

From Dracula to Rostovtzeff or: The misadventures of economic history in early Egyptology*

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Plus on remonte dans l'antiquité vers les origines de l'art égyptien, et plus les produits de cet art sont parfaits, comme si le génie de ce peuple, à l'inverse de celui des autres, se fut formé tout à coup [...] De l'art égyptien, nous ne connaissons que sa décadence.

(Nestor L'Hôte)

Egyptology is a historical discipline full of paradoxes. Fruit of the Enlightenment, its very beginnings can be traced back to the end of the 18th century, when the Napoleonic attack launched on Egypt was accompanied by a thorough pioneering scientific project aiming at describing the natural, social and economic history of the country. The *Description de l'Égypte* remains a true monument of knowledge and an expression of the new scientific spirit typified by the *Encyclopaedia*. Shortly afterwards the deciphering of the hieroglyphs was celebrated as another brilliant triumph of rationalism and scientific method. But those promising beginnings were not followed by the transformation of Egyptology into a leading or innovative scientific discipline in the domains of the nascent 19th century history and archaeology. Quite surprisingly, Egyptology became more and more isolated and alien, to a certain extent, to the new methods of historical analysis and comparative research developed during the 19th and early 20th centuries, as if it was somewhat of an elitist self-sufficient domain of study, one of the last bastions of antiquarianism and romantic archaeology, where social and economic history were at best only educatedly tolerated at the margins of the discipline.¹ This of course does not mean that the contributions of the first Egyptologists

should deserve a disdainful look from the summits of our contemporary, sophisticated, techniques and methodologies. But the reasons underlying such a scientific choice have never been truly explored and they usually remain hidden under the heroic account of the archaeological discoveries, or the not less praiseworthy story of the difficulties overcome by our predecessors when studying the texts and monuments so painstakingly preserved from the Pharaonic past. However this choice has something the character of a skeleton in the cupboard, perhaps because it was inextricably linked to the social values, hopes and mentality of many early Egyptologists who saw in the land of the Pharaohs something more than a simple and dispassionate object of study, something which should be preserved to a certain extent from the cold analytical tools of the modern historical analysis. In tracing a possible and, I must confess, rather personal genealogy of this choice, I would like to explore both the ideological context in which Egyptology grew up, as well as some nowadays neglected approaches which were nevertheless influential enough to mark, often unconsciously, the path followed by some pioneers of our field of study in the past decades.

Liberalism, the crisis of reason and the search for lost paradises at the turn of the 19th century

The end of the 19th century called into question the dominant role enjoyed by the high bourgeoisie in

* I would like to thank José Enrique Peña García for the discussions and his insightful and invaluable comments about the European culture at the end of the 19th century.

1 Cf. the comments by D. B. Redford, "Egyptology and history", in K. Weeks (ed.), *Egyptology and the Social Sciences: Five Studies*, Cairo, 1979, p. 1-20, esp. p. 8-9, 10-12.

society and by liberalism in politics. The extension of the right to vote to the middle and working classes marked the advent of the age of mass politics, where new aims and values were to defy the old political order and gradually to replace it by a new agenda. Nationalism, populism, Christian right wing conservatism, anti-Semitism and socialism became rising forces, represented by new parties highly organised and disciplined, whose efficiency stood in sharp contrast against the more informal and rather personal gatherings so typical of the liberal era. Yet the shift of the leading position enjoyed by the high bourgeoisie was not limited to the political sphere; its effects made themselves felt in the cultural life, when a pessimistic sense of decadence, of disintegrating values and declining social order nourished the crisis of the notions of progress and reason and opened the door to a wave of irrationality, religious renewal and growing interest in the darkest side of both individuals and society.² The works of Ibsen, Huysmans, Bryusov, Wedekind, Robert Walser and others reflected, in different ways, such feelings and explored possible alternatives, ranging from bitter criticism of middle-class hypocrisy to a deep interest in mysticism, symbolism and occultism. Later literature echoed in a nostalgic mood the passing of the aristocratic ethos and paid tribute to its ideals in such vivid evocations as Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* or Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*. In general, arts mirrored the anxiety for the coming of a world where the old certainties were dissolving whilst disturbing signs began to cumulate in the horizon: the optimism of reason was definitely over, and Munch's *The Scream* might be interpreted as the anguished reaction to Nietzsche's statement that God was dead.

Furthermore, from the middle of the 19th century the assault on the autonomy of the individual

subject made the classic liberal idea of character as individual self-mastery and rational behaviour harder and harder to sustain, as scientific discoveries and the emergence of new psychological concepts led gradually to the fragmentation of the former unity of character. The place and role played by the unconscious were strongly debated, and led to a complete revision of the basis upon which the culture of classicism had been built: rational thought could no longer make explicit the ideal, absolute order which underlies the construction of knowledge, nor express the versatile plurality of the world either. The consequence was the crisis of the classic concept of truth, the dissolution of the idea of totality and the open questioning of the identity of human beings. Individuals began to be considered as fragmented entities, the precarious result of the changing interrelations between the feelings which shape the experience and build the character.³ The publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) openly questioned the position of man in society and in nature, while Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) marked the end of the supremacy of reason.⁴ No wonder that the artists and intellectuals at the turn of the 19th century became deeply influenced by the evolutionist theories of Darwin, by the recently discovered mechanisms of the unconscious and, more broadly, by the existence of a hidden world only accessible thanks to the development of the nascent medical laboratory research (microbiology, radiography, finding of bacteria and germs). Thus, the end of the 19th century saw, in quite a paradoxical way, an increasing feeling of distrust towards modern science as a source of happiness, since it revealed a multiplicity of danger-threatening characters already fragmented in themselves. What is more, serious doubts about the blessings of Western industrial civilisation came to be articulated around the ideas of race, of the crowd, of violence and of selectionism. In the 1890s Europe saw a sustained and growing pessimism about the efficacy of liberalism, the life in

2 E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire: 1875-1914*, London, 1989 ; C. E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna. Politics and culture*, London, 1980, chap. 1 and 3; J. W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason. European Thought, 1848-1914*, New Haven-London, 2000; Cl. Magris, *L'anello di Clarisse. Grande stile e nichilismo nella letteratura moderna*, Turin, 1984; J. Le Rider, *Modernité viennoise et crises de l'identité*, Paris, 2000; Idem, *Freud, de l'Acropole au Sinai. Le retour à l'Antique des Modernes viennois*, Paris, 2002; Idem, *L'Allemagne au temps du réalisme. De l'espoir au désenchantement, 1848-1890*, Paris, 2008.

3 J. M. G. Cortés, *Orden y caos. Un estudio cultural sobre lo monstruoso en el arte*, Barcelona, 1997, p. 93-94; J. Clair, *Eloge du visible. Fondements imaginaires de la science*, Paris, 1996.

4 H. Glaser, *Sigmund Freuds zwanzigstes Jahrhundert. Seelenbilder einer Epoche. Materialien und Analysen*, Munich, 1976; J. Le Rider, *Freud, de l'Acropole au Sinai. Le retour à l'Antique des Modernes viennois*, Paris, 2002.

and of the metropolis and the future of society, whilst the human sciences were heavily preoccupied with the pathologies of natural selection. Degeneration, the fear of a slide back down the evolutionary chain influenced intellectuals, weakened even more the former belief in social progress, and led to a growing interest in ancient civilisations and in pseudo-sciences (eugenics, theosophy), and to a morbid taste for the unknown, the strange and the macabre (occultism, spiritualism), in a context of a broader subjectivism and a no less general scepticism about the superior capacities of imagination.⁵

As long as the political ideals of emancipation brought by mid-century nationalism and liberal revolutions were declining, and the effects of industrialisation were transforming society and dissolving its traditional values, a new wave of nationalism emerged where the emphasis was put essentially on culture (including language and race) as a means to re-create and draw together imagined communities.⁶ The past was seen as a golden age of innocence, firm beliefs and hierarchical social order whose values, if restored in present times, would ensure the regeneration of a decadent society. On the other hand, folklore and anthropology became the privileged intellectual tools which rendered "primitives" accessible to scientific study, just before industrialisation and colonialism finally lead them – and their traditional cultures – to extinction. Yet inner (e. g. peasants) and foreign "primitives" became too often romantically idealised as the last trustees of such prized values as honour, chivalry, bravery, endurance or sobriety,⁷ whose revival should revitalise modern society and refound it on a sounder ground. Eugenics, paternalism and cultural uniformity became thus conservative ideals apt to enter into the political agenda. Simultaneously, individuals disenchanted

with the present began to seek lost paradises both in the past and in remote exotic areas,⁸ whereas surgery advances opened the possibility of enjoying artificial paradises thanks to the use of substances like morphine, cocaine, opium or absinthe. Lastly, the escape from modernity could be achieved in other, sophisticated ways, when aesthetics and culture were raised to the rank of ultimate refuge for privileged connoisseurs, shutting themselves away in refined ivory towers and devoted to an elitist cult of arts ... and to the contempt of philistines: Oscar Wilde,⁹ Bernard Berenson,¹⁰ Stephan George¹¹ and Richard Wagner¹² personified in different ways this *fin-de-siècle* ideal. Paul Gauguin was an illustrious representative of such an escape in search of a romantic uncontaminated paradise, first in the rural society of Brittany, later in the Polynesia.¹³ Yet he was not alone in the pursuit of a mythical South full of promises: Melville, Stevenson, Elliot, and many others also tried to discover a sense to their existence far away from the western world. The attraction of the vast open spaces of Africa, where wild nature was still the dominating force, nourished the myth of the "white hunter", the romantic hero who inhabited a world where danger, sport and loneliness were compatible with refinement and who displayed an undeniable aristocratic ethos superbly embodied by Frederick Selous or by Denys Finch-Hatton, later immortalised in Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*. In other cases the quest for transcendence was set in a desert

5 José M. G. Cortés, *Orden y caos*, passim; J. Clair, *Paradis perdu: l'Europe symboliste*, Paris, 1995; D. Glover, *Vampires, Mummies, and Liberals*, p. 65; C. A. Senf, *Dracula: Between Tradition and Modernism*, New York, 1998, p. 74-88; Idem, *Science and Social Science in Bram Stoker's Fiction*, Westport, 2002. Cf. also E. Hornung, *Das esoterische Ägypten*, Munich, 1999.

6 E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983; B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London, 1983; E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge, 1990.

7 Cf. the colonial image of Bedouin, Tuareg, Massai and others or the idealised conservative image of peasantry in western societies.

8 Idealising past communities, and their values definitively gone because of the intrusion of modernity, was a major theme in *Mittleuropa* literature: Cl. Magris, *Lontano da dove. Joseph Roth e la tradizione ebraico-orientale*, Turin, 1971; J. Le Rider, *L'Allemagne au temps du réalisme. De l'espoir au désenchantement, 1848-1890*, Paris, 2008, p. 313-321. There also developed among sections of the Great Britain elite a more romantic attachment to the British Empire as the last repository of the kinds of traditional hierarchies that were disappearing at home: D. Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire*, London, 2001.

9 Cf. Todorov's lucid analysis about the quest for absolute in the work of Wilde, Rilke and Tsvetaeva: T. Todorov, *Les aventuriers de l'absolu*, Paris, 2006.

10 R. Hughes, *Nothing if not Critical*, New York, 1990, pp. 352-366.

11 P. Gay, *Le suicide d'une république. Weimar 1918-1933*, Paris, 1993, p. 68-74.

12 C. Schorske, *De Vienne et d'ailleurs. Figures culturelles de la modernité*, Paris, 2000, p. 123-142.

13 Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, *El escriba sentado*, Barcelona, 1997, p. 119-121; Idem, *La longue fuite*, Paris, 2000.

environment, as in the powerful evocative pages written by Thomas E. Lawrence or in the interest in sufism shown by the renowned explorer Richard Burton.

