign and pressure soon mounted to expel French military forces.

Figure 1. Battle of the Pyramids. Painting by François-Louis-Joseph Watteau, 1798-1799.
French military occupation of Egypt was short-lived. Ten days after the tremendous French victory over the Mamluks, the British army led by Admiral Horatio Nelson destroyed the entire French fleet at Aboukir Bay just outside Alexandria.\textsuperscript{17} Further, Egyptians convinced that French rule was condescending and uncivil became dissatisfied and accused Napoleon’s army of being hyper managerial and overstepping boundaries. For instance, Cairenes “resented the fact that Bonaparte required them to wear tricolor rosettes” as distinguishing markers and “balked at the takeover of Cairo’s most sumptuous buildings and the rude … bearing of many of the French soldiers.”\textsuperscript{18} Ultimately, the Egyptians revolted against the French; they fought with “clubs, truncheons, sticks, and hammers.”\textsuperscript{19} Yet, it wasn’t on behalf of the local inhabitants that the French occupation was doomed. Rather, the reaction of the occupying soldiers to the rebellion voided any authority they previously maintained. Jabarti, appalled at the brutality of the French response, writes that “[t]hey ravaged the students’ quarters and ponds … They treated the books and the Quaranic volumes as trash … Furthermore, they soiled the mosque, blowing their spit in it, pissing and defecating in it.”\textsuperscript{20} The reckless behavior, clearly contemptuous of Islam and thus local culture, alienated the French from the Egyptians. It would thereafter be impossible to allege that they were faithful Muslims, and as a result Napoleon “had created a population entirely hostile to French authority.”\textsuperscript{21} With no credibility whatsoever, it was no longer feasible for the French to remain in Egypt.
The Evolution of French Occupation: A New Academic Approach

After the destruction of their fleet and the rebellion in Cairo, France’s military influence diminished rapidly. Within one year of the invasion, Napoleon departed Egypt under the pretext that “he had not deserted his troops, but had left to answer a higher calling in France.”22 Regardless of Napoleon’s true understanding of the conditions in Egypt at the time of his leave, Jean-Baptiste Kleber, whom Napoleon left in charge, sought to get French troops out of Egypt as soon as possible. Kleber failed and was duly assassinated by a political foe. However, after subsequent negotiations between his successor and British, “almost exactly three years and one month after they had set foot on Egyptian soil, French soldiers began to leave.”23 In strategic terms, Napoleon’s invasion was a geopolitical failure. That said, the French did generate a legacy by way of the civilizing mission that accompanied the military factions. At the invasion’s outset, Napoleon commissioned a corps of 151 scholars to travel with him to Egypt and give “credence to the ideal of this mission civilisatrice.”24 In addition to providing moral cover for the invasion, Napoleon’s cohort of scholars, or savants, was also enlisted to “help administer the conquered territory, mapping the land, finding the water, befriending the leaders, and even negotiating with the foe.”25 Therefore, despite the uniqueness of the invasion’s intellectual component, the savants were not simply tasked with expanding Europeans’ knowledge of previously undocumented territory nor with developing an educational program for the Egyptians whom the “French [generally] made no attempt to teach.”26 The savants were primarily conceived as diplomats whose primary purpose was to expedite the imperial operation.
While academic progress distanced most Egyptians from the heritage of their own land, their religion was instrumentalized in the name of intellectual pursuits. The crowning achievement and most lasting physical reminder of French intellectual occupation, the Institut d’Égypte, is deeply representative of France’s attempt to define the country in academic terms and a central component of the mission civilisatrice. Immediately upon its establishment, Napoleon tasked his savants with a variety of projects aimed at solidifying French dominion, ill-fated as it was, over Egypt. Of particular interest was the following question originally assigned to the institute: “What is the present fate of jurisprudence, or the judicial order, both civil and criminal, and also of education in Egypt?”

Napoleon understood that successful occupation required an intimate understanding of the inner-workings of the society inhabiting the land. He had previously made appeals to Egyptians by feigning his own identification with Islam, and even attempted to grow French rule in concert with pre-existing Islamic structures. For example, Bonaparte “had established, in every city, Diwans, essentially municipal councils, composed of principal Sheikhs and notable inhabitants. These Diwans were consulted by the French government; the country’s affairs were managed with their participation.” Occupying powers often benefit from the contracted help of insiders; local people who use their privileged position within the occupied society as a tool for protection or profit. Napoleon was no exception. He was fully “convinced of the political and social values of Islam” and “perceived that everything in Muslim society, including jurisprudence, came from the Qu’ran such that it was impossible to reach populations without religious leaders.” In its three-year occupation, France effectively managed to instigate the separation of Egyptians from Egypt’s history and attempted to use the local population as a tool for advancing that same objective. Napoleon and
his soldiers ultimately proved themselves hostile to Islam; they certainly did not use their understanding of the religion to improve Egyptians’ lives. That said, Napoleon was correct about its political and intellectual power.

Regressive Religious Governance and the Egyptian Intellectual Void

France and the West may have focused primarily on ancient Egypt and its relics which they catalogued and hypothesized about at length, but the ancient Egyptians were clearly not in power at the time of the French occupation. It is the Islamic Egyptian population that withheld and continues to bear most social and political influence in Egypt. Born “into a society divided by a great many different religious and political allegiances,” Islam’s purpose “was to unify the Arabs by gathering them around one religious creed, and submitting their social life to one unified law.”\(^3\) Undoubtedly a grand task, Islam’s dissemination largely took place in academic contexts. However, the nature of Islamic learning changed considerably with time. Early in Egypt’s Islamic history, in the seventh and eighth centuries, “the Muslim people began the tremendous task of assimilating Greek science and philosophy into their culture. They had a number of Greek texts translated into Arabic, and started the great mosque libraries which were later to preserve much of Greek thought for the Western world.”\(^3\) Moreover, “sciences other than medicine were mostly taught in mosques” and “every important mosque had and still has its library not only of theological, but also of philosophical and scientific works.”\(^3\) Islam, at its inception, was not antithetical to science or progress. Religion was conceived as a force for social cohesion and more broadly, a belief in God. During the golden age of Islam, Egyptians
were cautioned by the orthodox Muslim philosophers that those “who think to support Islam by rejecting … sciences, are committing a great crime against religion, for religion does not deal with them by way of refutation nor verification.”

