

Reform or Modernization ?

EGYPT UNDER MUHAMMED ALI

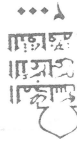
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Muhammad Ali and the Decline and Revival Thesis in Modern Egyptian History

by Kenneth M. Cuno

Taking up the theme of this seminar, “reform, modernization, or continuity,” this paper will discuss the issue of periodization. Its point of departure is the question of why the prevailing interpretation holds that there is a fundamental discontinuity between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In other words, why does “Ottoman” history end, and the “modern” history of Egypt begin, with the reign of Muhammad Ali? Merely to ask these questions is to suggest that the prevailing view of the Muhammad Ali period and the historical narrative of which that view is an integral part are not the only possible interpretation that one can arrive at when studying Egyptian history. The idea of Muhammad Ali as “the founder of modern Egypt” is not something that sprang spontaneously from the sources onto the pages of history books. Historical knowledge is a cultural artifact, in the sense that it is produced in particular circumstances and at specific moments. I think it is useful for us as historians to keep that in mind and, occasionally, to set aside our documents and raise questions about interpretative frameworks, such as this one, that we often tend to take for granted.

Periodization – the division of history into distinct periods – is an expression of a particular interpretative framework. When I began studying the Muhammad Ali period I was impressed by the sharp dichotomy that exists in the historical literature between the “Ottoman” and “modern” eras. This dichotomy was not fully established as the prevailing historical interpretation until the

monarchy period (1922-1952), even though its roots reach back much farther. In its modern form, the present conventional interpretation holds not only that the beginning of modern Egypt was an accomplishment of Muhammad Ali (and/or of Napoleon), but also that the modern revival occurred after a long period of decline under Ottoman rule. Hence, in the conventional interpretation, the thesis of Egypt's modern revival is closely related to another thesis, that of "Ottoman decline." According to the latter thesis, in Egypt and the rest of the Ottoman Empire the period from the mid-sixteenth century through the end of the eighteenth century was one of political anarchy, intellectual and cultural sterility, and economic and demographic decline.

The idea of Muhammad Ali as "the founder of modern Egypt" is usually juxtaposed against the dark image of Ottoman-era decline, and as such it goes far beyond an accounting of the Pasha's many real accomplishments and their impact. Rather, the Muhammad Ali period is portrayed as the antithesis of the "Ottoman" period: in place of political anarchy, Muhammad Ali established order; in place of intellectual and cultural sterility, Muhammad Ali initiated an age of enlightenment; and, in place of economic and demographic decline, Muhammad Ali put Egypt on the road to progress and growth.

During the past twenty-five years, however, this dichotomy between the "Ottoman" and "modern" periods in the conventional interpretation has been undermined. There has been a renaissance in studies of the "Ottoman period" – the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries – in Egypt, Bilad al-Sham and other parts of the Ottoman Empire that has made the Ottoman decline thesis untenable. Instead of seeing the sixteenth through eighteenth century period as an era of political anarchy, scholars such as Rifaat Ali Abou-El-Haj, Daniel

Crecelius, Leslie Peirce, and Jane Hathaway¹ have re-framed the political history of that period in terms of a structural transformation. The centralized rule of the "classical" era (mid-fifteenth through mid-sixteenth centuries) gave way to a much more decentralized "politics of households," in which elite households in the imperial center as well as in the provinces competed for resources and power. This work on political households is complementary to other studies, mainly of Bilad al-Sham, which highlight the role of the urban notables during the Ottoman period.² The politics of the "Ottoman" period now appears not to have been anarchic, but merely structurally different from the preceding period (mid-fifteenth through mid-sixteenth centuries) and the succeeding one (nineteenth and twentieth centuries).

The thesis of intellectual and cultural sterility is perhaps exemplified by David Ayalon's article, "The Historian al-Jabarti" (1962), in which he described al-Jabarti as a unique genius in an intellectual wasteland.³ Gamal al-Din al-Shayyal made advanced an early challenge to that viewpoint with his review of eighteenth-century intellectual activity. His argument that in the Islamic Middle East the eighteenth century was a period of intellectual revival anticipated the viewpoint propounded later by Peter Gran.⁴ In addition to falsifying the thesis of Ottoman-era intellectual and cultural stagnation, the trajectory of Shayyal's and Gran's studies has been toward connecting eighteenth-century intellectual and cultural activity with that of the nineteenth century. Their work, along with a growing number of studies in and editions of the manuscripts of Ottoman Egypt, has discredited the thesis of intellectual and cultural sterility. Although the main trends in nineteenth-century intellectual and cultural life were different from those of the Ottoman period,

difference is not the same thing as sterility.