In this cultural context, where classical Greek democracy and Roman republic began to be equated to the blamed “politics” of the present, the supposedly unchanging Pharaonic Egypt and its hierarchical society began to be appreciated as an exemplary conservative alternative, another lost paradise of beauty and spirituality which fed the nostalgia for an idealised past apt to compete with present, at least in the realm of fantasy. All the more because in a world where cartography, exploration and scientific knowledge were progressively filling the blanks in the maps, few mythical places still remained available to western imagination outside the sphere of literary fiction. Tibet was one of them, and its fate presents fascinating parallels with the elaborated image of the “eternal Egypt” then under construction. In fact, the turn of the 19th century encouraged the myth of Tibet as a timeless privileged country out of time and space, the last surviving refuge of a primordial wisdom, innocence and spirituality, an idyllic land hermetically sealed against all the contamination and pathologies of modernity. It became a focus of European desire and fantasy, a sacred space within the desecrated world of the modern West, whilst the mysterious city of Lhasa held the imagination captive, as one of the last secret places on earth.¹⁴ Kipling’s *The Man Who Would Be King* (1888) popularised the idea of a remote lost valley, somewhere in the Himalayas, having preserved for centuries an arcane but nevertheless West-related culture, whereas Madame Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) contributed to the association of Tibet with occultism and secret doctrines originating in a primordial wisdom. The books by Alexandra David-Neel or the publication of Evans-Wentz’s *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1927) further increased the interest about this remote country and paved the way to the success of Shangri-La, the fictional place described in James Hilton’s novel *Lost Horizon* (1933) as an Arcadia hidden in a

14 P. Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La, Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape*, London, 1989; Idem, *Dreams of Power: Tibetan Buddhism in the Western Imagination*, London, 1993; D. S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, Chicago, 1998.

remote, secluded valley among the far away peaks of the Himalayas, an earthly paradise isolated from the outside world. In short, the evocative power of Tibet was such in Western imagination that its influence is perceptible even in the work of eminent scholars, like the psychologist Carl Jung, who evinced a serious interest in Eastern doctrines and methods, to the point that he became profoundly disturbed by the thought that the world of Indian spirituality might be the real world and that the European lived in “*a madhouse of abstractions*”.¹⁵

For all these reasons archaeology sometimes gave in to temptation and provided, even in quite a vivid manner, a stage where dreams about an ideal past and a lost paradise could be set. Evans’ excavation and reconstruction of the Minoan palace of Knossos, for instance, inspired the image of a peaceful civilisation devoted to pleasure in a refined sensual setting, to the point that the lively Minoan art was frequently compared with the *fin-de-siècle* Art Nouveau – Evans stated that some fresco fragments at Knossos recalled the wallpapers made by William Morris, one of the artists who founded the British Art and Crafts movement. But it was doubtless ancient Egypt which was called to be the most privileged purveyor of such a heavenly past at a time when classic Greece and Rome were no longer deemed to keep up this role. When Petrie discovered the painted pavement from the Great Palace at Amarna he described it, in 1892, as if it was an Art Nouveau work of art (“*not until modern times can such studies from nature be found*”), thus transforming an archaeological finding into an attractive piece of interior design comprehensible to a late 19th century aesthetic. It might be possible that his words were influenced by the ideology of this artistic movement, which rejected designs based on classical or renaissance archetypes along with the boundaries between high academic art and decorative craft.¹⁶

15 G. Wehr, *Jung: A Biography*, Boston, 1988, p. 283. Cf. also G. R. Velbon, *The Buddhist Nirvana and Its Western Interpreters*, Chicago, 1968; B. A. Elman, “Nietzsche and Buddhism”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (1983), 671-686; V. Rajapakse, “Buddhism in Huxley’s evolution and ethics: a note on a Victorian evaluation and its ‘comparativist dimension’”, *Philosophy East and West* 35 (1985), 295-304.

16 D. Montserrat, *Akhenaton: History, Fantasy and Ancient Egypt*, London, 2000, p. 68-69.

“Art” is precisely the key concept. The appeal of Pharaonic Egypt may be partly explained by its apparently inexhaustible capacity to deliver wonderful works of art in an age of changing aesthetic tastes in western culture. Such a fascination shows a sharp contrast with the failure of ancient Mesopotamia to raise a similar interest, probably because the bulk of its treasures consisted of juridical and economic tablets whilst artistic masterpieces were rather more scarce.¹⁷ No wonder that, since the end of the 19th century, it has always been more undemanding to meet actual reincarnations of Cleopatra, Nefertiti or Akhenaton than, say, Ninurta-kudurri-usur or Sennacherib!

Dracula and Egyptology: an unexpected contribution to the crisis of reason

Bram Stoker’s novels *Dracula* (1897) and *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903) belong to a difficult historical moment in which the beginning of Britain’s decline was signalled politically by setbacks during the First Boer War (1880-81), economically by the Great Depression between 1873 and 1896, diplomatically by the rise of new powers like Germany and the United States, and culturally by a pervasive sense that the high point of the Victorian era was now past and the signs of decadence were plainly visible for anyone to see.¹⁸ Classical Greece and Rome were held in high esteem and the British Empire was seen as the modern heir of the Caesars. But the post-Romantic conception of history led some British intellectuals and politicians to think that the lesson from the comparison with Rome was that England was in danger of falling prey to the decline that had claimed the glories of Rome. The possibility of such degeneration was apparent, for instance, in Froude’s writings (“*the fate of Rome seemed to me likely to be the fate of England if she became what the political economists desired to see her*”) as well

17 B. R. Foster, “Assyriology and English literature”, in M. Ross (ed.), *From the Banks of the Euphrates. Studies in Honor of Alice Louise Slotsky*, Winona Lake, 2008, p. 51-82. About the absence of a comparable “Babyloniamania” in western culture, cf. J. M. Lundquist, “Babylon in European thought”, in J. M. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 1, New York, 1995, p. 67.

18 D. Glover, *Vampires, Mummies, and Liberals: Bram Stoker and the Politics of Popular Fiction*, Durham, 1996, p. 139.

as in those by Carlyle (“*Romans are dead out, English are come in*”).¹⁹

Furthermore, these novels provide an unexpected link with Egyptology as they evoke the menacing use of the buried past to interrogate the present, when the spectator is forced to confront a threat whose very existence seems to compromise any possibility of securing the line between the modern and the premodern. *Dracula* is a novel that is very much concerned with the strengths and weaknesses of modernity and, understandably, some of Stoker’s contemporaries were uneasy with this aspect of the book. In *Dracula* present is constituted jointly through the procedures of law and science. Insofar as it stands for the accumulation and rigorous testing of evidence, science ultimately provides the key to the construction of the novel, offering a master discourse that orders and organises the disparate empirical knowledge and avoids misperceptions. In the end science is essentially a humanist ideal as it seeks to bring nature under the full control of the human subject.²⁰ However, from the 1880s onward, doubts about the dominant role of reason, character and liberalism opened the way to a less enthusiastic consideration of science and, even more worrying, to the possibility of degeneration.²¹

Stoker was troubled by the power that the past exerts over the present. In *Dracula*, a group of modern westerners fight against a being who is the physical and psychological embodiment of the primitive past, a creature who is both Renaissance warlord and a far more primal destroyer of human beings. In the final battle, the representatives of modernity, including scientists, lawyers, and technocrats, use the tools of nineteenth-century science and technology and

19 J. A. Froude, *Oceana, or England and her Colonies*, London, 1886, p. 8-10; Th. Carlyle, *Selected Writings*, Harmondsworth, 1971, p. 202. I have taken these references from the excellent article by D. Bell, “From ancient to modern in Victorian imperial thought”, *The Historical Journal* 49 (2006), 735-759. About the prominence of the cyclical conceptions of ancient history in the 19th century, cf. A. Momigliano, “Time in ancient historiography”, in *History and the Concept of Time* (History and Theory, Beiheft 6), Middletown, 1966, p. 1-23.

20 D. Glover, *Vampires, Mummies, and Liberals*, p. 63.

21 D. Glover, *Vampires, Mummies, and Liberals*, p. 65; C. A. Senf, *Dracula: Between Tradition and Modernism*, New York, 1998, p. 74-88; Idem, *Science and Social Science in Bram Stoker’s Fiction*, Westport, 2002.

finally conquer the forces of the primitive past.²² In this and subsequent novels Stoker shows himself confident that science can correct the problems of the past and provide for a more comfortable future. *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, on the contrary, departs from this model. In this novel the past is much more powerful, and the result is that the forces of the present are annihilated by Queen Tara, whose mummy has been resurrected by a small group of scientists and Egyptologists in the course of a scientific experiment. Unlike *Dracula*, *The Jewel of Seven Stars* ends with the death of modernity. What is more, this novel is consistently ambivalent about the power that the past exerts and less optimistic about the supremacy of modern science. In fact, its characters frequently note that the present age has actually lost the wisdom of the past, including the knowledge exercised by the Egyptian priests, their magic and astronomy, thus suggesting that contemporary science can build on scientific knowledge that had been lost for some time.²³

This rather pessimistic conclusion seems to have been influenced by Egyptian archaeology at a time when Egyptologists kept the public informed of the work they were carrying out in Egypt. Stoker, for instance, was personally acquainted with Richard Burton, the famous explorer who also found prehistoric stone implements in Egypt, and with William Wilde, an amateur Egyptologist. It is possible that Stoker learnt from them the opinions of Petrie about the end of the Old Kingdom, imagined as the consequence of a great social revolution that had swept then over Egypt and had been marked by systematic destruction of tombs, sarcophagi and statues. Petrie imaginatively compared this work of destruction to the excesses of the mob during the French Revolution.²⁴ Thus, in *The Jewel of Seven Stars* there is no suggestion that progress is inevitable or even that science and technology can

control the forces of the past. The two novels suggest that Stoker was aware of the scientific and cultural developments that were taking place around the turn of the century, and that he was apprehensive about primitive forces, sometimes associated with women and minority groups.²⁵ His narratives are also symptomatic of the antinomies of freedom and determinism discussed in Britain after 1880,²⁶ and they were not free of the increasing influence of irrational elements, sometimes originating from Egyptology. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s authors like Rudyard Kipling, Robert L. Stevenson, Herbert G. Wells (*The War of the Worlds*, 1898), Henry Rider Haggard or Arthur Conan Doyle wrote many tales in which fantastic creatures threatened the British Empire.²⁷ Invasion literature was at a peak, and when Stoker met Arminius Vambéry, a Professor of Oriental Languages at the University of Budapest, he was introduced to the *Dracula* legend during a dinner at the Beefsteak Club in 1890, an informal group of personalities which included precisely scholars involved in the study of Egyptian antiquities like Richard Burton or Wallis Budge. Budge was an Egyptologist interested in the paranormal and

25 From the middle of the 19th century women were being incorporated in growing numbers in certain working activities outside the domestic sphere (principally as secretaries, teachers and employees) and reached higher levels of education, to the point of becoming an important part of the reading public. They also began fighting for their right to be admitted at universities, to lead a life of their own and to enjoy the same political rights as men. The cultural masculine reaction to this unexpected defy was an horrified one. Symbolist created the archetype of the sensual, passionate but, in the end, cruel and fatal woman, leading man (and reason, it goes without saying) to annihilation. The female vampire was perhaps the most popular icon of the woman who expressed her erotic drive in an uninhibited manner, who exhibited her own initiative in seduction and who overtly exerted her dominion over men when satisfying her own desire. Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) and Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1892) are the best known literary examples, whilst Edvard Munch's *Vampire* (1893), *Ashes* (1894) and *Self-Portrait (Salome Paraphrase)* (1898), figure prominently in the pictorial domain.

26 D. Glover, *Vampires, Mummies, and Liberals*, p. 92-93.

27 Cf., for instance, the fascination for mummies: N. Daly, "That obscure object of desire: Victorian commodity culture and fictions of the mummy", *Novel. A Forum of Fiction* 28 (1994), 24-51; C. Lupton, "'Mummymania' for the masses—Is Egyptology cursed by the mummy's curse?", in S. MacDonald, M. Rice (ed.), *Consuming Ancient Egypt*, London, 2003, p. 23-46; M. Fitzenteiler, Ch. E. Loeben (ed.), *Die ägyptische Mumie ein Phänomen der Kulturgeschichte* (IBAES, 1), London, 2004.

22 C. A. Senf, "Dracula, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, and Stoker's 'Burden of the past'", in C. M. Davison (ed.), *Bram Stoker's Dracula. Sucking through the Century, 1897-1997*, Toronto, p. 77.

23 C. A. Senf in C. M. Davison (ed.), *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, p. 77-94.

24 C. A. Senf in C. M. Davison (ed.), *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, p. 88; Idem, "Reservation about science, popular Egyptology, and the power of natural world in *The Jewel of Seven Stars*", in C. A. Senf, *Science and Social Science in Bram Stoker's Fiction*, Westport, 2002, p. 73-96.

believed in the reality of spirits and haunting, like a number of friends who met at the Ghost Club, a London circle committed to the study of alternative religions and the spirit world. In fact, his translation of the *Book of the Dead* was destined to have a lasting influence over esoteric groups. He was also a member of the Savile Club, an academic and arts club for men of the newly-enlarged electorate who included prominent poets like William B. Yeats and writers like Rudyard Kipling, Robert L. Stevenson, Herbert G. Wells, Thomas Hardy or Henry Rider Haggard. Some of them were deeply interested in occultism and spiritism, like Budge himself, Hardy or Yates, whilst Haggard, the famous author of *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), was a passionate reader of Egyptology.²⁸ In fact Stoker's Queen Tara owes much to Ridder Haggard's Ayesha, a character of his novel *She* (1887), as the archetype of the immortal oriental princess, well-versed in the ancient arts and sciences, who poses a threat to the British Empire.

Thus Egyptology confirmed some increasingly popular ideas of the turn of the 19th century: the past could become a repository of arcane knowledge which opened the possibility of reaching deeper levels of spirituality and wisdom in a troubled and desecrated present, whilst civilisation and cultural achievements were by no means the fruit of an irresistible ascending movement but, quite the contrary, were liable to an almost inevitable decline.²⁹ In fact, Petrie contrasted the high levels of organisation reached by ancient Egyptians with the return to the "degraded" condition of the present in despite of the fact that the physical characteristics of the landscape had remained unaltered.³⁰ In this context, the deep religious beliefs of many Egyptologists further contributed to support a nascent Biblical archaeology at the turn of the 19th century, when the revival of an Old-

Testament-based Christianity was concomitant with the loss of confidence in progress.³¹ For instance, Petrie's discovery of the Merenptah stele in Karnak (1896), which mentioned Israel, raised great interest because it provided evidence in Egypt of the Biblical account of the Exodus. Montet set his sights on Tanis, which was held to be setting of the biblical city of Zoan, while Naville had conducted a mission at Tell el-Mashkuta, thought to be the site of the "treasure-cities Pithom and Raamses" built by the Israelites for Pharaoh, according to Exodus. As Kamil has stressed, to these scholars the ancient past bore no resemblance to the Egypt in which they worked. The once-great civilisation of the pharaohs could not reasonably be attributed to the forefathers of the present Arabic-speaking population, whom they regarded as not enlightened enough.³²

To sum up, ancient Egypt played an ambiguous role in a historical period when faith in future was fading. The country and its decaying old monuments proved that progress was reversible, and that a formerly brilliant civilisation and its high culture could simply disappear. But Egypt also showed a possible escape, if not a solution, to uncertainty, consisting in sheltering oneself in a romantically idealised past turned into a refuge against the unwanted, but ineluctable, consequences of progress ... as well as against the not less disturbing possibility of its end.