Therefore, for much of Islamic history in Egypt, the practice of science was condoned and the Arab world contributed significantly to academia.

In the 10th and 11th centuries, attitudes began to shift when the Seljuq Turks came into power in the Islamic world. Newly converted to Islam, they were quite impressionable and “fell easy victims to the reactionary orthodox theologians, especially the Hanbalites.”

What followed was a complete reversal of course from the era of scientific inquiry and enlightenment. Islamic scholars and leaders launched an attack on scientific institutions they believed stood in the way of religion. For instance, in A.D. 1029, Muhammad Al-Ghaznawi “ordered the burning of books on astronomy and philosophy.”

In Egypt, Saladin, who had garnered a strong reputation for his victories against the Crusaders, endeavored to re-educate the Egyptians. A believer in Islamic orthodoxy, he founded three schools in 1170, the famous madrasas which were to expand and turn Egypt into a center of intellectual life once again.

The intellectualism promoted by Saladin, however, was purely religious in nature. After many centuries of scientific and philosophical inquiry, academics embraced the founding of the madrasas as centers for learning, but theologians concerned that the sacred and secular would be mixed “reacted by endeavoring to suppress all science in the interest of the prevailing orthodoxy.”

Thus, academic life in Egypt took on a new character devoid of research and questioning beyond the realm of religious texts.

Until the arrival of the French, little changed in the Egyptian academic landscape. In 1677, more than 500 years after Saladin founded the madrasas, the famous theologian Ala
Al-Din Al-Hasafki wrote that “learning is a personal duty in so far as it is necessary for one’s religious needs, … and forbidden when it deals with philosophy, sorcery, astrology, natural science, magic, and fortune telling.” This sentiment was reflective of the Egyptian mentality overall in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Religious and linguistic literature dominated as the only subjects of study, yet many Egyptians were not alarmed. Instead, they “took comfort in the impression which had dominated Egypt since the crusades, that Europeans or Franks were backward people who could not even stand up in battle” and whose advances in sciences must therefore be moot. Education centered around religion, specifically Islam, was thus the only effective intellectual institution in Egypt when the French invaded in 1798.

The al-Azhar mosque was at the center of the Egyptian education system at the end of the 18th century. Far more students, however, received an education at kuttabs. At these small schools, young pupils “learnt the orthography of the Arabic language mainly through memorising the Kor’an, the whole task taking two or three years.” For the vast majority of Egyptians, the kuttab was the first and last institution they would attend. Nonetheless, society accepted the kuttab as the sole standard for education because, given deep-rooted societal rejection of sciences and arts, “this system gave the young student all he was expected to know, namely, the recitation of the Kor’an by heart, the recitation of prayers and the correct performance of the movements that went with them.” From there, a small number of students belonging to the shaikh, or royal, class would go to “al-Azhar and in due course become a shaikh” while most others become apprentices “to a member of the particular corporation … which had control of his calling.” Women, perhaps surprisingly, were also allowed to enroll in kuttabs. Most, however, did not take advantage given societal pressures to remain in the
domestic sphere while those who did attend “did not learn how to read and write as there was … a very strong prejudice against their learning to do so.” Overall, the lack of instruction in matters unrelated to Islam meant that Egyptian students had very few career options. If they were not of nobility, students could either become tradesmen or work in commerce.

While a religious education in the kuttab was available to almost everyone, the education system also generated inequality between various segments of society. The Coptic Christians, for example, were not provided the same education as their Muslim counterparts. Their schooling was generally “limited to the mere learning by heart of the Scripture” and unlike the Muslim community, there “were no facilities for higher education.” Employment opportunities were also limited. Some were employed as secretaries, while others were “land-surveyors and collectors of taxes.” In the 18th century, there was also a Jewish population in Cairo. Although little is known about the Egyptian Jewish community during this era, it is likely that they “learnt how to perform their tasks in the same way as the Copts, … by following a long period of apprenticeship with their seniors.” Minority religious groups weren’t often persecuted violently by Islamic leadership at the turn of the century, but there were very few roles they were allowed to play in society.

Higher education had by far the biggest role in class formation. One’s skill and merit were irrelevant; the upper echelons of the education system were “reserved for a special class, … the ‘ulama’ and shaikhs who had their seat of learning in the college-mosque of al-Azhar.” Generally speaking, institution of higher learning, also known as madrasahs, offered a continuation of the curriculum taught in kuttabs, albeit to a much greater depth. Some of the subjects students were expected to memorize included the art of Koranic recitation, prophetic
traditions, theology, mysticism, as well as logic, algebra, and even astronomy. Ulama and shaikhs, by virtue of their privileged position in society, were thus provided access to a much broader breadth of knowledge than the bulk of Egyptians. Yet, the substance of their education was perhaps less meaningful than their role in society. The Ulama were revered as carriers of tradition and the people held their judgement in high regard. In fact, when “the people were oppressed, they always went to their shaikhs [or uluma]; al-Jabarti gives us several instances of shaikhs using their influence on behalf of the people in order to regain some lost right or to indemnify some act of violence.” Without doubt, the Ulama enjoyed the average Egyptian’s trust. Simultaneously, as members of an elite class, they enjoyed a relatively easy life.

Figure 2. *Class of Ulama*. Unknown photographer, 1906.

Over multiple centuries, the Ulama consistently endeavored to maintain their privileged position in Egyptian society. Because they benefited from the limited penetration of science,
non-religious literature, and philosophy, the elite were keen to maintain the status quo. Allegedly, they “played an important role in effecting this reinterpretation” in the 10th and 11th centuries which rendered “reconciling modern science with Islam” exceedingly difficult.\textsuperscript{50} It is questionable whether the lion’s share were actually worried about the fate of Islam. The French, who surely did not prioritize traditional education during their short occupation, had understood the importance of mobilizing local populations in their operation. In the process, they uplifted the Ulama to “a more influential position in society.” The Ulama, the natural leaders of the Muslim community, saw their “status … recognized and indeed enhanced by Bonaparte.”\textsuperscript{51} Furthermore, the French entrusted them with “administrative functions.”\textsuperscript{52} This vested authority meant that the Ulama had a difficult decision to make. Given the “very strong tie between the ‘ulama’ and the people,”\textsuperscript{53} the expectation was always that they would continue to act on behalf of the people. Because of the elevation of their position in society under the French, they therefore had a critical role to play in choosing the next leader. When that person appeared, a “young officer … named Muhammad Ali”\textsuperscript{54} whom they approved of, it remained to be seen how Egyptian society would evolve. Common Egyptians had long been disempowered on multiple fronts. While European academic occupation belittled contemporary Egyptians and diminished their capacity for self-determination, most Egyptians contended with a stagnant economy, almost nonexistent opportunity, and a lack of intellectual diversity under the traditional culture and education. The French opened the door to the West and spurred scientific exploration where none had existed, but Mohammad Ali was not guaranteed to include all Egyptians in future progress nor respect entrenched cultural norms.
The Academic Conception of Ancient Egyptian Ruins