The idea of a demographic decline in the Ottoman era has also been corrected, at least for Egypt, by Andre Raymond and Nelly Hanna. Egypt's population appears to have grown in the sixteenth century and to have fluctuated thereafter.⁵ There was a parallel expansion of population in sixteenth-century Anatolia, and we can at least pose the question of whether there were similar trends in the other provinces of the Empire – that is, whether the Ottoman side of the Mediterranean experienced the same or similar demographic rhythms as the European side. In Egypt, again, and working backward from late nineteenth-century data, Justin McCarthy and Daniel Panzac have argued convincingly that the Egyptian population circa 1800 was probably around 4 million, or in other words about twice the previously accepted figure, which was based on an estimate made during the French expedition.⁶

As for the question of economic decline, it is now accepted that the international trade of Egypt did not collapse after the Portuguese rounded the

Cape of Good Hope. Rather, there were a series of structural changes in this trade from the sixteenth century to the early nineteenth century.⁷ The local Egyptian economy seems to have expanded during the first century of Ottoman rule, and to have fluctuated thereafter, suffering a sharp setback only in the late eighteenth century. In *The Pasha's Peasants* I argue that during the first three centuries of Ottoman rule there were economic ups and downs, but no retrogression in economic structures. I disprove the accusation that the Mamluks and/or the Ottomans allowed the irrigation system to deteriorate through neglect, showing that the system was not neglected until the crisis of the late eighteenth century. I also emphasize the existence of sophisticated commercial structures and practices in the economy before 1800, which facilitated the rise of a more commercialized economy in the nineteenth century.⁸

As a consequence of this new scholarship it is much more difficult to draw a line circa 1800 as marking the beginning of "modern" history in Egypt, or a few decades later for the other Arab countries. From the perspective of "the politics of households," Muhammad Ali looks like a very successful head of a political household, and from the perspective of "the politics the notables," there appears to be much continuity in the local political leadership of Bilad al-Sham between the "Ottoman" and "modern" periods.⁹ The new work on Ottoman-era intellectual and cultural history also suggests a degree of continuity with the nineteenth century, and the new studies in Ottoman-era economic history indicate that the nineteenth century developments were based upon pre-existing structures. Thus, although certainly there were important qualitative changes in the nineteenth century,

it is no longer possible to regard the “modern” period, beginning with Muhammad Ali, as the antithesis of the “Ottoman” period.

The question that needs to be asked at this point is why, in spite of this new scholarship, does the old framework persist? What accounts for the durability of the thesis of Ottoman decline and revival, and the related idea of Muhammad Ali as “the founder of modern Egypt”?

Thanks to the work of Edward Said¹⁰ and others we are well aware of the ways in which the discourses of Orientalism, colonialism, and modernization have contributed to the decline-and-modernization thesis. However, these discourses are not the only source of the thesis, and, ironically, an exclusive emphasis on its “foreign” origins tends to reproduce the trope of an aggressively active West imposing its norms on a passive or static East. That trope, which denies any agency to actors in the East, is one of the hallmarks of the discourses of Orientalism, colonialism, and modernization. While not discounting the importance of those discourses, in this paper I want to sketch the outlines of the indigenous or “Eastern” contribution to the decline and revival thesis, specifically in the Egyptian context. My purpose is to demonstrate that this thesis was not imposed unilaterally by foreigners, but that, instead, the construction of the decline and revival thesis was a “joint venture” in which the Ottoman and Egyptian contribution was a vital element. Or, in other words, the decline and revival thesis and the idea of Muhammad Ali as “the founder of modern Egypt” were formed through a dialectic between Western and Eastern discourses.

In order to show this I will focus on three Ottoman and Egyptian contributions to these theses. First, the roots of the decline thesis can be found in Ottoman political writings of the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, which were the earliest in either the East or the West to assert that the Empire was experiencing a decline. Second, in the Ottoman Empire, including Egypt, the rhetoric of the *Nizam-i Jadid* and *Tanzimat* reformers emphasized the idea of a previous decline as a way of legitimating the reform agenda. Third, in the first half of the twentieth century, the view of Muhammad Ali as “the founder of modern Egypt” became the conventional one as a result of scholarship patronized and/or encouraged by King Fuad and his son Faruq, the great-grandson and great-great-grandson of Muhammad Ali, respectively.

Origin of the decline thesis.

Long before European intellectuals seized upon the idea of the decline and decadence of the Ottoman Empire, a group of Ottoman writers was insisting that the Empire had declined since its “golden age” in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. These writers produced a genre of political works known in Ottoman studies as the *nasihatname* literature. The *nasihatname* literature belonged to a well established tradition of writing on statecraft in Islamic history, including, for example, the famous *Siyasatname* written by the Saljuk vezir Nizam al-Mulk (d. 1092). However, in addition to addressing the practicalities of ruling, many of the Ottoman authors compared their own time unfavorably with the strength and prosperity of the the “classical” age. The old order had broken down, they alleged, causing the empire to decline.