Pharaonic Egypt, a peaceful realm?

Having in mind all the considerations evoked in the preceding pages it will not be a surprise to assert that Pharaonic Egypt has been regarded as a particular lost paradise, a refuge of artistic beauty, high culture, social order, spiritual life and sophisticated knowledge which could not but seduce the learned society in an age of uncertainty, at the turn of the 19th century, including some of the most active Egyptologists. The popularity of this highly evocative but distorted image is inseparable from phenomena such as the succession of spectacular

28 S. M. Addy, *Rider Haggard and Egypt*, Huncoat, 1998.

29 K. Hoelzli, "Exorcising the Beast: The Darwinian influences on the narrative of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*", in C. T. Kungl (ed.), *Vampires: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, Oxford, 2003 p. 27-30.

30 P. Sedra, "Imagining an imperial race: Egyptology in the service of Empire", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24 (2004), 253; N. A. Silberman, "Petrie's head: Eugenics and Near Eastern Archaeology", in A. B. Kehoe, M. B. Emmerichs (ed.), *Assembling the Past: Studies in the Professionalization of Archaeology*, Albuquerque (NM), 1999, p. 69-79..

31 D. Gange, "Religion and science in late nineteenth-century British Egyptology", *The Historical Journal* 49 (2006), 1083-1103.

32 J. Kamil, *Labib Habachi: The Life and Legacy of an Egyptologist*, Cairo-New York, 2007, p. 30.

discoveries, the opening of the canal of Suez and the development of modern communications – which allowed for a rising flux of tourists into the Nile Valley – and, finally, the increasing levels of literacy in western countries and the growing importance of press, which contributed to popularize the image of ancient Egypt not only among educated citizens but also among public in general. Ancient Egypt became a consumer good, able to satisfy the increasing appetite for exotics, knowledge or simply evasion in an era of imperialist expansion and of incipient mass culture.³³

Moreover, the crisis of liberalism was concomitant to the crisis of the values of the high bourgeoisie, to the point that the concepts of decadence and degeneration became commonly admitted into the cultural and scientific discussions at this period. Not surprisingly the Western perception of ancient Egypt was influenced by these ideas in two ways: the post-Pharaonic history of the country was considered as an example of return into barbarism which explained why the culture, values, character and high achievements of the ancient Egyptians had been completely forgotten since antiquity;³⁴

33 D. M. Reid, "From explorer to Cook's tourist", in D. M. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, Berkeley, 2002, p. 64-92; E. Colla, "The discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb: Archaeology, politics, literature", in E. Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities. Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Identity*, Durham-London, 2007, p. 172-226; H. Whitehouse, "Egypt in European thought", in J. M. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. I, New York, 1995, p. 15-31; P. Starkey, J. Starkey (ed.), *Travellers in Egypt*, London, 1998; D. Jeffreys, "Introduction –Two hundred years of ancient Egypt: Modern history and ancient archaeology", in D. Jeffreys (ed.), *Views of Ancient Egypt since Napoleon Bonaparte: Imperialism, Colonialism and Modern Appropriations*, London, 2003, p. 1-18.

34 The idea of the return to barbarism (or of the coming of the barbarians) was not exclusive of Cavafy but rather common in the western culture at the end of the 19th century: M. Grodent, "Cavafy lu par Tsirkas: 'The ugly head of Marx'", in S. Basch, J.-Y. Empereur (ed.), *Alexandria ad Europam* (Études alexandrines, 14), Cairo, 2007, p. 123. Cf. the similar feeling expressed by the French explorer Henri Mouhot when discovering the Khmer temple of Angkor Wat in 1860: "mais en voyant, d'un côté, l'état de profonde barbarie des Cambodgiens actuels, de l'autre les preuves de la civilisation avancée de leurs ancêtres, il m'était impossible de voir dans les premiers autre chose que les descendants des Vandales, dont la rage s'était exercée sur les œuvres du peuple fondateur, et non la postérité de celui-ci" (*Voyages dans les royaumes du Siam, du Cambodge et du Laos*, Paris, 1868, chap. 17). More examples in P. Sedra, "Imagining

and the pre-Pharaonic past was simply discarded as it was inconceivable that there could be any link between a high civilisation and a native African origin. From this perspective, it was accepted that Pharaonic Egypt was completely formed from the very beginning, and the existence of a prehistoric past was disregarded or denied as absurd, especially when it was broadly acknowledged that the Egyptian civilisation had reached its peak under the pyramid builders and the classic art of the fourth dynasty, and that this perfection had appeared suddenly, owing nothing to any remote – and less noble – precedent. Eminent Egyptologists like Mariette, Maspero and others continued to deny the existence of prehistory on Egyptian soil as late as 1900, as if its admission could threaten the charm which emanated from the beauty of the Egyptian *beaux-arts*.³⁵ The weight of such a prejudice was so great that even Petrie was led to admit in the first instance that his prehistoric discoveries at Nagada and Ballas corresponded in fact to Bedouins or to foreign populations arrived into Egypt at the end of the Old Kingdom.³⁶ His *Dynastic Race* bringing civilisation into the Nile Valley from the Middle East was another attempt to break any tie with a native African environment and to explain why the pharaonic culture supposedly appeared completely formed from the beginning. Yet these preconceived ideas were not limited to the sphere of the historical interpretation since they also affected such cultural domains as religion, when late 19th century Egyptologists denied, for instance, the existence of polytheism in ancient Egypt as – it was argued – such a high civilisation should assuredly have possessed rather more sophisticated spiritual beliefs than the cult of a multitude of extravagant divinities. It goes without saying that the more elevated spirituality so proposed was founded on some form of monotheism, and that among its most

an imperial race: Egyptology in the service of Empire", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24 (2004), 250.

35 The controversy has been described by J. de Morgan, *Recherches sur les origines de l'Égypte. L'âge de la pierre et des métaux*, Paris, 1896, p. 47-54; Idem, *La Préhistoire orientale. Tome I : Généralités*, Paris, 1925, p. xxii-xxxii. Cf. also A. Jarnay, *Mémoires de Jacques de Morgan (1857-1924)*, Paris, 1997, p. 409 n. 50. Cf. also B. Midant-Reynes (ed.), *Les pionniers de la préhistoire en Égypte* (Archéo-Nil, 17), Paris, 2007.

36 W. M. F. Petrie, *A History of Egypt*, London, 1894, p. 7.

fervent supporters there were priests like Hermann Junker or Étienne Drioton.³⁷ In any case, these prejudices were common in colonial archaeology at the turn of the 19th century, like the contemporaneous refusal to admit that the architectural complex known as Great Zimbabwe was the work of African peoples, or the reluctance to accept that the elaborated irrigation networks discovered in North Africa had been built and kept by native populations – in fact, they were systematically attributed to the Romans. These examples are a reminder of the ideological values prevalent among the colonial powers, aiming to be regarded as the modern heirs of such prestigious forebears as Greeks or Romans in bringing the benefits of civilisation into their new territorial acquisitions.³⁸ Indeed, modern European imperialists exhibited an “imaginative dependence” on Rome,³⁹ to the point that in India, for example, British officials were routinely artistically represented in classical poses and dress,⁴⁰ whilst the lessons to be learnt from the Romans became a fixture in the

entrance exams for the Indian civil service.⁴¹ For Seeley, as the Roman empire in the West was “*the empire of civilisation over barbarism*”, so the British empire in India was “*the empire of the modern world over the medieval*”.⁴²

Pharaonic Egypt should then be preserved as an island of grace and beauty, regularly delivering its treasures to the devoted archaeologists who sought for the masterpieces which fuelled the myth of the eternal Egypt. Under these premises it has been rightly stated that the idea of advancement in the discipline centred more on the discovery of new monuments than on new interpretations.⁴³ I should add that the feelings of many Egyptologists of the past towards the social sciences had a certain Cavafian flavour – waiting for the barbarians. By contrast the temptation to recreate an imagined lost paradise was widely accepted, as the case of Tell el-Amarna shows.

By the late 1890s and early 1900s, archaeologists and the media made Amarna offer a combination of exciting, biblical-tinged archaeology and *beaux-arts* in line with the current taste.⁴⁴ Shortly afterwards the locality was associated with daily life, knowableness and bourgeois comforts, displaying a delightful taste in art and regarded as the Versailles of Egypt, a city of love and pleasure where the recently discovered image of Nefertiti was invoked in literature as the paradigm of loveliness.⁴⁵ The parallels with the contemporaneous diggings and artistic reconstruction carried out by Evans at the palace of Knossos are striking. Not coincidentally John Pendlebury, the director of the archaeological dig at Amarna for five seasons, from 1931, had been appointed curator at Knossos by Evans from 1929 to 1934. The personality of Pendlebury is an excellent illustration of the role that Egypt played for some scholars. He found the present day uninspiring, wanted to return to a Utopian past and there are stories about his dislike of the mundane aspects of modernity, such as cars. An obituary in the *JEA*

37 E. Hornung, *Der Eine und die Vielen*, Darmstadt, 1971, chapter I.

38 B. D. Shaw, “The noblest monuments and the smallest things: wells, walls and aqueducts in the making of Roman Africa”, in B. D. Shaw, *Environment and Society in Roman North Africa*, Aldershot, 1995, chapter VII. P. Briant, “Impérialismes antiques et idéologie coloniale dans la France contemporaine: Alexandre le Grand modèle colonial”, in P. Briant, *Rois, tributs et paysans. Études sur les formations tributaires du Moyen-Orient ancien*, Paris, 1982, p. 281-292. About the frequent comparison between ancient Rome and the British Empire, cf. R. Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, Oxford, 1980; F. M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, New Haven, 1981; N. Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome*, Oxford, 1997; J. Majeed, “Comparativism and references to Rome in British imperial attitudes to India”, in C. Edwards (ed.), *Roman Presences*, Cambridge, 1999, p. 88-110; R. Hingley, *Roman Officers and English Gentlemen*, London, 2001; Ph. Vasunia, “Greater Rome and Greater Britain”, in B. Goff (ed.), *Classics Colonialism*, London, 2005, p. 38-64. Cf. also the nuances introduced by D. Bell, “From ancient to modern in Victorian imperial thought”, *The Historical Journal* 49 (2006), 735-759. With regard to Egypt, cf. D. M. Reid, “Cromer and the Classics: Ideological uses of the Greco-Roman past”, in D. M. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, Berkeley, 2002, p. 139-171; P. Sedra, “Imagining an imperial race: Egyptology in the service of Empire”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24 (2004), 249-259.

39 A. Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, London, 1995, p. 12.

40 B. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, Princeton, 1996, p. 30.

41 Ph. Vasunia, “Greek, Latin, and the Indian civil service”, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 51 (2005), 35-69.

42 J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, London, 1883, p. 239, 244, 261, 304.

43 D. B. Redford in K. Weeks (ed.), *Egyptology and the Social Sciences*, p. 7.

44 D. Montserrat, *Akhenaton*, p. 70.

45 D. Montserrat, *Akhenaton*, p. 72.

said that “chivalry and romanticism were of his essence”. Consequently, Pendlebury’s Amarna is a paradoxical place: it is certainly fabricated as a romantic escape from the present, but it is an escape into a past whose troubling features have been discarded and replaced by the best aspects of the present. In elaborate architectural reconstructions and perspective drawings he was able to promote his vision of the clean, glittering city of Amarna to a wide reading public, with a strong concentration on artistic productions. By 1937, when the dig at Amarna ended, Amarna had been fabricated into a space in remote time where the evils of modernity could be cured.⁴⁶

Evasion also underlies the romantic mixture of adventure, archaeology and exploration which opened the vast spaces of the Western Desert of Egypt to the scientific knowledge. Legends like the lost oasis of Zerkura were the excuse which motivated the risky expeditions into uncharted blanks in the map led by men who tried to escape from the routines of modern life, often uncomfortable with present and nostalgic of an old order definitively gone. The Hungarian Count Laszlo Almásy is probably the most popular of them and his exploits – which included the discovery of prehistoric rock art sites in Uweinat and Gilf Kebir – recall those of other illustrious travellers guided by similar considerations, like Wilfred Thesiger.

Yet the evasion through Egyptology could also be a social one. In a world of rising educated middle classes but still fiercely hierarchic and dominated by aristocratic tastes and values, Egyptology appears as a particularly favoured way of social – if not economic – promotion.⁴⁷ It allowed scholars from a relatively modest background to go around with rich sponsors from the great world, where digging and love for fine antiquities offered a common ground of understanding on an elitist basis and shared values. The study of Egyptology under such a sociological perspective would be a fascinating

one, as it could cast some light over the traditional priority accorded to fine arts and beautiful objects in Egyptian archaeology. For the sake of brevity it will suffice to evoke only some representative cases.