A notable shift in focus from strategic value to archaeological significance occurred during and after the French invasion. Throughout the French occupation, the savants either assumed or preferred to believe that “they were along primarily to make discoveries and practice science.”55 Most shunned their military purpose, and instead concentrated on their academic interest: Egyptian monuments largely ignored by contemporary Egyptian populations. As their gaze shifted to the vast riches of the Valley of the Nile, a reorientation of the French priorities followed.56 This recasting of Napoleon’s invasion was exemplified by Vivant Denon, a French archaeologist embedded with the troops. He rued the speed of French military advancement and wistfully remarked: “How was it possible to leave such precious curiosities without taking a drawing of them? How to return without a sketch to show.”57 Denon’s excitement was supposedly contagious, and the general leading his expedition shifted his focus from warfare and soon became his “fellow archaeologist.”58 The Savants’ fascination with archaeology, a critical feature of Egyptology, cast Egypt as much more than a land simply for conquest. Academic exploration transformed Egypt into a place Europe was eager to define by way of its ancient history and innumerable treasures.

Collection, documentation, and educational narration of architecture and antiquities were the principal avenues through which Egypt grew closer to the West and entered the European imagination in the early nineteenth century. Although the French were pushed out in 1801, the three-year long invasion fundamentally altered how Europeans perceived the country. In Edge of Empire, which traces the exploits of collectors on the frontier of the British Empire, Maya
Jasanoff suggests that the invasion “transformed the European attitudes toward, and knowledge of, ancient Egypt.” Accompanied by the monumental discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799, recognized as “a possible key to the hieroglyphic code,” a new fixation developed on this previously unexplored era of Egyptian history.\textsuperscript{59} After their defeat, the French could no longer physically occupy Egypt, but thorough documentation of the Egyptian architectural landscape allowed for an intellectual occupation. Architecture and antiquities were absolutely at the center of the European understanding of Egypt. The land therefore became academically “possessed” through appropriation of its antique cultural resources.

The destruction and borderline disrespect for monuments is a symptom and physical manifestation of Egyptologists’ desires to explain the past and understand the world. Archaeological sites, or perhaps ruins, are in many cases the single most effective vehicles for understanding the past given their inherent grounding in history and therefore connection to ancient peoples and societies. At issue is how and for whom ruins are prioritized. In \textit{Colonising Egypt}, Timothy Mitchell writes that among French and other European scholars, ancient monuments became part of an imperial narrative wherein “the colonial process would try and re-order Egypt to appear as a world enframed. … In other words it was to be made picture-like and legible.”\textsuperscript{60} This mission, however, was not grounded in the premise that increased access through colonial enterprise would spur pure intellectual study. Colonial power requires knowledge, and archaeological expeditions would make it feasible for European to leverage their novel Egyptian discoveries over those who had inhabited the land for centuries prior.

Dispossession was extensive, mischaracterized ancient Egyptian civilization, and was highly detrimental and deceitful with the contemporary Egyptian population. The French and
European intellectuals, including the legendary Jacques de Morgan, as part of their mission, were supposed to make their findings on the origins and history of ancient Egypt digestible to the average European, and not the everyday Egyptian. To do so, ancient monuments and artifacts had to be decontextualized from the context in which they were found. In essence, Egypt was co-opted through the “Western claim on the ‘true heritage’ of ancient Egypt [that] has been forced, over the course of the century, to base itself on more subtle justifications. Ancient Egyptians, along with ancient Mesopotamians, were given status of ‘honorary Westerners’ and their achievements were taught as part of Western civilization and world history courses.”

By qualifying ancient Egypt as a branch of Western history, contemporary Egyptians are dispossessed of their patrimony. Academics and especially archaeologists, meanwhile, were able to justify colonial dominion given the necessity of investigating and revealing ancient Egypt, and therefore their own past, for the masses. The ruins, monuments, and artifacts discovered by archaeologists were not for Egyptians. French archaeology, in this sense, was designated for a European audience alone.

Fin de siècle approaches to Egyptian archaeology were cavalier, showing little concern for the people whose land and history were under examination. Among archaeologists, there was indeed the attitude that “Egypt’s past does not really belong to its present day inhabitants.” The European sense of ownership was pervasive; certainly expressed frequently by Jacques de Morgan who was reverent of France’s presence in Egypt. Archaeological projects such as those conducted by de Morgan were motivated largely through the European desire to glorify “their own past, while simultaneously belittling the history of their colonial subjects.” In light of the consequence of archaeology in constructing this imperial mindset, Ann Stoler’s theories on
ruination discussed in Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination encapsulate both the motivating factors and ramifications of French archaeological projects. Though Stoler’s analysis is not specific to Egypt or the archaeologists of de Morgan’s era, the concept of ruination explains the relationship between the imperial state conducting archaeology and the colonial subjects. According to Stoler, ruination or “ruin-making endeavors are typically state projects, ones that are often strategic, nation building, and politically charged.” Archaeology was indeed a state project carried out by France which spread its influence not only throughout Egypt, but Persia as well. Fin de siècle Egyptians, who could only get in the way of France’s national endeavors, were thus “systematically prevented, by Europeans, from studying their own ancient history” and for much of the 20th century “were dismissed from museum service.”

De Morgan’s archaeological mission was therefore something forced upon the Egyptians. Ironically, through study of Egypt’s past, archaeologists like de Morgan could occupy their present. Although he was studying physical ruins from the past, de Morgan engaged in “processes of ongoing ruination” not only through the further manipulation and destruction of monuments, but in the sense that for contemporary Egyptians ruination was “an act perpetrated, a condition to which one is subject, and a cause of loss” as they had no agency over their own ancient past. So, while de Morgan had undertaken and to an unprecedented extent succeeded in the incredibly vast and exciting project of defining ancient Egyptian history, the underlying reality was that Egyptians were not only unable, but prohibited from doing it themselves. In this regard, European archaeology was self-serving. Despite European interest in the origins and development of ancient Egypt, and co option of Egyptian history as its own, artifacts and the history they
revealed were kept from contemporary Egyptians deemed by their conquerors as unworthy of their own patrimony.