Several generations of scholars accepted these writings as nothing more than objective descriptions of Ottoman decline, a tendency exemplified by Bernard Lewis in his article "Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline" (1962), which also gives a good synopsis of the views expressed in the *nasihatname* literature. Nowadays, a younger generation of Ottoman historians understands the *nasihatname* literature as polemic rather than objective description. These works created a *discourse* of decline, as a way of criticizing changes in the way the Empire functioned – changes such as the rise of "the politics of households," beginning in the mid-sixteenth century. Abou-El-Haj has argued that these writings need to be viewed as "political tracts that represent a struggle within the ruling elite,"¹² that is, between those who opposed change and those who accepted it. Although the "decline" of the Ottoman Empire was announced in these writings as early as the mid-sixteenth century, very little actually occurred that could be described as "decline" until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the Empire began to suffer permanent territorial losses.¹³ Moreover, what "declined" in the eighteenth century was the military effectiveness of the Empire vis-à-vis its European adversaries, and the political center's hold on the provinces.¹⁴ As Douglas Howard has written,

[The] theory of the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries rests primarily on the interpretations of contemporary Ottoman political writers; the idea was, in other words, first an Ottoman creation. It found ready acceptance among subsequent generations of Ottoman intellectuals and was repeated in Ottoman political literature of the next two centuries. Through

translation of this literature into western languages, the Ottoman intellectual analysis of the Ottoman decline became its accepted modern scholarly interpretation.¹⁵

Howard's main point is that the thesis of Ottoman decline was originally "an Ottoman creation." But here I want to suggest another important link between the decline thesis and the rhetoric of the nineteenth century *Nizam-i Jadid* and *Tanzimat* reforms.

The rhetoric of nineteenth century reform.

By the late eighteenth century the decline thesis was widely accepted in Ottoman intellectual circles. According to Lewis,

Ottoman statesmanship was still looking backward to the golden age in the past, and earnest reformers saw the only hope of salvation in a restoration of Islam and of the pure and ancient traditions of the house of Osman. In 1792, when Selim III asked a score of eminent Ottomans for their advice on how to run the Empire, there were many who still gave the same answer. There were some, however, who had found another way.¹⁶

Here, Lewis was drawing a distinction between traditionalists, who were "still looking backward to the golden age," and others, who would support the *Nizam-i Jadid*, a European-inspired reform. However, both camps agreed that a decline had occurred and that reform was needed. The decline thesis provided the proponents of the *Nizam* and later of the *Tanzimat* reforms with a justification for their agenda, and – just as important – with a means of discrediting their conservative opponents.

In the conventional modern interpretation these reforms are presented as innovative, but initially the reformers presented them as a restoration of the old order. For example, in the Imperial Rescript of the Rose Chamber, issued by Sultan Abdulmajid in 1839, the opening paragraphs invoke the decline thesis: they assert that "in the first days of the Ottoman monarchy, the glorious precepts of the Koran and the laws of the empire were always honored," and that this led to strength and prosperity. However, "in the last one hundred and fifty years ... [these precepts and laws were disregarded], and the former strength and prosperity have changed into weakness and poverty"¹⁷ The timing of the onset of decline in this version of events may be a reference to the Empire's first permanent losses, which occurred approximately one hundred and fifty *hijri* years earlier. In any event, one can see that at this stage the reform program was being presented as necessitated by decline, and as a restoration of that which had once made the empire great. In Egypt, Muhammad Ali employed a similar rhetorical strategy, for example, in the law of 1829 regulating agriculture, known as *La'ihat Zira'at al-Fallah*. This law was necessary, according to its own preamble, because of an alleged decline – in industrial skills, commodity production, and cultivation – that had occurred previously.¹⁸

By the middle decades of the nineteenth century there was a shift in the rhetoric of reform, with greater emphasis being placed on the idea of progress. The Imperial Rescript of 1856 spoke of "renew[ing] and enlarg[ing] still more the new institutions," and it linked those new institutions to the position the Ottoman Empire held "among civilized nations."¹⁹ In Egypt,

in a similar vein, the Pasha's decrees in the 1840s concerning the census invoked "progress and civilization" and "the attainment of the general good" as reasons for enumerating the population.²⁰ The timing of this shift in the rhetoric of reform, from an emphasis on decline and recovery to the attainment of progress and civilization, and the reasons for that, are beyond the bounds of this paper, though they deserve to be studied in detail. For now, suffice it to note that the rhetoric of nineteenth century reform carried a thesis of pre-nineteenth century decline, which apparently derived from the *nasihatname* literature.