Francis Llewellyn Griffith (1862-1934) was born in a cultivated family, and his passion for ancient Egypt was accompanied by an innate sense for opportunities at a time when Egyptology offered few possibilities to scholars with modest income.⁴⁸ He refused to read for an honours degree because there was no chance to take any degree in Egyptology in Oxford in 1882, and there were no professional positions in Egyptology to be had in England. Nevertheless he managed to meet powerful supporters there, like the wealthy Archibald Sayce, who became a lifelong mentor, and Amelia Edwards, founder of the Egypt Exploration Fund, who introduced Griffith to Petrie. He accompanied Petrie to Egypt between 1884 and 1888 when he was offered a vacancy in the British Museum, though in the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities. For eight years he could only devote his spare time to the study of the Pharaonic past, until he married a woman of independent means and went to live in the house of his father-in-law, who took him in affection. This enabled Griffith to devote his time fully to the study of Egyptian texts, even after the death of his wife, when his father-in-law continued to support him and bequeathed him, after his death in 1907, a considerable fortune. In 1909 Griffith married another rich woman and, as Ray has put it, “it is a minor mystery how such a reclusive scholar managed to marry two wealthy women in a row”.⁴⁹ She enjoyed social life and succeeded in persuading her husband to join her. In the end, his self-criticism, shyness and absent-minded appearance might prove to be in part cultivated habits used as a defence, which hardly reveal the astonishing will of the self-taught brilliant scholar Griffith was.

The case of Howard Carter (1874-1939) is quite different. A child of humble origin who became the most celebrated Egyptologist in his day, he developed partly different defence mechanisms which reveal his maladjustment in the scholarly

46 D. Montserrat, *Akhenaton*, p. 79-83.

47 T. E. Peet, who held posts at Manchester and Liverpool before acceding briefly to the Chair of Egyptology at Oxford, had originally specialised in the prehistory of Italy, but had been persuaded to switch to Egyptology because it offered a more secure opportunity for earning a living: T. Champion, “Beyond Egyptology: Egypt in 19th and 20th century archaeology and anthropology”, in P. Ucko, T. Champion (ed.), *The Wisdom of Egypt: Changing Visions through the Ages*, London, 2003, p. 180.

48 J. D. Ray, “Francis Llewellyn Griffith”, in C. E. Bosworth (ed.), *A Century of British Orientalists, 1902-2001*, Oxford, 2001, p. 186-199.

49 J. D. Ray in C. E. Bosworth (ed.), *A Century of British Orientalists*, p. 194.

and social environment where he nevertheless fought so painstakingly to be admitted. Arrogance and stubbornness went hand in hand with a kind of inferiority complex over his general skills as an academic Egyptologist; he seemed almost to avoid the company of professional colleagues, as if he might suffer some form of exposure of ignorance⁵⁰ and, in general, he had a life of loneliness. So a curious mixture of shyness and self-determination suggests that he felt somewhat out of place. Yet he always showed an inclination to high society and, in his own words, he loved luxury, a “weakness” that he inherited from his mother.⁵¹ Also significant is the fact that he lied about his birth date (1874, not 1873) and birthplace (Earl’s Court, not Swaffham), perhaps because after the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun he may have felt it necessary to dignify his origins. Even his description of his father’s town house where he was born was full of fantasy: it was a fairly modest terraced house with a garden, which can scarcely have been the property he romantically evoked as “this quaint old house” with “a lovely garden with beautiful trees”.⁵² His education as a young boy was rather elementary, but being trained as a painter by his father – a second rank artist who nevertheless moved easily in the cultivated circles of Victorian society –, he managed to enter in good relations with some prominent local families with strong Egyptian interests – like the wealthy Amhersts –, who financed his first visit to Egypt and who recommended him for working there when he was only seventeen.⁵³ Carter always looked back at his involvement in Egypt as the great opportunity of his life, the chance of going to a land of exotic possibilities, far beyond the expectations of a young man largely country-bred, with rude manners, member of an untravelled family, and who was not much enthusiastic about the idea of spending his life as his father had done.⁵⁴ Hard times were not unknown for him. When he resigned from the Antiquities Service in 1905 he earned an intermittent living working as a draughtsman and selling paintings and watercolours to rich tourists

50 T. G. H. James, *Howard Carter : The Path to Tutankhamun*, London & New York, 1992, p. 399.

51 T. G. H. James, *Howard Carter*, p. 7.

52 T. G. H. James, *Howard Carter*, p. 3.

53 T. G. H. James, *Howard Carter*, p. 8-10.

54 T. G. H. James, *Howard Carter*, p. 16.

in Luxor, and was rescued in the end from a rather miserable and undignified existence by his new patron, Lord Carnarvon. Carnarvon later encouraged Carter to act as an intermediary for European and American museums, earning him commissions as a reputable dealer, whereby Carter enjoyed and copied some of the lifestyle Carnarvon had been born into.⁵⁵ Finally, at the end of his life, he enjoyed a moderate fortune and even took up the pursuit of collecting Egyptian antiquities, a distinguished activity in which he became a successful collector.

Arthur E. P. Weigall’s life (1880-1934) announces a new turn towards a more professional, open-minded Egyptology, progressively detached from the Edwardian values prevalent among British Egyptologists. He belonged to a middle class family whose military and clerical background was typical of what has been defined as the backbone of the Victorian society. Like Carter, Weigall altered the place and date of his father’s death (from Afghanistan in 1880 to Tell el-Kebir in Egypt in 1882) as well as his own birth too, to keep the coincidence.⁵⁶ The same year of his birth his mother was widowed and heard the divine call which pushed her to become involved in missionary activities, during Weigall’s childhood, in the slums of northern England industrial towns. But Arthur was revolted at this existence which he later described as abnormal and hysterical. Thanks to his family relations he managed to enter into a select school where he became fascinated with the casual self-confidence of the boys and their offhandedness. At seventeen he became very interested in Egyptology, and the so more as he was obliged to work for accountancy firms in order to earn his living. He read furiously and without method about ancient history and archaeology, and a love affair with a married woman when he was nineteen opened to him a refined world of concerts, galleries and poetry. Although not graduated at any university he met Petrie and reconstituted himself as an inspector of antiquities in Egypt, where he exhibited an inherent sense of romantic imperialism, bringing about order and justice and serving his country: “*The Kipling feeling has taken me by the*

55 F. Carnarvon, 8th Countess of Carnarvon, *Carnarvon and Carter. The Story of the Two Englishmen who Discovered the Tomb of Tutankhamon*, Highclere, 2007, p. 50.

56 J. Hankey, *A Passion for Egypt. A Biography of Arthur Weigall*, London, 2001.

shoulders".⁵⁷ At a time when Egyptology was being popularized by journalists and publicists as a cultural sport for the rich, Weigall participated in the 1901 discovery of the tomb of Akhenaton and in the 1908 finding of that of Horemheb. But in those days ancient Egypt was also the arena of competing scholars and greedy entrepreneurs for power and possession of treasures. Weigall became the desperate witness of all sorts of excavating and commercial mischief, involved in bitter rivalry with certain colleagues and increasingly disappointed when his own claims to train native professionals were regarded with disdain. Finally, a shady affair concerning a statue and a nervous breakdown precipitated his departure from the Antiquities Service and his return in Europe in 1911, where he worked as a successful set-designer for the London revue stage, as well as a film critic, journalist and novelist. In this new role his books are an attack on conventions, doubtless inspired by his own experience in Egypt. He chose to write biographies about Nero, Marc Antony, Alexander the Great and Sappho in which one finds a sharp sense of contrast: Nero against the senatorial classes of Rome, Marc Antony against much the same, Alexander alone with his sense of mystic destiny, and Sappho against the moralizing of history.⁵⁸ Shortly before his death he decamped for America, in 1929, tired of the old world, impatient with its values. From this standpoint the role Egypt played in his life has been accurately described by his biographer: "*Egypt was simply a secret dream, an enchanted land which released him from the dreary London days and the Bayswater Flats*".⁵⁹

Considered as an escape route from a conventional life, Egyptology probably played a similar role for Battiscombe Gunn (1883-1950). Son of a member of the Stock Exchange, he was educated at liberal public schools like Westminster and Bedales which did not submit to most of the Victorian ethos. The latter, for instance, was founded in 1893 in reaction to the limitations of the conventional Victorian Public School, and its relatively secular teaching made it attractive in its early days to non-conformists, agnostics and liberal Jews, and it was also well known and popular in some Cambridge and Fabian intellectual circles with connections to

57 J. Hankey, *A Passion for Egypt*, p. 53.

58 J. Hankey, *A Passion for Egypt*, p. 322.

59 J. Hankey, *A Passion for Egypt*, p. 19.

the Wedgewoods, Darwins, Huxleys and Trevelyans. One can speculate about the possibility that such open-minded environment encouraged Gunn to try a different way than that foreseeable for him when considering his familial background, especially as he enjoyed joining literary and artistic circles.⁶⁰ After trying banking, engineering and journalism, he worked as private secretary to the dramatist Pinero until he became assistant to Petrie and Gardiner, who stated that "*I was sometimes almost in despair over my partner's unproductiveness. Gunn was a real Bohemian and much of his research was carried on in his own lodgings at dead of night. After some years, perhaps about 1920, it was agreed that Gunn should seek employment elsewhere*".⁶¹ Nevertheless Gunn continued to adhere to a traditional Egyptology where the prestigious philology and the study of fine antiquities were considered the true *raison d'être* of the discipline. When Shinnie, the eminent African archaeologist, went to Oxford to study Egyptology in 1934 "*it was generally considered that an ability to read hieroglyphs was adequate training for excavating a site in Egypt*". He sensed nevertheless that other training was necessary if he was to become an archaeologist and "*to work in Egyptology but with a somewhat wider view of the nature of the subject than was held by my teacher, Battiscombe Gunn, one of the great Egyptologists of the time. Gunn would almost certainly have said that for his study of Ancient Egypt, texts and tomb paintings would provide the most important evidence. He did not consider the study of artefacts very necessary and though he sent me to the Ashmolean Museum to copy inscriptions on funerary stelae he never suggested that I look at the rich collection of other Egyptian objects exhibited there*".⁶²

Many more examples could be cited.⁶³ In short, it is no exaggeration to state that Egyptologists

60 W. R. Dawson, "Battiscombe George Gunn, 1883-1950", *Proceedings of the British Academy* 36 (1950), 229-236.

61 A. H. Gardiner, *My Working Years*, London, 1962, p. 32.

62 P. Shinnie, "A personal memoir", in P. Robertshaw (ed.), *A History of African Archaeology*, London, 1990, p. 221.

63 Cf. Cl. Le Tourneur d'Ison, *Une passion égyptienne. Jean-Philippe et Marguerite Lauer*, Paris, 1996, p. 20, about Lauer: "*à vingt-quatre ans, l'idée de rompre avec une existence conventionnelle et monotone s'accordait fort bien aux rêves qu'il portait en lui. Derrière la courtoisie charmante, la politesse docile et la caractère affable, se laissait deviner la bride d'une éducation sévère. Elevé dans le carcan rigide de la bourgeoisie huppée du 16^e arrondissement, il n'avait*

usually regarded ancient Egypt as a kind of lost paradise where it was still possible to discover an ideal refuge from the uncertainties and the ugliness of the industrial world. In this respect it is particularly noteworthy that the Pharaonic past began to replace the traditional models in which the educated elite liked to mirror themselves: classical Greece, Rome and the Renaissance had been the symbols of a rationalist view of the world firmly anchored in the notion of progress. But from the end of the 19th century they were being displaced in the preferences of the new generation, fascinated by the primitive, the mysterious and the archaic⁶⁴ – Picasso assured his public in 1907 that an African sculpture in his studio was more beautiful than the Venus of Milo while Marinetti, in a similar vein, proclaimed in his famous *Futurist Manifesto* (1909) that a racing automobile was more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace. Freud is a good example of this attitude, when Egypt gradually replaced ancient Greece as the focus of his cultural curiosity, while Thomas Mann put ancient Egypt on a par with the Anglo-Saxon civilisation in *Joseph und seine Brüder*.⁶⁵ Ancient Egypt became the paradigm of a conservative order, sincere spirituality and refined culture, the cradle of an alternative genealogy linking the past to the present but without the disadvantages of the increasingly blamed democracy, rising masses and secular values. In this respect, Gange has stressed that the spectacular finds suggested that Egyptology could offer firm evidence against Darwinism while proving events of the Old Testament to be historically true, and support for biblical Egyptologists at the turn of the 19th century reveals that, in Egyptology, the *fin-de-siècle* enjoyed a widely supported revival of

pas jusqu'à là dérogé aux valeurs conservatrices de sa famille dont il partageait la foi chrétienne, suivant à la lettre les préceptes de l'Eglise catholique. Pourtant, il sentait un besoin fiévreux de briser enfin ce moule". When Lauer saw for the first time the Egyptian peasants labouring the fields he thought that "moi, si croyant, je venais de prendre conscience que j'avais posé le pied sur une terre que le Christ avait foulée" (J.-Ph. Lauer, *Je suis né en Égypte il y a 4700 ans*, Paris, 2000, p. 28).