Jacques de Morgan: A Pioneering Archaeologist

One of the preeminent French archaeological savants of the nineteenth century, Jacques de Morgan did not actually arrive in Egypt until the end of the nineteenth century. By the time of his arrival in 1892, Egypt had already been scoured by countless archeologists, each more eager than the last to uncover treasures for the regime which employed them. Responsible for the exceptionally detailed and extensive Recherches sur les origines de l’Égypte, de Morgan had not even originally intended to go to Egypt until he was appointed director of the Egyptian antiquities service in 1892. Initially, this was an alarming assignment given the British occupation that had started ten years prior. Tensions were high between Britain and the rest of Europe and it remained questionable whether a French archaeologist would be readily accepted by British colleagues. Rivalry, however, did not prove to be an issue. De Morgan was not a classic Egyptologist, and he was “first taken by the English for a diplomat, especially since he had the allure and the language of the profession.” For the English, association with a diplomatic figure was assuredly less threatening than with an express academic who would possibly supersede their intellectual efforts in Egypt. The Frenchman’s reception was accordingly quite amicable. Archibald Sayce, a British Egyptologist, even exclaimed: “Finally, … Egypt’s antiquities are in good hands.” The approval from such a prominent English figure effectively gave de Morgan the green light to pursue the project of his choice.
Throughout the following five years, de Morgan’s career in Egypt came to be defined by three significant elements. First, he founded the Museum of Alexandria in collaboration with the Italian architect Giuseppe Botti and improved the grounds at the Museum of Giza. Second, he published a vast corpus of texts related to his expeditions throughout the country, although these are considered to have copious errors and misrepresentations of the reality he encountered. Third, de Morgan is remembered as perhaps the greatest French explorer of the region for his exhaustive examinations and even restorations of ancient monuments such as the Temple of Kom Ombo in upper Egypt from the Ptolemaic dynasty. Without question, countless British and French savants preceded de Morgan in Egypt and previously documented much of what he saw. What set de Morgan apart, in addition to his tangible accomplishments, was his entirely new approach to his field. In fact, he is reasonably critical of his predecessors’ methods. For example, in the preface to Recherches, de Morgan argues that “a purely superficial opinion had been established by the numerous savantes who had traveled along the valley of the Nile in all directions” and that “no one had sought to elucidate the problems relative to the origins” of Egypt. De Morgan promised to adopt a more analytical approach in regards to archaeological finds, because “in Egypt, more than anywhere else, it is necessary to examine with scrupulous precision the smallest clues: because the debris resulting from thousands of years are heaped on top of each other and are often scrambled.” The research techniques de Morgan embraced led him to discoveries not even considered by his colleagues, particularly given his proclivity for going beyond the acknowledgement of the existence and basic form of ancient structures as well as his willingness to venture outside of the most accessible areas along the Nile. That said, despite the novelty of his work in Egypt, the motif of his projects was largely inspired by his past
career in Persia, where his excavations of ancient monuments and appropriation of artifacts carried discriminatory and eurocentric undertones given that he largely ignored their significance to native cultures.

The scale of de Morgan’s work cannot be understood without the contextual events that both guided and predated his Egyptian project. Much like British and French savants of the early and middle nineteenth century, de Morgan’s work and writing were explicitly imperial. Due to his era, he was like his archeological peers also necessarily a product of the fin de siecle.

Christine Lorre, a curator at the Musée d’Archéologie nationale, acknowledges the consequence of this time period to De Morgan’s academic pathway and points out that at “the end of the XIX century, these enterprises spanning archaeology, ethnography, and naturalism are being integrated into the European academic tradition of encyclopedic or universalist study.” In other words, it was desirable and fashionable in Europe to pursue a thorough understanding of the world documented through a synergism of academic disciplines. The body of work produced by people like Jacques de Morgan was at the time becoming part of the mainstream discussion in Europe, consequently rendering his observations more appealing to the masses. Therefore, Egyptology was commodified. Fueled by growing European enthusiasm for all aspects of Egyptian culture, the discipline was generally conducted with the intention of profiting from the immense market for antiquities and surging interest in architecture and literature about ancient Egypt. Bernardino Drovetti, an Italian-French collector, knew in the early-mid nineteenth century that antiquities “could win him prestige and possibly career advancement,” collecting for France would allow him to “underline his loyalty to the French state,” and that museums and “private collectors were increasingly eager to acquire such items, which meant that collecting
could be an excellent source of cash.”

For most collectors and chroniclers of Egyptian architecture, their vocation was a way to serve themselves and the state.

De Morgan’s occupation was likewise made possible by French imperialism. It was by French appointment that he took up excavations in Egypt, and earlier in his career he supervised the obtention of a French “monopoly on archeological excavations in Iran” while acting as the director for the Délégation scientifique Française en perse. His methods and personal motivations, however, were arguably more cognizant of the significance of architecture than his peers. De Morgan advances a narrative of development, preferring not to situate all of Egypt within a static framework. He claims that Egypt, by way of its architecture, “knew progress; her civilization modified itself.” To support his assertion, de Morgan’s analyses were intensive rather than cursory. For instance, three out of the six chapters in the second volume of Recherches focus on the royal tomb of Negadah alone, which, “given the techniques underlying its construction, seemed to me … to ascend to the most distant eras of Egyptian civilization.” This first piece of analysis is evidence that he explored his environs methodically, and saw real intrinsic value in monuments providing insight into the past. For de Morgan, architecture tells a story. Through the excavations at Negadah and other sites in Egypt, never before seen by Europeans, de Morgan unearthed new chapters in Egyptian history.

The Archeological Findings of Jacques de Morgan in the Valley of the Nile

Jacques de Morgan’s excavations at the temples of Negadah represented a new way for approaching ancient monuments. His highly discerning techniques revealed extensive details
about key moments in ancient Egypt. For Jacques de Morgan, the excavations were instrumental in building his reputation. An article published in the British newspaper The Sun in April 1897 iterated that the Negadah temples constituted one of the “greatest Egyptian discoveries that has ever been made” and they are potentially linked to the “tomb and mummified body of Egypt’s probable first King, who is supposed to have reigned 4800 B.C.,” a find that “cannot be overestimated.” Thus, the excavations truly established De Morgan as one of the greatest Egyptologists despite the lack of substantial records for anything dating back so far in history in the region.