In Egypt, although there was a shift in emphasis in the reform discourse from "decline and recovery" to "progress and civilization," the memory of decline was preserved because it served to legitimate the Muhammad Ali dynasty. In his speech from the throne opening Majlis Shura al-Nawwab in 1866, Khedive Ismail stated that when his grandfather Muhammad Ali became the governor of Egypt, "he found it without any traces of civilization, and he found its people deprived of security and comfort," and so he devoted himself "to making the people secure and to civilizing the country."²¹ Loyalist bureaucrat-intellectuals like Rifa'a Tahtawi and Ali Mubarak also supported the claim of the Muhammad Ali dynasty to have begun a new era of progressive change.²² This theme was carried over into the British occupation period, with the bureaucrat-intellectual Yacoub Artin inventing a history of progressive change in land tenure, initiated by Muhammad Ali and carried forward by his successors, the aim of which (or so Artin claimed) was to establish private landownership.²³

As for books on the history of modern Egypt published in Arabic in the late nineteenth century, if the writer were pro-khedivial there was a similar tendency was to highlight the role of the dynasty as a whole, and not just Muhammad Ali. In surveying bibliographies of Arabic books published in Egypt before 1900 I found only one in which the subject was Muhammad Ali himself: Muhammad Farid Bey, *Bahjat al-tawfiqiyya fi tarikh mu'assis al-'a'ila al-khidiwiyya* (Bulaq, 1893). The title describes Muhammad Ali only as the founder of the khedivial dynasty, not "the founder of modern Egypt," although the clear implication is that modern Egyptian history began with the advent of that dynasty.²⁴

Royal patronage in the writing of history.

While the roots of the decline and revival thesis can be located in the Ottoman *nasihatname* literature and the rhetoric of nineteenth century reform, and it was nurtured by Muhammad Ali's successors, the idea that the modern history of Egypt began with an awakening initiated by the Pasha did not become widely accepted in modern historiography until the twentieth century. This was largely due to the efforts of the monarchy, and especially King Fuad, to foster a national history befitting the newly independent state as well as legitimating their dynasty. In the nineteenth century, on the other hand, this idea was not universally accepted, and it had to compete with alternative narratives which either described the Pasha as a destroyer instead of a founder, or advanced other candidates as the real "founders" of modern Egypt.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, for example, the historian al-Jabarti failed to perceive Napoleon and Muhammad Ali as initiators of a new and better era. Instead, he tended to look back with nostalgia to the days of Ali Bey al-Kabir and Muhammad Bey Abu al-Dhahab.²⁵ Al-Jabarti's unfavorable view of Muhammad Ali was due at least in part to the Pasha's confiscation of *iltizams* and *waqfs*, from which al-Jabarti and others of his class had derived a comfortable income. In 1815, Muhammad Ali's Albanian troops revolted against his attempt to implement the *Nizam-i Jadid* by drilling them in the "French" manner. The Pasha barely escaped to the Citadel, whence he dispensed concessions to the troops, the ulama, and merchants in order to strengthen his position. Al-Jabarti grumbled that had the Pasha not been so politically skilled, "all" would have turned against him due to his confiscation of *iltizams* and *waqfs*.²⁶ And in yet another well-known passage in his history, al-Jabarti's description of the building of the Mahmudiyya canal emphasizes the burden placed on the peasants who were corvéed for this project, and alleges that they suffered high mortality.²⁷ In al-Jabarti's view, then, things had gone downhill since the time of Ali Bey al-Kabir and Muhammad Bey Abu al-Dhahab.

During his rule Muhammad Ali and Egypt were the subject of numerous French and English books, which is evidence of a lively interest in his reforms and conquests. The Pasha himself was concerned with his image in Europe and sought to present himself to Europeans as an enlightened reformer.²⁸ Yet although some writers admired him and praised his projects, others sought to portray him as a tyrant who was ruining the

country. Moreover, European interest in Muhammad Ali seems to have been mainly due to the strategic and economic importance of Egypt and the growing importance of the "Eastern Question" in international diplomacy during the nineteenth century. Once the Pasha had passed from the scene, European writers quickly turned their attention to his successors.

For example, during his short rule Said Pasha (1854-63) was extravagantly praised by a few writers who saw his reforms in the land law as a major turning point in Egypt's history. One described Said's reforms as having "the importance of a social revolution," and another described them as transforming the Egyptian people from "slaves ... into free citizens." It is conceivable that had he ruled longer, or had one of his direct descendants become the king in 1922, Said might have become "the founder of modern Egypt" instead of his father.

Yet another narrative of the history of modern Egypt was put forward by British writers during the occupation period. These writers – for obvious reasons – portrayed the British occupation as rescuing the country from disorder and bankruptcy.²¹ They downplayed the importance of Muhammad Ali's reforms and portrayed Khedive Ismail as an incompetent tyrant, in order to highlight the "enlightened" administration that they, the British, had brought to Egypt as the most important turning point in its history. Still other narratives of modern Egyptian history began to be advanced by nationalist writers during the occupation period. As Dr. Sayyid Asmawi points out in his contribution to this volume, the nationalists had differing views of Egypt's history and of the role of the khedivial dynasty in it, and not all of them were favorable toward the dynasty.