64 J. Le Rider, *Modernité viennoise et crises de l'identité*, Paris, 2000, p. 186.

65 J. Le Rider, *Modernité viennoise*, p. 305-307; Idem, *Freud, de l'Acropole au Sinaï. Le retour à l'Antique des Modernes viennois*, Paris, 2002, p. 239-270; R. Bernbeck, "The past as fact and fiction: From historical novels to novel histories", in S. Pollock, R. Bernbeck (ed.), *Archaeologies of the Middle East: Critical Perspectives*, Oxford, 2005, p. 97-121.

Old-Testament-based Christianity amidst a flowering of diverse beliefs.⁶⁶

Such alternative genealogy passed necessarily through "westernizing" ancient Egyptians. Petrie's *Dynastic Race* might be interpreted in this sense as well as the astonishing attempt by Breasted to transform the inhabitants of the Nile Valley into white people ("*the evolution of civilization has been the achievement of the Great White Race*"),⁶⁷ in his wider effort to convert Egypt into the supremely privileged ancient culture which could offer the most to the progressive "civilising" of humanity.⁶⁸ One can also evoke Hitler's fascination with Nefertiti which led him to proclaim that the famous queen was the epitome of Aryan beauty.⁶⁹ The nostalgic reconstruction of the glories of the past as a visible evocative model for the present can also be intimated in the professional and sentimental attachment of certain Egyptologists to localities like Lauer's Saqqara, Pendlebury's Amarna or Montet's Tanis. Digging prestigious monuments like tombs and temples in search for fine antiquities has brought about durable consequences for our understanding of the Pharaonic civilization, since this kind of select objects provided a convenient though biased filter which contributed to entertain the myth of an eternal Egypt. They were also the silent witnesses of an age of beauty definitely gone, yet apt to be rediscovered and enjoyed by a minor elite who found in their harmony the proof of a certain aristocratic ethos and a spiritual continuity through the centuries. *Beaux-arts* were the indispensable, solely worthwhile link in a genealogy connecting Egyptologists, rich collectors and amateurs to the Pharaonic past, a genealogy whereby they appear

66 D. Gange, "Religion and science in late nineteenth-century British Egyptology", *The Historical Journal* 49 (2006), 1083-1103.

67 S. Vinson, "From Lord Elgin to James Henry Breasted: The politics of the past in the first era of globalization", in R. Rowan & U. Baram (ed.), *Marketing Heritage: Archaeology and the Consumption of the Past*, Lanham, 2004, pp. 57-65. Breasted had firm Christian beliefs and started studying for the ministry at the Chicago Theological Seminary before turning to Egyptology.

68 D. Montserrat, *Akhenaton*, p. 101.

69 "Colouring" ancient Egyptians seems to be a curse periodically endured by the inhabitants of the Nile Valley when being the object of certain historical discussions, from Breasted's "whiteness" to Bernal's "blackness". Cf. also H. Brugsch, *Egypt under the Pharaohs. A History Derived entirely from the Monuments*, vol. I, London, 1891, p. 2-3, who considered them as "Caucasians".

as a dream community of connoisseurs acting as the legitimate heirs and trustees of a venerable legacy, not to be disturbed by such materialist approaches as economic or social history.

Economic history and early Egyptology, a story of failed relations?

This was the case indeed. As late as 1975 J. J. Janssen could assert that “*economic history of ancient Egypt [...] is as yet virtually non-existent*” and “*it may be clear that the influence of the economy on Egyptian political and cultural history has been underrated*”.⁷⁰ Even now a recent book setting out the state-of-the-art in Egyptology disregards entirely the social or economic history of pharaonic Egypt.⁷¹ And, in a broader perspective, it is remarkable how small a role Egypt still plays in comparative studies of more complex societies, and how few of the contributions to a wider, comparative, view of the past have been made by Egyptologists.⁷² Economy and, more generally, daily life did not become a major focus of scholarly study in our discipline and, in fact, it has traditionally remained a rather neglected field of investigation. This anomalous situation is specially shocking when considering the burgeoning popularity of agrarian studies on ancient civilisations, especially on classic Greece and Rome, at the turn of the 19th century. Even if we concede that pharaonic sources were not particularly abundant, they could hardly be regarded as unsubstantial either, and scholars like Spiegelberg, Griffith, Gardiner or Revillout, among others, had translated and studied many important texts which specialists of the ancient economy like Max Weber or Eduard Meyer were well acquainted with. Both of them, for instance, wrote extensively about ancient Egypt and had a remarkable knowledge of both pharaonic sources and scholarly discussions.

70 J. J. Janssen, “Prolegomena to the study of Egypt’s economic history during the New Kingdom”, *SAK* 3 (1975), 128, 129; Idem, “The role of the temple in the Egyptian economy during the New Kingdom”, in E. Lipinski (ed.), *State and Temple Economy in the Ancient Near East*, vol. II (OLA, 6), Louvain, 1979, p. 505-507.

71 R. H. Wilkinson (ed.), *Egyptology Today*, Cambridge, 2008.

72 T. Champion, “Beyond Egyptology: Egypt in 19th and 20th century archaeology and anthropology”, in P. Ucko, T. Champion (ed.), *The Wisdom of Egypt: Changing Visions through the Ages*, London, 2003, p. 184-185.

Nevertheless, Egyptologists showed an astonishing reluctance to deal with the economy of the ancient inhabitants of the Nile valley, a circumstance which contrast sharply with their more open-minded attitude towards anthropology or the history of religion.⁷³ I think that the main reasons underlying such a lack of interest are the elitist consideration of beaux arts as the true focus of Egyptological investigation (and the antiquarian-minded view from this resulting), the consideration of ancient Egypt as a repository of a praiseworthy conservative social order, the solid Christian background and beliefs of many Egyptologists and, finally, the increasing isolation of Egyptology in respect of humanities and, more generally, of social sciences.

The first approaches to the economy of ancient Egypt

Papyri and inscriptions with economic contents were being translated and studied from the middle of the 19th century and integrated into the first descriptions of the economy of ancient Egypt. In a period when sociology and economic history were just taking their first steps, scholars turned to anthropology and law history in the search for parallels that should help them to understand the economic organisation of the land of the Pharaohs. Egyptologists were well aware of anthropological research, as the work of W. M. F. Petrie, G. A. Reisner, A. Moret or E. Revillout shows. But too frequently hasty comparisons led to an oversimplification of the Egyptian sources in order to fit them into the dominant theories of the moment. Moret, for instance, thought that the Pharaonic society should be regarded as a primitive one, where clans were at the basis of the social organisation,⁷⁴ and matriarchy

73 D. O’Connor, “Ancient Egypt: Egyptological and anthropological perspectives”, in J. Lustig (ed.), *Anthropology and Egyptology: A Developing Dialogue*, Sheffield, 1997, p. 20; W. Y. Adams, “Anthropology and Egyptology: Divorce and remarriage?”, in Idem, *ibid.*, p. 27-28; T. Champion in P. Ucko, T. Champion (ed.), *The Wisdom of Egypt*, p. 161-185; D. Wengrow, “Republican values and the study of the ancient Orient”, in D. Jeffreys (ed.), *Views of Ancient Egypt since Napoleon Bonaparte: Imperialism, Colonialism and Modern Appropriations*, London, 2003, p. 179-193, esp. 186-190.

74 A. Moret, “La conditions des féaux en Égypte, dans la famille, dans la société, dans la vie d’outretombe”, *RT* 19

remained one of its main constituents, at least until the New Kingdom.⁷⁵ His opinions were combatted by law historians who privileged the opposite view: as “juridical” documents were well attested in the Old Kingdom, a period when arts reached its peak and massive monuments like the pyramids were built, one could only but deduce that the power and achievements of the state were then at their climax and that the Old Kingdom might be considered the most brilliant period of the entire Egyptian history. Not surprisingly, some economic overviews written by law historians dealt only with this epoch.⁷⁶ E. Revillout, a scholar with an extensive knowledge of juridical and economic sources, was certainly influenced by the anthropological researches of his time, and his writings, full of comparative data, carried a considerable weight in the early interpretations of the pharaonic economy. His essay on the political economy of ancient Egypt, for example, abounds in references to traditional Madagascan society or to Jesuit Paraguay.⁷⁷ Unlike Moret, he held the opinion that Egypt could hardly be labelled a primitive society. Instead, its political economy was even more complex than that of the ancient city as described by Fustel de Coulanges,⁷⁸ and he discussed some basic principles of the pharaonic economy which would have a durable influence on Egyptology. The Old Kingdom was, for instance, a period of elevated public ideals, when charity and justice were much valued in private inscriptions while the sovereign was “une Providence visible dirigeant – d’une façon que les socialistes d’État ne répudieraient pas – la

culture et l’industrie, pour subvenir aux besoins de tous”. In return for the paternal authority of the Pharaoh Egyptians might obey.⁷⁹ This sort of social contract was a powerful idea among Egyptologists and found support in the Biblical story of Joseph, as we shall see later. But Egypt also differed from the other civilisations of the Near East because of the role played by silver: if the Chaldean political economy was based on silver, the Egyptian one was on wheat and agriculture,⁸⁰ and this fact should explain the moral superiority of pharaonic Egypt over other ancient Near Eastern states. Agriculture indeed needed a careful organisation of farming and irrigation, and both were only possible thanks to the monarchy and to the principles of solidarity and charity, which should be preserved at any price from the influence of money/silver, as “*l’individualisme d’âme tue le communisme d’intérêts*”.⁸¹ The basic principles of the Egyptian economy were thus clearly set out: a paternal monarchy whose main concern was providing for the needs of its subjects, the obedience and devotion due in return to the sovereign, a sincere piety which ensured the longevity and the stability of the kingdom, and a departure from the commercial values and the dangers associated with them.⁸² So the myth of the eternal Egypt found its economic correlative in the depiction of a conservative agrarian utopia, an ideal social order that, in the desecrated and decadent Europe of the turn of the 19th century, could not but seduce those who dreamt of an authoritarian alternative to liberalism (not to speak to socialism or anarchism) and who sought in ancient Egypt a precedent and a lost paradise.⁸³ In this view,

(1897), 112-148; Idem, *Le Nil et la civilisation égyptienne*, Paris, 1926, p. 111, 318. Cf. also A. Moret, G. Davy, *Des clans aux empires* (L’évolution de l’humanité, 6), Paris, 1923. About Moret’s ideas on clans, cf. D. Wengrow in D. Jeffreys (ed.), *Views of Ancient Egypt*, p. 179-193.

75 See the precedent note as well as A. Erman, H. Ranke, *Ägypten und ägyptisches Leben*, Tübingen, 1923, p. 182-184; J. H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt, from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, London, 1921, p. 85-86 ; W. M. F. Petrie, *Social Life in Ancient Egypt*, London, 1924, p. 109; G. A. Reisner, *Mycerinus. The Temples of the Third Pyramid at Giza*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1931.

76 J. Pirenne, *Histoire des institutions et du droit privé de l’Ancien Égypte*, 3 vols., Brussels, 1932-1935; G. Dykmans, *Histoire économique et sociale de l’ancienne Égypte*, 3 vols., Paris, 1936-1937.

77 E. Revillout, “Économie politique”, in Idem, *Précis du droit égyptien comparé aux autres droits de l’Antiquité*, Paris, 1903, p. 1509-1561.

78 E. Revillout, *Précis du droit égyptien*, p. 1518.

79 E. Revillout, *Précis du droit égyptien*, p. 1513.

80 E. Revillout, *Précis du droit égyptien*, p. 1516-7, 1556-7.

81 E. Revillout, *Précis du droit égyptien*, p. 1513, 1556..

82 Quite significantly, the literal interpretation of the rhetoric in official records led many Egyptologists to regard foreign tribute flowing into Egypt as the proof of the strength of the Pharaohs, whereas bargaining was despised as a sign of the decadence of the state. In this respect, the story of Wenamun is symptomatic. Cf., for instance, H. G. Breasted, *A History of Egypt*, p. 513, 516-519. In fact, bargaining and negotiation were the normal kinds of commercial transactions between states in the Late Bronze Age: M. Liverani, *Prestige and Interest. International Relations in the Near East ca. 1600-1100 B. C.* (HANE—Studies, 1), Padova, 1990, p. 247-254.