Through his innovative approach, De Morgan showed the progression of Egypt over more than 2 millennia from its predynastic period to the New Kingdom and beyond. For instance, in Recherches sur les origines de l’Égypte, de Morgan draws on scientific and historical knowledge to arrive at the conclusion that the tombs had endured multiple periods in Egyptian history, while remaining untouched throughout the contemporary colonial era. He writes that “I encountered a large number of graves from the the Roman, Greek, and Ramesside eras,” that were “accompanied by vases belonging to the New Empire” on top of the graves. Then, in reference to a fire that evidently afflicted Negadah, he elaborates that “the fire could not date from the late period, it had to have been lit in ancient antiquity.” By situating the tombs of Negadah over an extended frame of reference, de Morgan undertook the unfamiliar responsibility of illustrating an ancient society with a multifaceted history through close analysis of its architecture thereby permanently transforming the field of Egyptology into a dynamic field drawing closely on empirical data rather than fanciful conjecture.
Of particular interest to De Morgan was the timeline and chain of events that led to what he calls the “first Egyptians.” Essentially, he traced the history that birthed pharaonic Egypt, and based his conclusions primarily on the tombs of Negadah and the materials they contained. One of De Morgan’s principal observations concerned the presence of metals, or the lack thereof. He found that as the society progressed past the stone age, the quality of tools changed dramatically. For example, he writes that “the more ancient a piece of worked silicone, the more detailed and perfect it is … This proves that little by little the art of shaping stone disappeared in Egypt as the use of metals penetrated” the population. The introduction of new and superior technologies was indeed fundamental to the growth of the Egyptian Empire, and its hegemony over the region. Metal was a more effective and durable material than silicone, whose later applications were attended to less scrupulously as the former proliferated. De Morgan believed that this evolution from stone to metal was not organic, but a consequence of invasion. Metals were likely introduced by invaders from Mesopotamia where bronze came to prominence in 3500 BC, 350
years earlier than Egypt.** For the newcomers to Egypt, De Morgan hypothesizes that “the most important innovation that they introduced in their new country, the thing that without doubt gave them superiority over the indigenes armed with sharpened stones, was the usage of metal.” Even given the superiority of their bronze, there was still a transition period wherein the invaders were influenced by the indigenous populations. De Morgan explains that while the newcomers had more advanced technology, from “the beginning we see a mixing the new forms and those used by the indigenes.” Indigenous designs were frequently improved upon with more suitable materials.** In short, de Morgan concluded that the formation of the Egyptian Empire was gradual, composite, and not the product of a single culture. To de Morgan, unlike for those who came before him, seemingly mundane details relating to building materials such as their admixture and workmanship were instrumental in charting cultural origins.

Similar to his fascination for raw materials used by ancient civilizations, de Morgan had great appreciation for aesthetically pleasing objects. Although he generally showed greater interest in Egyptian prehistory, the archaeologist is also credited with unearthing some of the most important treasures of the Middle Kingdom. At the pyramids of Dahshur, situated to the North of Negadah along the Nile, de Morgan unearthed the tomb of the Princess Khumit along with her jewelry and crown. This was a significant find, as “judging by her funerary accompaniments, [she] must have occupied a very important situation at the court of Amenemhat II” of the 12th Dynasty, a figure who even today remains rather obscure.** In the tomb he found necklaces, bracelets, anklets, and a variety of other small objects made out of precious stones and metals. These items are all iconic examples of ancient Egyptian art, and de Morgan found them “remarkable for their composition as an artistic whole, by the precision and fineness of their
chiseling, and by the incrustations of gems which they possess.”\textsuperscript{86} His greatest find, however, was the Princess’ crown. Built of solid gold and gems of multiple colors, it was by appearance unlike anything that had been found by previous archaeologists. De Morgan, reporting on his exploration of the tomb, claims that “the crown must have presented a highly original appearance, in a degree not possible to estimate before such a discovery.”\textsuperscript{87} As with the connections he drew among metal and silicon, he concluded that the crown revealed a fair amount about the extent of trade or communication between different regions under Egyptian influence. Its components likely originated from surrounding areas such as Assouan, Saïd, and Sinai. And, because many of the stones used on the crown could not have been found in the valley of the Nile, de Morgan, in a novel leap of understanding contended the crown proved Egyptian power extended far beyond the traditionally held seat of pharaonic rule.\textsuperscript{88} De Morgan’s forensic approach worked on the premise that each and every object is a key to unlocking some element of the past. He conceived of archaeology as purely academic with few repercussions and believed that pursuit of archaeological knowledge would further Europeans’ comprehension of social history abroad.

Ultimately, de Morgan through his publications constructed not only an academic, but a popular image of the relationship between Egyptian architecture and history. In Recherches, he notes that the “people who we call the Egyptian people, originated from a mix of an indigenous and conquering race” and that “the graves of the type found at Negadah … show the two races in contact and … the growing predominance of the conqueror’s race.”\textsuperscript{89} De Morgan’s analytical style used archaeological sites to conduct research in anthropology and ethnology, which to him were natural successors to his primary field of study, archaeology. His belief in the
interconnectedness of these particular disciplines was far ahead of his time. Bruce Trigger, a professor at McGill University, explains that before the mid 20th century, “prehistoric archeology was generally considered to be the weak sister of ethnology or social anthropology. … [E]thnologists continued to view it as a factual discipline that was unable to contribute significantly to the development of anthropological theory, either because of the limitations of its data or because of its practitioners specialized intellectual horizons.” At issue for De Morgan was that traditions of French scientific racism and colonial theory largely informed his ethnological work.

In de Morgan’s era, the academic community considered the skull as the foremost tool for categorizing human populations as the pseudo scientific discipline of phrenology dominated theories about racial differences. In consequence of De Morgan’s reliance upon human remains from which he drew important conclusion, he was severely misguided in the application of archeological finds to the social sciences. In 19th century France, there was a tendency in the academic community “to embody race difference in a particular selection of measurable features” such that “race typology had become part of a modern way of seeing (racial) difference.” Often, these measurable features were found in skulls. And, given that De Morgan carried out the majority of his work in tombs, there was no shortage of human remains available to him.