Perhaps the most famous criticism of the role of Muhammad Ali by an Egyptian was published by Muhammad Abduh in *al-Manar* in 1905. Abduh described Egypt before the rule of Muhammad Ali as having had a stable social and political order in which the religious elites played a leading and moderating role. The picture of pre-nineteenth century Egypt that Abduh sketched was not that of a society in decline and in need of revival, and, consistent with that picture, he described Muhammad Ali as a destroyer rather than a founder.³²

What spurred Abduh to pen his criticism of the Pasha was the avalanche of speeches and articles in praise of Muhammad Ali on the occasion of the centenary of his appointment as governor of Egypt in 1805. A thorough survey of the periodical press in this period is beyond the bounds of this paper, and Dr. Asmawi's contribution to this volume discusses in detail the debate in the press on Muhammad Ali during these centennial celebrations. Suffice it here to note that there were two celebrations, in 1902 and again in 1905, due to the divergence of the Islamic and Gregorian calendars. The idea of Muhammad Ali as "the founder of modern Egypt" – including the nickname itself – seems to have crystallized in the interval between them. For example, in a speech delivered in Alexandria on the evening of May 21, 1902, the nationalist leader Mustafa Kamil spoke of "the work of Muhammad Ali that revived the nation and advanced it," though he was only warming up the crowd before calling for a British evacuation.³³ On the same day *The Egyptian Gazette*, a mouthpiece for the British community in Egypt, opined that Muhammad Ali "rescued [Egypt] from anarchy" and that "he is as worthy of the title of father of his

country as any monarch in history.” However, the writer also insisted that the Pasha’s reforms died with him, and no trace of them remained by the time of the British occupation.³⁴ Hence the role of Britain as Egypt’s rescuer was maintained. Yet in contrast to that, during the 1905 celebrations the *Gazette*’s editors employed the now familiar nickname “the founder of modern Egypt” as if it were already a familiar one. Similarly, the Vice President of the Alexandria Municipality described the Pasha in a speech as “l’auteur de l’Egypte moderne.”³⁵

It is significant that the nickname “the founder of modern Egypt” was coined in the context of the official celebration of the centenary, which was organized by the Palace. On one hand, the assignment of the role of “the founder of modern Egypt” to Muhammad Ali was consistent with the dynasty’s rhetoric of reform and modernization. In this respect it may be regarded as a restatement of the historical narrative advanced, for example, in Khedive Ismail’s speech of 1866. On the other hand, the Palace now had to contend with the alternative historical theses put forth recently by the British and especially the anti-khedivial nationalists. The struggle to define Egypt’s past was part of the larger struggle between the Palace, the British, and the anti-khedivial nationalists over Egypt’s political future.³⁶ In this context the Palace appears to have exploited the opportunity of the 1902-1905 centennial to assign to the founder of the khedivial dynasty – and hence to the dynasty itself – a central place in the narrative of national history.

The struggle for Egypt and the contest over its past intensified after the First World War, and Muhammad Ali began to be named "the founder of modern Egypt" in book titles. Abd al-Halim Hilmi al-Misri's *Muhammad 'ali al-kabir munshi' misr al-hadith* appeared in 1919, and Ilyas Ayyubi's *Tarikh muhammad 'ali mu'assis misr al-haditha wa ra's al-'a'ila al-karima* appeared in 1922.³⁷ In the following year Ayyubi published a two-volume history of the era of Khedive Ismail (the grandson of Muhammad Ali and father of Fuad), which extended the narrative of progress under the auspices of the khedivial dynasty into the late nineteenth century and maintained a continuity between "the founder of modern Egypt" and the current monarch.

Indeed it was largely due to the efforts of his great-grandson, King Fuad, that Muhammad Ali's role as "the founder of modern Egypt" became firmly established in historiography. Fuad's role as a patron of intellectual activity resembles that of his father, though it has not received adequate attention from historians. While a prince he was the royal patron of the Egyptian University (now Cairo University), founded in 1908, and once on the throne he saw to the organization of a national archive in Abdin Palace. National archives had been organized for the purpose of historical research several decades earlier in western Europe and the U.S.A. Like a national library or

museum, a research archive had become one of the appurtenances of a modern state. Such an archive would facilitate as well as influence the writing of the history of the state – especially in Egypt, where the Abdin archive was the personal property of the King, who controlled its organization and access to it.³⁹