83 E. Revillout, *Précis du droit égyptien*, p. 1513: “*Dans de telles conditions, ne devait-il [=the king] pas exiger une obéissance absolue, une foi complète en ce qu’il ordonnait, comme en ce qu’il enseignait, en vertu d’une tradition immémoriale et divine? Le sage, c’était le croyant; et l’esprit fort, c’était*

the power of the Pharaohs had a certain Bismarckian flavour, as their unquestionable authority could not simply be reduced to some kind of "oriental despotism". Quite the contrary, it was inspired by a sincere social policy and by respect for law,⁸⁴ the Old Kingdom being the epitome of efficiency, good government and a strong state "such as was not found in Europe until far down in the history of the Roman Empire".⁸⁵

In fact, the very existence of such a social contract between the Pharaoh and its subjects made politics simply superfluous, thus setting Egypt apart from the kind of social conflicts common in world history. H. Kees, for instance, interpreted the end of the Old and New Kingdoms as the consequence of the subversive attempts of a "working class" which aimed only to destroy the social order of the powerful, but without any real political concern, as an incompetent and corrupt administration did not cope any more with the needs of the people.⁸⁶ The strikes mentioned in Deir el-Medineh sources led W. Spiegelberg, one of the finest specialists on economic and juridical texts of his time, to praise the calm and the model behaviour of the Egyptian workers, because "c'est que nous avons à faire à des hommes libres, et non à des esclaves dont toute tentative de révolte entraîne

à sa suite les plus horribles forfaits. Si nombreux que soient les points de contact que l'on note entre les soulèvements des ouvriers égyptiens et ceux des ouvriers d'aujourd'hui, il faut cependant se garder de mettre les premiers sur la même ligne que nos grèves actuelles. Dans toute cette agitation ouvrière égyptienne, il n'est jamais question d'augmentation de salaire, ni de diminution d'heures de travail; nous ne voyons jamais non plus l'ouvrier transgresser son contrat, mais c'est contre l'État violant son contrat qu'il fait valoir son bon droit, en réclamant le paiement du salaire stipulé".⁸⁷ In such an ideal social order, where everybody knew and accepted his place in the social hierarchy, conflicts could only arise as disruptions in an otherwise perfect system. The restoration of the old order would thus bring harmony and prosperity back again, whilst the economic decline of the entire system in the long term was obviously the consequence of the foreign (and regrettable) influence of money in a formerly healthy, agrarian economy, as Revillout pointed out. This probably explains the pejorative consideration of the later periods of the pharaonic history as decadent (*Basse-époque*), when money and the integration in the Mediterranean commercial circuits became more and more important in the Egyptian economy.⁸⁸

The consideration of pharaonic Egypt as a tempting mixture of a lost paradise and a conservative agrarian utopia was further promoted by the biblical story of Joseph. At the outset of the 19th century, when religious beliefs began to fade in industrial countries, and when historical and literary criticism of the Bible began to filter into Great Britain and the United States, there was a sharp reaction in Christian circles, as they considered that the understanding of the divine inspiration of Scriptures was seriously

l'impie maudit. Je ne pense pas qu'aucun socialisme puisse prospérer dans d'autres conditions; car il faut beaucoup de pieuse résignation et très peu d'égoïsme pour vivre comme dans le Paraguay des Jésuites ou comme dans l'Égypte des vieux Pharaons". H. G. Breasted, *A History of Egypt. From the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, London, 1909², p. 234: during the New Kingdom, the king "ruled in absolute power; there was none to offer a breath of opposition; there was not a whisper of that modern monitor of kings, public opinion, an inconvenience with which rulers in the orient are rarely obliged to reckon, even at the present day".

⁸⁴ H. G. Breasted, *A History of Egypt*, p. 242: "the social, agricultural and industrial world of the Nile-dwellers under the Empire was therefore not at the mercy of arbitrary whim on the part of either king or court, but was governed by a large body of long respected law, embodying the principles of justice and humanity"; p. 77: "in spite of the luxury evident in the organization of his court, the Pharaoh did not live the life of a luxurious despot", as "in the Fourth Dynasty at least" he had as prince already seen arduous service in the administration and "he was thus an educated and enlightened monarch". Even the vizier "was a veritable Joseph [...] He was regarded by the people as their great protector" (p. 244).

⁸⁵ H. G. Breasted, *A History of Egypt*, p. 83.

⁸⁶ H. Kees, *Ägypten* (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft, III.1.3. Kulturgeschichte des Alten Orients), Munich, 1933, p. 168-171.

⁸⁷ W. Spiegelberg, "La question sociale il y a 3000 ans", *Revue de Belgique* 29 (1897), 75-95, esp. 95. Cf. also his remarkable book *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung im Pharaonenreich den Ramessiden (ca. 1400-1100 v. Chr.). Eine kulturgeschichtliche Skizze*, Strasbourg, 1895, as well as *Studien und Materialien zum Rechtswesen des Pharaonenreiches der Dynast. 18-21 (c. 1500-1000 v. Chr.)*, Hannover, 1892.

⁸⁸ Cf. the conference by D. Agut-Labordère, "« Comme un phénix ... » : une petite histoire de l'égyptien démotique à travers les réseaux de savants", in C. Bonnet, V. Krings, C. Valenti (org.), *L'Antiquité en réseaux: Individus et institutions, projets et publications, stratégies et savoirs (XVIII^e - XXI^e siècles)*, Toulouse, the 7th March 2008.

threatened.⁸⁹ Thus, in their view, excavations in Egypt and Mesopotamia had the primary purpose of illuminating the Bible and verifying its historicity. In a context when the “*Babel-Bibel controversy*” was at its climax,⁹⁰ biblical Egyptologists were supported in an attempt to provide conclusive evidence against Darwinism while proving events of the Old Testament to be true.⁹¹ So, the biblical story of Joseph was allegedly considered a true depiction of the basic mechanisms of the Egyptian state, whereby a centralised and all-mighty, though paternalist, monarchy controlled every person, activity and resource in the Nile Valley thanks to a meticulous bureaucracy. Grain was collected and then redistributed to the population, thus ensuring the prosperity of the country and the harmony of the social relations.⁹² The irrigation system was also a basic concern for the government, who tried by all means to keep it in good order. In the end, “public” works such as the construction of pyramids and temples might be interpreted as a way to redistribute the national wealth to a thankful population whose piety to the gods and obedience to the rulers contributed to the astonishing longevity of the Egyptian civilisation. Under these considerations it is not surprising that the 4th Dynasty was seen as the peak of the pharaonic state and that the collapse of the Old Kingdom “*opened a wound in Egyptian thought which never again closed up entirely*”.⁹³ In any case, the story of Joseph, and the very existence of such impressive monuments like the pyramids and

the temples, have greatly contributed to uphold the myth of a bureaucratic, economically interventionist and all-encompassing state which was nevertheless concerned about the welfare of its subjects. Such a popular image in the historiography of the 1920 and 1930 was updated in the aftermath of the II World War, when the consolidation of the Soviet and Chinese revolutions led conservative historians to assert that the “*oriental state*” was back again as an “*hydraulic despotism*” whose traces could be traced back in ancient China, Egypt or Mesopotamia.⁹⁴

Quite paradoxically, the idealisation of the agrarian economy of ancient Egypt has paralysed any serious attempt to understand the agricultural techniques, landscape and social organisation in the Nile Valley for decades, as if ancient literature and iconography and some selective modern ethnographical parallels should suffice in order to provide the necessary information. Thus, even when the pharaonic agriculture deserved some attention, it consisted mostly in descriptions relying heavily upon ancient iconography.⁹⁵ In the end, modern Egyptians were thought to have lived like their forefathers, fellah’s life and physique having remained unchanged since ancient times, whereas agricultural tools like the plough or the shaduf, not to speak of many traditions, could be traced back to pharaonic times.⁹⁶ Such an idea has been present in the work of many Egyptologists, to the point that A. K. Bowman has recently asserted that “*in more recent*

89 M. W. Chavalas, “Assyriology and Biblical studies: a century of tension”, in M. W. Chavalas, K. Lawson Younger (ed.), *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations*, Grand Rapids, 2002, p. 21, 24, 29. Cf. also the studies by Holloway and Frahm in S. W. Holloway (ed.), *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible* (Hebrew Bible Monographs, 10), Sheffield, 2006.

90 K. Johannng, *Der Bibel-Babel-Streit: Eine forschungsgeschichtliche Studie*, Frankfurt am Main, 1988; R. G. Lehmann, *Friedrich Delitzsch und der Babel-Bibel-Streit* (OBO, 113), Friburg-Göttingen, 1994; B. T. Arnold, D. B. Weisberg, “A centennial review of Friedrich Delitzsch’s ‘Babel und Bibel’ lectures”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (2002), 441-457.

91 D. Gange, “Religion and science in late nineteenth-century British Egyptology”, *The Historical Journal* 49 (2006), 1083-1103.

92 For a critical appraisal of the story of Joseph, cf. D. B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50)* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, 20), Leiden, 1970, esp. p. 236-239.

93 H. Kees, *Ägypten*, p. 200.

94 K. A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*, New Haven, 1957. Cf. also R. Bichler, “Der ‘Orient’ in Wechselspiel von Imagination und Erfahrung: zum Typus der ‘orientalischen Despotie’”, in A. Rollinger, A. Luther, J. Wiesehöfer (ed.), *Getrennte Wege? Kommunikation, Raum und Wahrnehmung in der Alten Welt* (Oikumene—Studien zur antiken Weltgeschichte, 2), Berlin, 2007, p. 475-500.

95 Cf. F. Hartmann, *L’agriculture dans l’ancienne Egypte*, Paris, 1923, or the influent work by P. Montet, *Scènes de la vie privée dans les tombeaux égyptiens de l’Ancien Empire*, Strasbourg, 1925. Cf. also the comments about the study of the history of Egyptian technology by D. Meeks, “L’Égypte ancienne et l’histoire des techniques: Égyptiens et égyptologues entre tradition et innovation”, in B. Mathieu, D. Meeks, M. Wissa (ed.), *L’apport de l’Égypte à l’histoire des techniques. Méthodes, chronologie et comparaisons* (BdE, 142), Cairo, 2006, p. 1-13.

96 One can think for instance about the vivid and influential pages written by A. Edwards, *One Thousand Miles Up the Nile*, London, 1891. About the *topos* of the fellah, cf. T. Mitchell, “The invention and reinvention of the Egyptian peasant”, *Journal of Middle East Studies* 22 (1990), 129-150.

times, the preoccupation with the *longue durée* has characterised much serious historical writing, and there has also been a less helpful tendency to evoke the timelessness of Egyptian history through the image of the peasant or fellah toiling with primitive tools over the cultivation of a small plot on the banks of the Nile. For European Egyptologists of the nineteenth century, pharaonic civilisation was dead and remote: what links there were with the present were more impressionistic than historical".⁹⁷

Irrigation was another victim of such idealisation of the modern Egyptian peasant life. The long-lived myth of the eternal Egypt has induced Egyptologists to ignore for nearly two centuries the researches made by hydraulic engineers and agronomists.⁹⁸ To put it in T. Ruf's words "the myth of the fellah as a direct descendant of the peasant from the land of Amon is still so rooted in people's minds that it must be denounced. There is now practically nothing in common between today's agriculture and that of antiquity or the Middle Ages. Techniques, crops, agricultural productivity, and even the very landscape have been transformed".⁹⁹ Such an oblivion is even more incomprehensible when considering the excellent study of the Egyptian landscape and its hydrological setting made by the engineers of the *Description de l'Égypte*, prior to the complete transformation of the irrigation system and the agricultural regime of the country under the reforms of Mohammed Ali, in the first decades of the 19th century. The neglect of this exceptionally rich corpus of information may be only explained by the Egyptological belief that such a study would be, at best, redundant, as the landscape and the

agricultural practices had remained the same for millennia.¹⁰⁰

Economic history and early Egyptology or the divorce of two disciplines

The study of the economic history of Antiquity knew a steady progress during the second half of the 19th century due to the influence of the discussions about the Marxist concept of "mode of production" developed around 1850 (*The Communist Manifesto*, 1847; *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*, 1858), to the historical researches of the first sociologists (Werner Sombart, Max Weber) and to the birth of the so-called German "historical school of national economy" (*Historische Schule der Nationalökonomie*).¹⁰¹ The economic studies which arose from such discussions underlined the sharp contrast between Antiquity and the modern world and encouraged the foundation of the *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik* (1863). In this journal theoretical and modern economy articles coexisted with studies of retrospective economic history where Antiquity enjoyed a prominent place. Nevertheless, the *Historische Schule* ended up stressing the strong differences between ancient and modern economy, and opened the way to two different approaches to the ancient economy ("primitivist" and "modernist") and to the well-known "*Bücher-Meyer controversy*".¹⁰²

97 A. K. Bowman, "Recolonising Egypt", in T. P. Wiseman (ed.), *Classics in Progress. Essays on Ancient Greece and Rome*, Oxford-New York, 2000, p. 213.

98 Cf. J. Barois, *L'irrigation en Égypte*, Paris, 1887; W. Willcocks, J. I. Craig, *Egyptian Irrigation*, London-New York, 1913³. The first serious attempt to study the ecological framework and hydraulic organization of ancient Egypt is K. W. Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt. A Study in Cultural Ecology*, Chicago-London, 1976.

99 T. Ruf, "The history of agricultural development", in G. M. Craig (ed.), *The Agriculture of Egypt*, Oxford, 1993, p. 188-208, esp. p. 188. Cf. also *Histoire contemporaine de l'agriculture égyptienne. Essai de synthèse*, Paris, 1988; Idem, "L'irrigation égyptienne. Deux siècles de changement socio-territorial", in J. C. Moreno García (ed.), *L'agriculture* (), p. 276-297.

100 That this is no exaggeration might be better understood when considering that Egyptologists have only recently begun to be aware of the potential of the contents of the *Description de l'Égypte*, thanks to G. Alleaume, "Les systèmes hydrauliques de l'Égypte pré-moderne. Essai d'histoire du paysage", in Ch. Décobert (ed.), *Itinéraires d'Égypte. Mélanges offerts au père Maurice Martin s. j.* (BdE, 107), Cairo, 1992, p. 301-322.

101 C. Nicolet, "Économie des Anciens, économie des Modernes: remarques historiographiques", in C. Nicolet, *Rendre à César. Économie et société dans la Rome antique*, Paris, 1988, p. 39-40, specially 35-38; J. Andraeu, "Introduction. Antique, moderne et temps présent: la carrière et l'œuvre de Michel Ivanovi Rostovtseff (1870-1952)", in M. Rostovtseff, *Histoire économique et sociale de l'empire Romain*, Paris, 1988, p. i-lxxxiv; H. Bruhns (ed.), *Histoire et économie politique en Allemagne de Gustav Schmoller à Max Weber*, Paris, 2004.