In his ethnography of Negadah, De Morgan makes broad sweeping statements steeped in scientific racism attributing personality traits to racial differences found in human bones analyzed by his colleague D. Fouquet, a French doctor. For example, he suggests that the “indigenes were dolichocephalic and the Egyptians mesencephalic and claims that “this single
distinction … allows one to imagine that the physical appearances, the traditions, and the aptitudes of the two peoples were completely different.” Today, these terms referring to the dimension of the human skull are no longer used and pseudo scientific ethnographic theories based off such research are entirely discredited. If they are used at all, it is only in the case of a medical abnormality that a physician or scientist might mention dolichocephaly. The categorization by skull was considered so valuable an ethnographic metric that de Morgan devoted entire sections of his first volume on Egypt to analyzing skeletons. Upon considering a large array of human remains, he comes to the conclusion that “our skeletons show, in their completeness, a … large number of signs … attributed to the prehistoric man: … I don’t hesitate to consider these remains very ancient.” For de Morgan, people were defined by their remains, his specious conclusions driven by erroneous certainties. His interest in ancient human relics, however, extended far beyond bones to include remnants of the Egyptian cultural heritage found in national and royal artifacts.

The Mistreatment and Appropriation of Colonial Acquisitions

The archaeological revelations made by Jacques de Morgan were unprecedented. The monuments, bones, and objects he discovered allowed him to tell a story of Egypt across millennia in a manner that had simply never been attempted or even imagined by previous Egyptologists. All of his work was completed, however, with the understanding that he had a responsibility to protect and celebrate the riches and knowledge born of Egyptology. Indeed, for de Morgan it was the responsibility of the colonial powers in Egypt to preserve and display the
monuments which, for all practical purposes, they owned. Furthermore, it was preferable that de Morgan, the diplomat, do so without causing an uproar from the local Egyptians that could put the colonial project in peril. This fear is why, despite Egypt’s occupation by the English, the French de Morgan carried out the European archaeological mission. The explanation given by Lord Cromer, the British Consul-General of Egypt, for this decision was that “excavations made in Egypt by a British official were likely to ‘complicate political relationships,’ and that the occupation of Egypt by the British ought not to be made an excuse for filching antiquities.”

According to Cromer, the British through political calculation had essentially outsourced archeology to the French in order to shift any ire felt by the native Egyptians to the nation less implicated in their current subjugation.

Regardless, de Morgan was generally apt to do what was expected of him, protecting and displaying antiquities, and was less concerned with which colonial power he worked for. In Egypt, he “opened many more rooms in the new Giza museum to visitors” and erected the museum of Greco-Roman antiquities in Alexandria, which both housed artifacts he and various other colleagues unearthed throughout Egypt. De Morgan was also quite successful at filling the museum rooms as he had achieved a “‘give and take’ arrangement with the native diggers for antiquities. He paid natives well when they supplied him with the information that led him to a site” with plentiful ruins. This novel cooperative remunerative practice was counter to those of his predecessors, who utilized night raids for appropriative missions. But, while de Morgan was willing to obtain archaeological artifacts without unleashing harsh brutality directly on natives, there is nonetheless a degree of violence inherent in collecting the remains from another country’s monuments for display in a museum. Moreover, through co opting natives into selling
antiquities to the highest bidder, despite what de Morgan considered for fair compensation, he transformed them into agents in the stripping of their historical patrimony. It is arguable that antiquities collected in Egypt have little to do with modern Egyptians. Although de Morgan may have treated Egyptians more fairly than his predecessors, nevertheless, as Maya Jasanoff suggests, de Morgan’s work served an imperialist agenda as “[e]ach antiquity he collected was a trophy of victory: over time, over the sun, [and] over the Egyptians” for the occupying power. Thus, while it is difficult to overstate the value of the narrative provided by artifacts and the interpretations provided by archaeologists like de Morgan, it is crucial to consider the agenda of Egyptologists and what it means to the cultures from which objects and their stories are appropriated. Certainly, as de Morgan’s work illustrates, there are implications to depriving artifacts of their archaeological context, and thereafter ascribing meaning to them from a European vantage.

Figure 4. *Egypt’s Greco-Roman Museum*. Photograph by Al-Masry Al-Youm, December 18, 2018.
When viewed through the lens of colonial oppression, archaeological finds take on a distinct meaning separate from their contextual significance. De Morgan cannot be faulted for a lack of interest in the history behind the architecture he encountered in Egypt. Gustave Jacquier, a Swiss archaeologist, accompanied De Morgan on many of his expeditions throughout Egypt and thoroughly documented the unequivocal significance of historical analysis in his work. In the epilogue of Recherches sur les origines de l’Égypte, Jacquier encapsulates the ultimate purpose of De Morgan’s excavations: to cement the sequence of events that launched and then proceeded the beginnings of the Egyptian Empire. Of the monuments unearthed by his colleague, Jacquier writes such “are, in summary, the objects that we can attribute to the beginning of the domination of the [inhabitants] of upper and lower Egypt. These [inhabitants] reveal themselves to us little by little with their names, their customs, their art, and, even more important for us, their origins.”

Jacquier also elaborates that antique artifacts “personify for us, just as they did for the ancient Egyptians, the beginnings of the monarchy, the union of all the provinces bordering the Nile under a single sceptre.” Key within this statement is “us,” because the revelations were specifically geared toward the audiences of Jacques de Morgan and other French or European archaeologists. Egyptians were and continue to be excluded from partaking in the cultural patrimony that has come to define Egypt the world over.

The sense of intellectual ownership of the ancient Egyptian monuments among Europeans was virtually ubiquitous, and their approach to ownership was also inescapably arrogant. Reflecting upon his Egyptian escapades, de Morgan boasts that “I had spent six years in Egypt and did a lot for that country. After my clearing of temples, my discoveries from Dahchour and my studies on the origins of the civilization in the valley of the Nile, I considered
my task as good as finished”\textsuperscript{101} It is borderline absurd to insist that a task as ambitious as defining and classifying the history of a millenia-old geographic entity as large and complex as Egypt could be completed within the span of six years.