Additionally, King Fuad and (to a lesser extent) and his son Faruq patronized historical research and writing on a grand scale, the aim of which was to further develop a narrative of modern national history that was inseparable from that of their dynasty. Largely as a result of their efforts, some fifty scholarly books in French, English, and Italian dealing with Muhammad Ali and/or Egypt during his era were published between 1900 and 1950.⁴⁰ Many, though not all, were published in Egypt. Nearly three-quarters of those titles appeared in the 1930s, and the second-largest number appeared in the 1920s, clearly indicating the role of Fuad (r. 1917-1936) as a patron of historical scholarship. Many of these works are substantial collections of selected diplomatic documents from European archives, hundreds of pages in length, published by the Royal Geographical Society under the personal auspices of the King. One of the monographs of this period was by the British historian Henry Dodwell, entitled *The Founder of Modern Egypt: a Study of Muhammad Ali* (Cambridge, 1931). It was Dodwell

who popularized this nickname for Muhammad Ali in the Anglophone world.

During the same half-century, more than forty works were published in Arabic in Egypt on Muhammad Ali and/or Egypt during his era.⁴¹ Several of these titles were pamphlets or printed speeches of less than forty pages in length, including the text of Mustafa Kamil's 1902 speech, printed by the press of his newspaper, *al-Liwa'*. However, most were works of more than a hundred pages, and several were substantial scholarly studies like Ahmad 'Izzat 'Abd al-Karim's history of education under Muhammad Ali, and Ahmad Ahmad al-Hitta's history of agriculture. The numerical disparity in favor of European-language books seems to reflect three factors. First, history was established as a professional discipline in Egypt comparatively late, with the re-founding of the Egyptian University in 1925, and archival studies in Arabic began to appear only in the 1930s. Second, although there was a steady output of historical writing in Arabic throughout this period, the Palace was unable to control or influence all of it. A significant proportion of it was produced by men and women who were not Palace supporters, and hence on subjects other than the exploits of Muhammad Ali and his successors.⁴² Third, the large corpus of European-language works seems to have been aimed, at least in part, at influencing the construction of Egypt's historical narrative in the West.

In addition to books on Muhammad Ali and his era, numerous other books (not included in the above account) appeared in this period that dealt with various aspects of the modern history of Egypt. Nearly all of them begin the narrative of modern history with the French expedition and/or the rise of Muhammad Ali, and all emphasize the pivotal role of the Pasha. An illustrative example is *Coup d'Oeil sur la Chronologie de la nation Egyptienne*, by Joseph Cattaui Pasha, published in Cairo in 1931. The Cattaui (Qattawi) family were one of the most prominent Sephardic Jewish-Egyptian families of the early twentieth century, tracing their roots in Egypt to the eighth century. Among his many business and political activities, Joseph Cattaui was a founding director of Bank Misr in 1920. Cattaui divided the nation's history into several epochs, and, in keeping with the contemporary liberal nationalist construction of it, he began with the pre-dynastic period. He identified the period extending from the Persian conquest in late antiquity through Ottoman rule up to 1805 as an era of foreign conquest and rule, and in contrast to that, he labeled the era of Muhammad Ali and his dynasty as the period of "national renaissance" and "the national epoch."

The liberal nationalist perspective was quite similar to, but not exactly the same as the viewpoint found in contemporary studies by sympathetic Europeans. An

example of the latter is A.E. Crouchley's study of foreign investment and the public debt, commissioned by the Ministry of Finance and published by it in 1936. "Modern Egypt," Crouchley wrote in his introduction, "begins with Mohamad Ali." Yet whereas the liberal nationalists tended to attribute the pre-nineteenth century decline to foreign (especially Turkish) rule, in Crouchley's view the cause of Egypt's decline was its isolation from progressive developments in Europe, an isolation that Muhammad Ali ended.⁴⁵

During the monarchy period, also, a smaller though still significant number of books appeared on Muhammad Ali's son and grandson, Ibrahim and Ismail, the aim of which was to secure their place in history as well. The reigns of Abbas I and Said (1849-1863) were almost completely neglected. From any perspective, those years are a crucial period in Egypt's history, but Fuad and Faruq were direct descendants of Muhammad Ali, Ibrahim, and Ismail. The historical narrative promoted by the kings had no place for Abbas and Said, and partly as a consequence there is gap in our knowledge of their period that persists to this day.

Conclusion.

This paper highlights the Ottoman and Egyptian contribution to the decline and revival thesis and the related idea of Muhammad Ali as “the founder of modern Egypt” as a way of explaining why those theses are so persistent in narratives of Egyptian history. One may object to the forgoing on the ground that Muhammad Ali’s reforms did indeed lay the foundations of a modern nation-state. Or, alternatively, one might argue that regardless of whether the Pasha’s nickname is justified, the many qualitative changes that occurred in the nineteenth century do justify a sharp distinction between the “modern” and “Ottoman” periods. However, such objections would not address the main point of this paper, which is not proposing simply to construct a new narrative of history in opposition to the conventional one. Rather, the aim is to suggest that we as historians have no obligation to stay within the boundaries and categories of the conventional narrative, since important aspects of it were constructed originally in support of political agendas. The purpose, as I have tried to show, was to close the debate on Egyptian history rather to open it to further inquiry. Hence, to the extent that we accept those boundaries and categories uncritically, as if they were revealed scripture, our work will be inhibited.