102 The main texts have been published by M. I. Finley (ed.), *Bücher-Meyer Controversy: An Original Anthology*, New York, 1979.

Eduard Meyer, one of the greatest historians of Antiquity at the turn of the 19th century, left an unmistakable mark on the interpretation of the economy of the ancient Egyptians.¹⁰³ His approach was rather different to that prevalent among the *Historische Schule* scholars as he disdained details (for which Wilamowitz censured him) and gave, on the contrary, a considerable weight to analogies instead of rigorous analysis. He thought that the ancient Near East and the classic Greek area (later Greco-Roman) experienced the gradual integration of formerly isolated states and civilisations, a process which finally culminated with the emergence of a single state, the Roman Empire. He also firmly believed in the cyclical movement of the history of the economy, to the point that the ancient world would have known a remarkable economic expansion followed by a deep regression; in addition, single periods of Antiquity could be fruitfully compared with single phases of the medieval and modern times. Therefore Meyer was convinced that the economic history of the most outstanding periods of the ancient world could be genuinely considered as very close to the modern, even contemporaneous times, an opinion which encountered the firm opposition of Max Weber, Karl Bücher and the historians of the *Historische Schule*, who developed instead the concept of *Oikewirtschaft*.¹⁰⁴ Lastly, Meyer

contemplated the end of the ancient world in a rather pessimistic vein, as the decline from capitalism, and this very idea of decline was to inspire Spengler and Toynbee. In fact, Meyer's scholarship was dominated by his ideological and political conceptions, and his colleagues regarded his work with not much indulgence.¹⁰⁵

The particularities of the economic research developed by Meyer are especially evident in the case of Pharaonic Egypt. And the success of his ideas amongst Egyptologists, paralleled by their virtual ignorance of Weber's remarkable approaches to the Egyptian economy, suggests a kind of affinity between conservative models of historical research which tended to mutually strengthen their preconceived interpretations of the pharaonic past. Meyer, for instance, saw the Old Kingdom as the most accomplished form of both the state and the royal power in pharaonic history. It was a period of an absolute, centralized monarchy, "as few states have known", where castes, aristocracy, privileged functions or special rights over state duties were simply absent.¹⁰⁶ But from the middle of the 5th Dynasty on, prominent families began to accumulate estates, official duties in the nomes became gradually inherited and the state continued to grant landed properties to the temples. This led to the formation of a local aristocracy,¹⁰⁷ and in this general move the sanctuaries succeeded to obtain immunities for their properties and personnel. In the end, local interests and provincial authorities played an increasingly important role, to the point that nomarchs became *de*

103 W. M. Calder, A. Demandt (ed.), *Eduard Meyer. Leben und Leistung eines Universalhistorikers* (Mnemosyne Supplement, 112), Leiden-New York, 1990.

104 Another aspect which explains Meyer's historical approach is the growing importance of natural sciences, modern philology and social sciences, which began to compete with traditional humanities, whereas modern high schools (*Realgymnasien*) equalled the long-established humanist *Gymnasien* and put the sciences of Antiquity on the defensive. Meyer, issued from a cultivated middle-class family was, paradoxically, rather critical of progress but attributed to Antiquity a progressist character in order to preserve and legitimize the mission of ancient history as a science able to interpret present times: B. Wagner-Hasel, "Le regard de Karl Bücher sur l'économie antique et le débat sur la théorie économique et l'histoire", in H. Bruhns (ed.), *Histoire et économie politique en Allemagne de Gustav Schmoller à Max Weber. Nouvelles perspectives sur l'École Historique de l'économie*, Paris, 2004, p. 159-182, esp. 175-177. Cf. also E. Meyer-Zwiffelhofer, "Orientalismus? Die Rolle des Alten Orients in der deutschen Altertumswissenschaft und Altertumsgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts (ca. 1785-1910)", in A. Rollinger, A. Luther, J. Wiesehöfer (ed.), *Getrennte Wege? Kommunikation, Raum und Wahrnehmung in der Alten Welt* (Oikumene

– Studien zur antiken Weltgeschichte, 2), Berlin, 2007, p. 501-594.

105 Mommsen judged his universal history basically "false" and found Meyer "dull". To Wilamowitz he was arrogant and in 1923 he called him the "bestgehassten deutschen Gelehrten". Finley said that "Meyer's lecture on ancient slavery is as close to nonsense as anything I can remember written by a historian of such eminence", whilst Momigliano was of the opinion that "in lui e già quindi visibile la decadenza del pensiero tedesco in confronto alla storiografia del primo Romanticismo". About these and other opinions, cf. M. Reynhold, "Review of W. M. Calder, A. Demandt (ed.), *Eduard Meyer. Leben und Leistung eines Universalhistorikers* (Mnemosyne Supplement, 112), Leiden-New York, 1990", *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 02.05.05.

106 E. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums. Band I, 2: Die ältesten geschichtlichen Völker und Kulturen bis zum sechzehnten Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart-Berlin, 1913, p. 192-193.

107 Idem, *ibid.*, p. 222-223.

facto independent and the state collapsed, replaced by a multitude of small principalities and a feudal order, in a process similar to that which touched the Carolingian Empire in the 9th century or the German Empire after the fall of the Stauffen.¹⁰⁸ But the beginning of the Middle Kingdom was a period of increasing freedom for city dwellers, much greater than that of peasants and, even if they were subject to the administration of the nomarchs, they were not continuously surveyed by officials and scribes, were exempted from compulsory work, could practise their trades and were allowed to settle in other towns. What is more, nomarchs apparently did not appoint city courts. Such a favourable environment should explain the prosperity displayed by many artisans, merchants and traders in their monuments.¹⁰⁹ As for the state, it had certainly a feudal *look* at the beginning of the 12th Dynasty, but the local princes were not any longer getting their resources by means of their personal power but, instead, from the new energy of a strengthened state and the resulting growing prosperity.¹¹⁰ The former eminent domain of the crown over the land was certainly a matter of the past, but the state collected taxes (delivered by the princes) in every province of the kingdom. And if the nomarchs continued to raise local militias, it was the king who recruited the soldiers. Even lawsuits were now judged by state officials. In short, the prosperity of Middle Kingdom Egypt was built on the power of the throne and the primacy of the vital interests of the country; centralism and localism counterbalanced each other, and the interplay of such parallel forces kept the power of the king within fixed limits.¹¹¹ In the end, the crisis of the state during the 13th Dynasty was not precipitated by any feudal disintegration but by the struggle for power which involved the high officials of the kingdom, no one of them being successful in securing his ephemeral authority or in founding a durable dynasty.¹¹²

108 Idem, *ibid.*, p. 239. For a similar interpretation, cf. G. Dykmans, *Histoire sociale et économique de l'ancienne Égypte. Vol. II: La vie économique sous l'Ancien Empire*, Paris, 1936, p. 94-116.

109 E. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums. Band I, 2*, p. 272.

110 Idem, *ibid.*, p. 273-274: "...die Mittel dazu verdanken sie nicht ihrer eigenen Macht, sondern der Neuerstärkung der Staatsgewalt und dem dadurch gesteigerten Wohlstand".

111 Idem, *ibid.*, p. 276-279.

112 Idem, *ibid.*, p. 311.

The economy of the New Kingdom differed from that of Babylon or, more generally, the Near East in that it remained a natural one, where precious metals were certainly used as measurement units but together with grain and cattle, both in the state and private spheres; even wages were paid in kind. The king owned the land of the country, and the fact that his will affected the entire existence of his subjects was the very essence of the state. Favours and rewards (including the possibility to enter the bureaucracy) could only be obtained from the Pharaoh, on condition that total obedience was shown to him and to his agents, thus contributing to the stability of the kingdom.¹¹³ If civil service was one of the pillars of the state, the army was no less significant. The mobilisation of all their forces in the war conducted against the foreigners had permitted the Theban kings to awaken national feelings. A new, military spirit pervaded Egypt and remained alive and strengthened thanks to the deeds, the loot and the gifts thereby the king rewarded every act of bravery. As a consequence, a warrior aristocracy, imbued with chivalrous values, was born and, in order to ensure its social position, the Pharaoh granted goods and servants to its members.¹¹⁴ On the face of it, it seemed as if the Theban kings had simply restored the 4th Dynasty state, with its divine absolute kingship and its control over the bureaucracy. Nevertheless a crucial difference should be noticed: the culture and the international scene had irreversibly changed, and the New Kingdom was to the Old Kingdom what the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV or the enlightened absolutism were to the kingship of Charlemagne. It simply bore the hallmark of the modern times, the result of an age-old evolution. As for the economic conditions which had precipitated the Old Kingdom into feudalism, they simply did not exist any more. The means at the disposal of the Pharaoh were now unlimited, in such a way that the state could now assert and impose its will without restriction, both in the domestic and in the foreign sphere, and it became imbued with the ideas of universality and worldwide authority.¹¹⁵

113 E. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums. Band II, 2.1: Die Zeit der ägyptischen Grossmacht*, Stuttgart-Berlin, 1928, p. 66-67.

114 Idem, *ibid.*, p. 68.

115 Idem, *ibid.*, p. 71-72.

One of the most striking aspects of Meyer insight into the economy of ancient Egypt is that it was more inspired by the mass and quality of the monuments and works of art than by the potential economic contents of the sources themselves. Thus prestigious monuments provided the core of a narrative where economic information was firstly chosen at convenience and, later, inserted here and there in order to illustrate an historical reconstruction written in advance. This tendency was further reinforced by Meyer's inclination to draw analogies from other (often distant) periods of the world history, which helped him to provide a necessary logic to the events of the past just discussed and to present the narrative as self-evident.¹¹⁶ His consideration of classical Greece as the core of ancient history did not help to improve his comprehension of the Near East, disregarded as a secondary scene in a vast historical narrative directly linking the modern world to Antiquity.¹¹⁷ Finally, European history was taken as the model of a cyclical movement whereby facts and trends repeated themselves over the millennia, thus offering an indispensable logic when the sources were scarce or, simply, absent. If such a method of historical research did not adhere to the established academic practice of its day, it proved nevertheless to be rather influential in the work of some historians fond of historical morphologies and hasty analogies, like O. Spengler and A. Toynbee. Quite significantly, these conservative approaches were well received in Egyptology, a discipline hardly touched by the renewal of the methods of the historical and socio-economic research which followed the end of the First World War.¹¹⁸ The

fate of Max Weber's interpretation of the pharaonic economic history is paradigmatic.

As one of the most influential scholars of the *Historische Schule*, his approach to the economy of the ancient world (including Egypt) shared its methodology and its modern conceptual tools, such as the critique of the naïve application of modern economic categories to phenomena of the past, the critique of the equation of economic developmental stages and historical epochs, the centrality of the causal analysis of the motivations of economic subjects together with the rationality of their behaviour (not the individual actor, but economic action and the economically-oriented action of people as members of a collectivity) and, finally, the analysis of the influence of extra-economic factors on the economy and the influence of the economy on cultural phenomena.¹¹⁹ In fact, Weber insisted that the ancient economy could not be regarded as separate from its political institutions. The central question in his *Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum* (was there in Antiquity anything like capitalist economy significant in cultural-historical terms?) was followed by a structural analysis of the economic systems of the ancient world. Such a question was at the core of the so-called Bücher-Meyer controversy, which turned around the modernity or primitive state of the ancient economy and, more precisely, whether Antiquity could in its entirety be assigned to the stage of *oikos* economy.¹²⁰ Weber tried to direct the discussions towards the question of the origins of capitalism: which were the characteristics of the ancient world that aborted the birth of capitalism in Antiquity, contrary to the Middle Ages?¹²¹ This led him to carry out a thorough analysis of the economy of the ancient world, including Pharaonic Egypt.¹²² In these pages, Weber was well aware of the recent developments in the field of Egyptian

116 The influence of this approach is also present in G. Dykmans, *Histoire sociale et économique de l'ancienne Égypte*, vol. II, p. 114-127, where the end of a supposed small peasantry, the loss of their properties and their final submission to big landholders is only inferred from the comparison with the Frankish and Carolingian kingdoms of the 6th to 10th centuries. Cf. also G. Dykmans, *Histoire sociale et économique de l'ancienne Égypte*, vol. III, p. 169-174.

117 For the cultural setting of Meyer and Egyptology, cf. the note 103 as well as H. Kloft, "Adolf Erman und die Alte Geschichte. Der Briefwechsel mit Eduard Meyer und Ulrich Wilcken", in B. U. Schipper (ed.), *Ägyptologie als Wissenschaft. Adolf Erman (1854-1937)*, Berlin-New York, 2008, p. 294-329; A.-K. Nagel, "Adolf Erman im Licht der Historischen Soziologie", in Idem, *ibid.*, p. 371-395.

118 Cf. the influential work of Count Jacques Pirenne, *Histoire des institutions et du droit privé de l'Ancien Égypte*, 3

vols., Brussels, 1932-1935, criticised by the historians but welcomed by the specialists of the history of the pharaonic law, like A. Moret, L. Wenger and E. Seidl.