Yet, this is exactly what Jacques de Morgan claimed. Much like Egypt was a battleground between imperial powers seeking to exact military and commercial influence in the surrounding region, de Morgan and his European colleagues perceived the valley of the Nile as a lieu for archaeological conquest. Every Egyptologist desired to be the first to reveal Egypt’s secrets, as doing so promised a great deal of renown for the individual and the nation they served. Natives, evidently, were left out of the equation. Gemma Tully of Durham University explains this notion in her book Engaging Heritage, Engaging Communities, which explores the importance of communities to the interpretation and conservation of cultural heritage. Tully asserts that ancient “Egypt provided a source of both intellectual challenge and national competition … [By] claiming the world’s ‘greatest’ civilization for its own, the West divorced living Egyptians from this heritage.”\textsuperscript{102} By extension, the Egypt of de Morgan was no longer Egyptian. Instead, Egypt, subject to archaeological conquest, was transformed into an annexation of Empire suitable for satisfying the ephemeral curiosities of Europeans.

Western and in particular, French imperialism became an institution that had unquestionable dominion over the archaeology and people of ancient Egypt. Jacques De Morgan, wholly convinced of the tremendous consequence of his work, determined that the appreciation of Egyptology was fundamental within any society in the throes of positive societal and scientific development. De Morgan demonstrates his confidence in the merit of France’s support for his archaeological work in the first page of Histoire et travaux de la Délégation en Perse du
Ministère de l’instruction publique, 1897-1905. Here, he maintains that of all the countries that believe in scientific methods, “France is certainly one of those whose efforts are the most energetic in the field of research outside its territory. Its missions and its international schools bring a yearly contingent of discoveries and works appreciated in all the countries moving, like her, at the forefront of the scientific movement.”

For de Morgan, unveiling Egyptian history through its artifacts epitomized a considerable social good; integral to the betterment of Western civilization. Therefore, even though de Morgan considered his archaeological project in Egypt proper finished, he needed to continue his work.

Despite his firm grasp of archaeology on Egyptian soil, de Morgan was certain from the tools and human remains he found at sites like Negadah that the origins of the Egyptian people lay in the intermixing of an indigenous people with invaders who overtook them from the East. In was in ancient Mesopotamia or modern-day Persia that de Morgan would find answers to his questions on origins. Speaking on the pertinence of expanding the breadth of regions he surveys, de Morgan relates in 1902 that in “the valley of the Nile, I had acquired the conviction that the first civilizations, at the origin of the Egyptian Empire, proceeded from Chaldea and that the Mesopotamian plains had been, consequently, the cradle of human progress.” He then explains that “Susa, by way of its remote antiquity, … had belonged to that primitive world that had seen the discovery of writing, the use of metals, and art. If the big question of origins needed to one day be resolved, it’s in Chaldea and especially in Susa that the elements needed to sought.”

This is an extraordinary acknowledgement that signaled an even greater undertaking than everything attempted in Egypt to that point in his career.
De Morgan, whose leading archaeological interests were in Egypt, would return to excavate in Persia amidst civilizations going back to the furthest reaches of human society. Such a project, naturally, required institutional backing given the associated costs. For that reason, France founded the Délégation en Perse. This organization obtained immense power, largely thanks to a treaty with Persia which gave France “an exclusive and perpetual monopoly to excavate in the entire Persian Empire” and gave her the unique right to “possess the totality of the objects discovered in Susa.” France, and by association Jacques de Morgan, thereby extended its sphere of influence even further. Persia, crucial to painting the picture of Egypt sought by French archaeologists, became part and parcel of the expanded French empire and as a result was subjected to the same degrading imperial practices practiced by academics along the Nile.

Figure 5. The Ruins at Susa. Photograph by Babak Sedighi.
Egypt and its historical appendages, at least from the perspective of European imperialist actors, did not belong to contemporary Egyptians or their antecedents. As such, de Morgan and company permitted themselves free reign to collect information without paying mind to cultural or religious sensitivities. Often, this meant that some sites were prioritized over others deemed less integral to the overall archaeological project. Generally, ethics were not considered during archaeological digs either. One does not need to act ethically, apparently, when the locations and monuments in question are under exclusive French sovereign control. In Egypt, even while de Morgan engaged in the preservation of many ancient buildings, he was ironically also destructive of monuments he saw as inferior or inhibitory to his overarching archaeological mission. Entrusted with the preservation of monuments such as the Temple of Kom Ombo in upper Egypt, which is still “one of the largest and best-preserved of the Graeco-Roman temples in southern Egypt” and “noted both for its extensive hieroglyphic inscriptions and well-preserved decorations,” De Morgan took it upon himself to determine what was worthy of protection. In doing so, he gained some criticism. For example, de Morgan’s fellow Egyptologist Gaston Maspero “criticized his scientific methods, deploring de Morgan’s pulverizing of sixty ancient … blocks at Kom Ombo for a dike to protect the temple from Nile floods.” Taking materials from the very structure he desired to protect was unnecessary. Yet, such decisions are indicative of how de Morgan interpreted his mission.

Stories about Egyptian origins interpreted from monuments held value, but their integral structures evidently did not. De Morgan extended this approach to nearly every site he exploited, including in Persia during his work at Susa. Vital to his work of defining Egyptian history and origins to the masses, de Morgan was perhaps even less concerned about maintaining Persian
monuments intact. In fact, upon arrival at the ruins, he declared that he should not “have to deal with well-preserved monuments that require careful delineation.” In his eyes, “the ruins were amorphous, and … [it] was thus necessary to undertake a general exploration of the site, without taking into account the natural strata, which cannot be recovered.” In other words, de Morgan was more interested in Susa’s temporal location than anything else. The architectural intricacies of the site were less noteworthy, and it was through analysis of the archaeological disposition of the site rather than in the architecture itself that breakthroughs would occur for Jacques de Morgan and his team.

Excavations at Susa were exceedingly thorough. However, the processes through which de Morgan and the French delegation exhumed the archaeological site were tremendously destructive. In order to proceed with his investigation, de Morgan describes how within the archaeological site “we remove each year an average of 50,000 cubic meters; in five years we have handled 250,000 cubic meters of earth” before concluding that “it will not be necessary to remove the totality of the prehistoric layers where a partial exploitation, of for example a quarter or a fifth, seems to be sufficient for shedding a light on those epochs where man knew neither writing nor metals.” Though he was engaging with ancient sacred monuments, de Morgan’s treatment of the ruins was akin to how one might approach a construction or public-works project. Notwithstanding his self-asserted dedication to accurate representations of history, through de Morgan’s approach the previously lightly scrutinized ruins at Susa were essentially condemned to irreversible destruction. That said, the willful demolition of Susa was but one component of de Morgan’s appropriation of the site. Ownership of the site was definitively asserted through de Morgan’s construction of a chateau on location. De Morgan made the
somewhat bizarre decision to build a castle “following the example of the architects of our strong castles of the Middle Ages.”