Notes.

¹ Rifaat Ali Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Albany, 1991); Daniel Crecelius, *The Roots of Modern Egypt* (Minneapolis and Chicago, 1981); Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, (Oxford, 1993); Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdaglis* (Cambridge, 1997).

² Albert Hourani called attention to the role of the notables in his landmark article, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of the Notables," in *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East*, ed. William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (Chicago, 1968), 41-68. See also Abdel Karim Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus 1723-1783* (Beirut, 1966); Karl Barbir, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus, 1708-1755* (Princeton, 1980); and Philip Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus 1860-1920* (Cambridge, 1983).

³ David Ayalon, "The Historian al-Jabarti," in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. B. Lewis and P.M. Holt (London, 1962), 391-402.

⁴ See the review of eighteenth-century antecedents in Gamal al-Din al-Shayyal, *A History of Egyptian Historiography in the Nineteenth Century*, (Alexandria, 1962), and also the same author's *Muhadarat 'an al-haraka al-islahiyya wa marakiz al-thaqafa fi al-sharq al-islami al-hadith* (2 vols.; Cairo, 1958); and Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt 1760-1840* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979).

⁵ See Andre Raymond, *The Great Arab Cities in the 16th-18th Centuries* (New York, 1984); and Nelly Hanna, *An Urban History of Bulaq in the Mamluk and Ottoman Periods* (Cairo, 1983).

⁶ Justin McCarthy, "Nineteenth-Century Egyptian Population," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 12, 3 (October 1976), 1-39; Daniel Panzac, "The Population of Egypt in the Nineteenth Century," *Asian and African Studies*, 21 (1987), 11-32.

⁷ On this see, e.g., Andre Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle* (Damascus, 1974); and Nelly Hanna, *Making Big Money in 1600: the Life and Times of Isma'il Abu Taqiyya, Egyptian Merchant* (Syracuse, 1998).

⁸ Kenneth M. Cuno, *The Pasha's Peasants: Land, Society and Economy in Lower Egypt, 1740-1858* (Cambridge, 1992), 30-32, 48-63. Dina Khoury and Beshara Doumani have made similar observations with regard to Ottoman Iraq and Palestine. See Dina Rizk Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540-1834* (Cambridge, 1997); and Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1758* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995).

⁹ In *The Pasha's Peasants* I have also emphasized the persistence of rural notable families in Egypt, from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century.

¹⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

¹¹ *Islamic Studies*, 1 (1962), 71-87. See also Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford, 1968), and Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (2 vols.; Cambridge, 1976-1977), in which the "observations" of the *nasihatname* writers are rehashed as description and explanation of Ottoman decline. It should be noted that Lewis and Shaw were in conformity with the prevailing interpretation in Turkish-language historiography at the time that they wrote.

¹² Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State*, 23-24.

¹³ This new perspective informs Suraiya Faroqhi's section, "Crisis and Change, 1590-1699," in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, ed. Halil Inalcik and Donald Quataert (Cambridge, 1994), 411-636. See especially pp. 413-414.

¹⁴ The latter is often put in terms of the rise of the *a'yan* (Turkish, *ayan*).

¹⁵ Douglas A. Howard, "Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of 'Decline' of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Journal of Asian History*, 22, 1 (1988), p. 53.

¹⁶ Lewis, "Ottoman Observers," 83.

¹⁷ J.C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East* (2 vols.; New York: Van Nostrand, 1956), 1:113-114.

¹⁸ *La'ihat zira'at al-fallah wa tadbir ahkam al-siyasa bi-qasd al-najah* (Cairo, 1829), 2.

¹⁹ Hurewitz, *Diplomacy*, 1:150.

²⁰ Kenneth M. Cuno and Michael J. Reimer, "The Census Registers of Nineteenth-century Egypt: a New Source for Social Historians," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 24, 2 (1997), 213.

²¹ Text in Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi' *'Asr Ismail* (2d. edn.; 2 vols.; Cairo, 1948), 2:85.

²² Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1789-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1983), 73.

²³ Cuno, *The Pasha's Peasants*, 205-206.

²⁴ Ida A. Pratt, *Modern Egypt: A List of References to Material in the New York Public Library* (New York, 1929), 95. I also surveyed Ayda Ibrahim Nusayr (Aida Nosseir), *Al-Kutub al-'arabiyya allati mushirat fi misr fi al-qarn al-tasi' 'ashar* (Cairo, 1990).