119 H. Bruhns, "Max Weber's 'basic concepts' in the context of his studies in economic history", in *Max Weber Economics* (Max Weber Studies, Beiheft 1), London, 2006, p. 39-69, especially 53-54.

120 Idem, *ibid.*, p. 55.

121 R. Descat, "Le marché dans l'économie de la Grèce antique", *Revue de synthèse* (2006), 253-272, especially 255.

122 M. Weber, *Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum*, 1909. I have used the recent French version (preceded by an excellent

studies, especially the publication of relevant sources, and he exhibits a fine critical approach which led him to distance himself from the current opinions of Egyptologists like Revillout and to propose fresh, new interpretations. He also qualified many accepted statements about the power of the king and the temples, and his approach to the study of the Pharaonic economy was a long-term one, where economic phenomena were studied in the “*longue durée*” without trying to fit them in the rather arbitrary historical periods established by Egyptologists. Contrary to Meyer, Weber avoided any reduction of the historical research to the simple study of individual facts to which the historian should then give a value. And even if he virtually used the same data as Meyer, Weber structured them from true questions, formulated from “controlled” comparisons. Meyer, on the contrary, firmly rejected any organisation of the historical data by means of a theory, as he thought that it was data and analogies which commanded the writing of history.¹²³

Unfortunately, the high quality work of Max Weber has been neglected by the historians of ancient economy (not to say Egyptologists) for decades.¹²⁴ In spite of the rather enthusiastic reaction of L. Westermann as early as 1915, shortly afterwards historians like M. Rostovtzeff or F. Heichelheim ignored his researches even when they were well acquainted with them. In fact, J. Hasebroek was the only link between Weber and the historians of Antiquity who rediscovered his contributions around the 1970s.¹²⁵ Quite different was the fate of Meyer’s consideration of the ancient economy as a small-scale, qualitatively similar, copy of the contemporaneous one, as it was commonly accepted until the middle of the 20th century. In fact, what began as a fruitful collaboration between ancient historians, sociologists, anthropologists and law historians around 1890-1910 turned afterwards to an increasing isolation between disciplines.¹²⁶

It is significant that a monumental international research work like the *Cambridge Ancient History* (1925-1939) was simply indifferent to any sociological categorising or comparative interpretation. Lastly, the deterioration of the social, political and economical conditions in the aftermath of the Great War, together with the declining prestige of the traditional academic history, contributed to a wave of irrationality which shot to fame the morphological histories of Spengler, Toynbee and others. The cultures of the ancient world were not alien to this move, as they provided a model for such cultural interpretations. Meyer was certainly not alone as their source of inspiration: one should remember the work of W. M. F. Petrie, *The Revolutions of Civilization* (1911), and his postulated laws which explained the consecutive phases in the evolution of cultures.¹²⁷ In this light, the cyclical move (and predictability) of history meant that recent events like the Soviet Revolution could be immediately recycled as retrospective explanations of the events of the past. The end of the Old Kingdom was a privileged field for such analogies. H. Kees, for instance, saw the “working class” as a kind of proletarians who precipitated the collapse of the pharaonic state at two different moments, at the end of the 6th Dynasty (“*probably the worst catastrophe of all Egyptian history*”) and the final years of Ramesseid rule. In both cases a feeble government had to face very simple subversive attempts which aimed merely to destroy the social order of the powerful, without any real political concern; in fact, the rebellions were pushed only because of the failure and corruption of an administration which no longer satisfied the needs of the people.¹²⁸ In the same vein, A. Moret could interpret the cultural changes which occurred at the end of the Old Kingdom as the consequence of the access of plebeians to civic life, when a real flood of proletarians swept aside the social categories during a social revolution which established a state socialism.¹²⁹ The so-called

introduction by H. Bruhns), *Économie et société dans l’Antiquité*, Paris, p. 153-181.

123 H. Bruhns in M. Weber, *Économie et société dans l’Antiquité*, p. 56.

124 M. van de Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History*, London, 1999, p. 115.

125 H. Bruhns, in *Max Weber Economics*, p. 42-47; Idem in M. Weber, *Économie et société dans l’Antiquité*, p. 34-43.

126 A. Momigliano, “Dopo Max Weber?”, in A. Momigliano, *Sui fondamenti della storia antica*, Turin, 1984, p. 437-454,

especially 448-450.

127 Cf. also his contribution to E. B. Knobel, W. W. Midgley, J. G. Milne, M. A. Murray, W. M. F. Petrie, *Historical Studies* (BSAE—Studies, 11), London, 1911, p. 12-13, 16-18.

128 H. Kees, *Ägypten* (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft, III.1.3. Kulturgeschichte des Alten Orients), Munich, 1933, p. 168-171.

129 A. Moret, *Le Nil et la civilisation égyptienne*, Paris, 1926, p. 251, 261, 270-273, 288, 292, 302, 306-307. Even the 18th Dynasty was also defined as a “state socialism”:

“pessimistic literature” was considered the evidence of such a political revolution,¹³⁰ an opinion which had been disregarded only some years before by such eminent Egyptologists as A. H. Gardiner (editor, in 1909, of one of the most relevant texts invoked, *The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage*) and R. Weill.¹³¹

Unfortunately, the innovative paths Weber opened were not followed by other historians, and the modernist trend, based on analogies with the present, prevailed in the end. *Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum* was intended to become a true sociology of Antiquity, suitable for a thorough analysis of all the important structures of the social life in the ancient world. And the study of the agrarian structures of the ancient civilisations should benefit from a thoughtful use of comparisons with other historical periods, not just for the mere search of analogies but for underlining the differences. In this context, Weber tried to develop a methodology and a conceptual framework suitable for the analysis of economic systems distant in time and space. This implied a criticism of the unthinking use of modern economic categories when describing phenomena of the past, as well as a disapproval of assimilating steps of economic development with historical periods. In fact, Weber’s project would have updated the initial aims of the *Historische Schule*. But fast changes in social sciences were conspiring against it and precipitated the crisis of this school of economic thought. Social sciences became increasingly autonomous from the beginning of the 20th century, thus reinforcing the disciplinary reasoning. It was precisely then that sociology emerged as a clearly differentiated discipline and neo-classicism succeeded in dominating academic economic thought. Economists quickly abandoned

historical perspectives, which only survived in the margins of the rising sociology. As a result, Weber’s ideas were rejected by economist and historians alike and confined into the category of “sociology”, disdained as irrelevant by economists, historians and, especially, historians of Antiquity. Finally, the general consensus among historians of the ancient world about the modernity of the ancient economy led them to disregard the innovations occurring in social sciences.¹³²

In this context, Weber’s gradual oblivion and the growing influence of Rostovtzeff sealed the fate of any serious study of the pharaonic economy. Rostovtzeff accepted Meyer’s cyclical vision of history and thought that the economy was subject to general and universal laws, in such a way that the situations studied by the historians only differed in degree (“*the modern development ... differs from the ancient only in quantity and not in quality*”). Under these premises, he rejected both the theories of the economic stages developed by Marxism and the *Historische Schule* (especially by Karl Bücher) and the application of the concept of “*oikos economy*” to the ancient economy. In Rostovtzeff’s eyes, the right economic analysis of history consisted in the study, for different periods and political entities, of the weight of the state in the economy and of the expansion and contraction of the market.¹³³ Such an importance of the state could not but be welcomed by historians used seeing the “*Orient*” as the epitome of the all-powerful, bureaucratic state.

S. Dairaines, *Un socialisme d’État quinze siècles avant Jésus-Christ: L’Égypte économique sous la XVIII^e dynastie pharaonique*, Paris, 1934. The theme was rather popular in the historiography of the 1920s and 1930s: L. Baudin, *L’empire socialiste des Inka*, Paris, 1928.

130 A. Moret, *Le Nil et la civilisation égyptienne*, p. 256-268; Idem, “L’accession de la plèbe égyptienne aux droits religieux et politiques sous le Moyen Empire”, in *Recueil d’études égyptologiques dédiées à la mémoire de Jean-François Champollion*, Paris, 1922, p. 331-360; Idem, “Une révolution sociale en Égypte vers l’an 2000”, *Revue de Paris* (March-April 1926), 869-893.

131 R. Weill, *La fin du Moyen Empire égyptien. Étude sur les monuments et l’histoire de la période comprise entre la XII^e et la XVIII^e dynastie*, Paris, 1918, p. 22-37.

132 H. Bruhns, “L’histoire économique de l’Antiquité a-t-elle besoin de la théorie économique? Interrogations à propos de l’œuvre de M. I. Rostovtzeff”, *Mediterraneo antico* 6/2 (2003), 571-595, esp. 580-585, 594-595; Idem, “Max Weber: théorie économique et histoire de l’économie”, in H. Bruhns (ed.), *Histoire et économie politique en Allemagne de Gustav Schmoller à Max Weber. Nouvelles perspectives sur l’école historique de l’économie*, Paris, 2004, p. 183-209; Idem, “Mikhail I. Rostovtzeff et Max Weber: une rencontre manquée de l’histoire avec l’économie”, *Anabases* 2 (2005), 79-99.

133 A. Momigliano, “M. I. Rostovtzeff”, *The Cambridge Journal* 7 (1954), 334-346; J. Andraeu, “M. Rostovtzeff et le «capitalisme» antique vu de Russie”, *Pallas* 33 (1987), 7-17; Idem, “Introduction. La dernière des grandes synthèses historiques de Michel Ivanovi Rostovtzeff”, in M. I. Rostovtzeff, *Histoire économique et sociale du monde hellénistique*, Paris, 1989, p. i-xxix; Idem, “Introduction”, in M. I. Rostovtzeff, *Histoire économique et sociale de l’Empire romain*, Paris, 1988, p. i-lxxxiv; B. D. Shaw, “Under Russian eyes”, *Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (1992), 216-228. Cf. also the precedent note.

Ancient Egypt was crucial in Rostovtzeff's work, as the papyri revealed, in his opinion, the importance of the bureaucracy and of an all-encompassing state where the entire country was merely the *oikos* of the king, even after the Greek conquest and the Hellenic appearance of the Ptolemaic dynasty.¹³⁴ Meyer thus provided the intellectual setting which contributed to the convergence of Rostovtzeff's interpretation of the economy of ancient Egypt with that formerly elaborated by the Egyptologists. The prestige of Rostovtzeff consolidated the long accepted image of Egypt as a powerful state-run machinery ruled by an absolute sovereign.¹³⁵

A modernist interpretation of the Pharaonic economy, a cyclical conception of history and the increasing isolation of Egyptology from the social sciences, all contributed to strengthen the belief that ancient Egypt stood apart from the other civilisations of the past. This only confirmed the idea held by Egyptologists that the basic aspects of the country had remained unchanging for millennia and that, in this perspective, the study of its social or economic organisation should not deserve much attention. Only the discovery of new texts would introduce, at best, minor nuances in an otherwise firmly grounded narrative. Such circular reasoning abolished any dynamic perspective in the study of the Pharaonic civilisation and perpetuated the popular image of ancient Egypt as an immense repository of treasures (the only worthwhile object of archaeological attention), and of Egyptologists as the last romantic adventurers eager to find a new tomb, an unknown temple or a forgotten inscription. Exhibitions, mass-culture and occasional spectacular findings continue to fuel the myth of the land of the Pharaohs as an

escape from the routines and uncertainties of the present.

As Wengrow has recently stated, "in Hollywood films, novels and fringe literature on the origins of extinct civilizations, western societies are still confronting fears about their own origins which manifest themselves as possessive demons, vampires, or other supernatural beings occupying the spaces between bourgeois consciousness and the ancient (and sometimes modern) East. A common structural element within many of these narratives, from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to William Blatty's *The Exorcist*, is the invasion of the western body by pathological forces from a hierocratic, dynastic past [...] These stories [...] undoubtedly also express basic insecurities about the condition of modernity, and the integrity of 'the West'".¹³⁶ In the end, the subtle link between Stoker and Rostovtzeff can help understand the persistence in early Egyptology of many accepted ideas whose foundations have never been clearly discussed. It also provides some cultural clues which explain the traditional ascendancy of a history-of-art and *belles lettres* perspective in Egyptological studies, and the belief that pharaonic Egypt was a refuge of elevated culture and values, an appropriate example of a conservative social order and a kind of lost paradise. It is no wonder that the powerful fascination exerted by the myth of the eternal Egypt has contributed to neglect the study of the economy of ancient Egypt for decades.

134 Egypt played a decisive role in Rostovtzeff's work and was to mark his later influential studies about the economy of the Roman and Hellenistic periods: M. I. Rostovtzeff, "The foundations of social and economic life in Egypt in Hellenistic times", *JEA* 6 (1920), 161-178; Idem, *A Large Estate in Egypt in the Third Century B. C.: A Study in Economic History*, Madison, 1922.

135 J. Rowlandson, "Approaching the peasantry of Greco-Roman Egypt: from Rostovtzeff to rhetoric", in D. Jeffreys (ed.), *Views of Ancient Egypt since Napoleon Bonaparte: Imperialism, Colonialism and Modern Appropriations*, London, 2003, p. 147-152; D. Rathbone, "Ptolemaic to Roman Egypt: the death of the *dirigiste* state?", in E. Lo Cascio, D. W. Rathbone (ed.), *Production and Public Powers in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge Philological Society—Supplementary Volume, 26), Cambridge, 2000, p. 44-54.

136 D. Wengrow in D. Jeffreys (ed.), *Views of Ancient Egypt*, p. 193.