Even stranger, he boasts of the power the castle gives him over the surrounding region. According to de Morgan, “I had, simply, pursued the project of taking possession of the country and becoming the king of Susa … We would have had a good laugh in the midst of the real king of Susa, upon learning such adverse news.” Whether this project was pure folly or the calculated imposition of European culture is difficult to ascertain. In any case, de Morgan’s planned demolition of priceless ancient ruins and the construction of a foreign element on Susa to establish dominance effectively represent a permanent scarring of the past unleashed by European archaeology.

Figure 6. De Morgan’s Castle and the ruins of the ancient city of Susa. Photograph by Ninaras, April 23, 2010.
Conclusion

When Napoleon Bonaparte’s occupation came to an end in 1801, the privileged Ulama class had the onerous task of providing guidance and selecting a leader to head a nation profoundly impacted by three years of French occupation. For Egyptians, Napoleon’s departure initiated a tense moment. The French had dispossessed Egyptians from their own heritage and privileged western law, and “in so doing … negated the customary rights-*droits*-of the people.”

And, the Egyptian people were indeed frustrated by France’s attempted institutional changes. For most Egyptians lacking access to monetary resources and thus higher education, or the state and social capital, the French incursion had seemed little more than “a bloody, inept three-year military occupation.” Multiple military campaigns had ravaged countless villages, while the French army’s confiscation and destruction of religious property had rendered their army and authority illegitimate to the masses schooled in kuttabs. Disillusioned Egyptians were joined in their discontent by their supposed leaders, the Ulama, at multiple times throughout the occupation. Only a small portion of lower-level Ulama, however, managed to maintain any meaningful influence through to 1801 and beyond. Many, by virtue of their overt support for Napoleon who feigned respect for their societal standing and exploited their reputations, “were rendered largely insignificant, ignored, and spurned by the populace.” By aligning themselves with violent and disrespectful intruders, the most privileged Ulama proved their unflinching opportunism predicated on their desire for personal gain.

France’s occupation threw an already struggling nation into further disarray. Through the instrumentalization of the predominant religious power structures for imperial gain, the French
seeded division between privileged and popular classes and cleared the path for a new category of intellectual: the European savant. During the years following France’s initial invasion, the savant’s purpose quickly outgrew that of Napoleon himself and became a crucial fixture of international academia during the nineteenth century. So celebrated was their work that no amount of political evolution endogenous to Egypt could compel them to leave. Certainly, intellectualism is not a damaging endeavor in and of itself. Discovery is noble and intrinsically good, and traditional Egyptian education had over the course of centuries fatally shifted to rote memorization of religious texts and failed to foster intellectual inquiry. But, at Susa, Negadah and every other site relating to Egyptian antiquity surveyed by Jacques de Morgan and his associates, landscapes were molded to fulfill and contribute to the narrow scope and ego of the foreigner while being completely deprived of archaeological context outside of the singular European perspective. From his position of power in Egypt and its associated lands abroad, de Morgan and other archaeologists used monuments to define Egyptian history. At the same time, the imperial approach to cultural appropriation stripped contemporary Egyptians of agency or control over their historical relics, at least those that were neither stolen nor destroyed by Egyptologists like de Morgan. The French archaeological finds in Egypt were certainly extraordinary, but the grandeur of the innumerable accomplishments is easily lost in the ruination they occasioned. Ancient Egypt, due to the advanced perfection of imperial archaeological projects, was claimed as a European possession and incorporated into a Western narrative of historical development. Egypt served as a conduit for French imperial archaeologists, who separated contemporary Egyptians from their physical and historical past before spreading their influences throughout the entire Nile Valley and into the lands of Egypt’s antecedents in Persia.
Notes


3. Ibid.


6. Ibid.

7. Tignor, *Egypt,* 154

8. Ibid.


11. Ibid.


14. Tignor, *Egypt,* 155


16. Tignor, *Egypt,* 155

18. Tignor, Egypt, 156

19. Ibid., 157


21. Tignor, Egypt, 157

22. Ibid., 158

23. Ibid.

24. Burleigh, Mirage, 8

25. Ibid., 8-9


30. Ibid., 119

31. Riḍwān, Old and New Forces in Egyptian Education, 40

32. Ibid., 42


34. Al-Ghazzali, Almunqidh min Al-Dalal. (Damascus, 1939): 90

35. Riḍwān, Old and New Forces in Egyptian Education, 44
36. Ibid.
38. Riḍwān, *Old and New Forces in Egyptian Education*, 44
39. Ibid., 45
40. Ibid., 14
41. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*, 2
42. Ibid., 6
43. Ibid.
45. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*, 86-87
46. Ibid., 87
48. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*, 15
50. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*, 32
51. Ibid., 45
54. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*, 31
57. Drier, "Napoleon in Egypt," 47
58. Ibid.


62. Ibid., 190

63. Ibid.


65. Wood, "The Use of the Pharaonic Past in Modern Egyptian Nationalism," 181-182


68. Ibid.

69. Ibid., 48

70. Ibid., 50

71. Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire*, 220


75. Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire*, 244-245


78. De Morgan, *Ethnographie Prehistorique Et Tombeau Royal De Negadah*, 147

79. The American Numismatic and Archaeological Society, "Negadah," 50

80. De Morgan, *Ethnographie Prehistorique Et Tombeau Royal De Negadah*, 149-150

81. Ibid., 228


84. Ibid., 183


86. Ibid.

87. Ibid., 927

88. Ibid., 928

89. De Morgan, *Ethnographie Prehistorique Et Tombeau Royal De Negadah*, 53


95. Ibid., 185
96. Ibid., 183-185

97. Ibid., 183

98. Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire*, 251


100. Ibid., 231


104. De Morgan, *La Délégation En Perse Du Ministère De L'Instruction Publique, 1897 à 1902*, 46


107. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, 185


109. Ibid., 53

110. De Morgan, *La Délégation En Perse Du Ministère De L'Instruction Publique, 1897 à 1902*, 152

111. Ibid., 49

112. Ibid., 53


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