²⁵ Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, *Aja'ib al-athar fi al-tarajim wa al-akhbar* (Bulaq, 1880), 2:191-92, 203, 381, 418-19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4:225, 228.

²⁷ Cuno, *The Pasha's Peasants*, 122.

²⁸ See the contribution in this volume by Dr. Ali Kurkhan. Khaled Fahmy describes the Pasha's presentation of himself to European visitors in *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His army and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge, 1997), 1-9.

²⁹ For an overview of this literature see Jacques Tagher, *Mohamed Ali jugé par les Européens de son temps* (Cairo, 1942).

³⁰ Paul Merruau, *L'Egypte contemporaine de Mehemet-Ali a Said Pasha. 1840-1857* (Paris, 1858), 45-55; Domenico Gatteschi, *Real Property: Mortgage and Wakf according to Ottoman Law* (London, 1884), 31-32.

³¹ Lord Cromer's book *Modern Egypt* (London, 1908) says it all.

³² Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tarikh al-ustadh al-imam* (3 vols.; Cairo, 1925), 2:382-89; also Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 159.

³³ Summary in *Al-Ahram*, 22 May 1902.

³⁴ "Mohamed Aly Centenary," *The Egyptian Gazette*, 21 May 1902. This essay was reprinted verbatim during the subsequent centennial celebration, on 13 May 1905. Some of the comments in it were plagiarized from Baron de Malortie, *Egypt: Native Rulers and Foreign Interference* (2d. ed.; London, 1883), 27-30, 65.

³⁵ "Mohamed Aly. Some personal Reminiscences by Sir Charles Murray K.C.B.," *The Egyptian Gazette*, 12 May 1905. Murray was one of the British consuls in Egypt during Muhammad Ali's rule. The nickname was used in the editorial introduction. Speech: "Mohamed Aly Centenary. Celebrations at Alexandria," *The Egyptian Gazette*, 14 May 1905.

³⁶ This is to simplify to some extent the picture of the contending forces.

³⁷ See Ayda Ibrahim Nusayr (Aida Nosseir), *Al-Kutub al-'arabiyya allati nushirat fi misr bayn 'amay 1900-1925* (Cairo, 1983), 331, 333.

³⁸ *Tarikh misr fi 'ahd al-khidiwi ismail basha min sanat 1863 ila sanat 1879* (Cairo, 1923); see Nusayr, *Al-Kutub al-'arabiyya allati nushirat fi misr bayn 'amay 1900-1925*, 331.

³⁹ More than a few traces of the original Abdin archive are present in the present-day national archives (Dar al-Watha'iq). Two examples will suffice here. First, the translations into Arabic of Ottoman Turkish documents that were done in the monarchy period are but summaries which tend to leave out information unflattering to the dynasty (personal communication from Khaled Fahmy). Second, the file of copies of articles from the official journal, *al-Waqa'i' al-Misriyya*, only contains articles from the reigns of Muhammad Ali and Ismail, the great-grandfather and father of Fuad. None of the other nineteenth-century khedives were his direct ancestors.

⁴⁰ My count is based upon Jacques Tagher, "Bibliographie Analytique et Critique des Publications Françaises et Anglaises relatives à l'Histoire du Règne de Mohammad Ali, *Cahiers d'Histoire Egyptienne*, sér. 2, 1 (1949), Numéro special à l'occasion du centenaire de la mort de Mohammed Ali (1849-1949), 128-235; supplemented by the catalog of the American University in Cairo library.

⁴¹ My count is based upon the following bibliographic sources: Pratt, *Modern Egypt*; Nusayr, *Al-Kutub al-'arabiyya allati nushirat fi misr bayn 'amay 1900-1925*; Nusayr, *Al-Kutub al-'arabiyya allati nushirat fi misr bayn 'amay 1926-1940* (Cairo, 1980); and Ahmad Muhammad Mansur et al., *Dalil al-matbu'at al-misriyya 1940-1956* (Cairo, 1975).

⁴² I do not mean to suggest that academic scholars such as Abd al-Karim and al-Hitta were propagandists for the Palace. However, at that time the world professional standard in academic history, to which they aspired, was to use the state as the frame of analysis, even anachronistically. Second, as recipients of advanced degrees in Egypt they undertook research in the Abdin archives. Third, since the Palace was not above interfering in academic politics, someone aiming at an academic career would think twice before writing something objectionable to the Palace. Non-academic and/or amateur writers of history were less constrained.

⁴³ Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998), 45.

⁴⁴ Table of contents, 433-447, and text, 347.

⁴⁵ A.E. Crouchley, *The investment of Foreign Capital in Egyptian Companies and Public Debt* (Cairo, 1936), 4-5. These themes were restated in his later work, *The Economic Development of Modern Egypt* (London, 1938).