Failure to Engage:  
The Breasted-Rockefeller Gift  
of a  
New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo  
(1926)  

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FAILURE TO ENGAGE: THE BREASTED-ROCKEFELLER GIFT OF A NEW EGYPTIAN MUSEUM AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE AT CAIRO (1926)

By

Azra Dawood

Submitted to the Department of Architecture on May 20th, 2010 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Architecture Studies

In 1926, the United States’ first Egyptologist James Henry Breasted and the philanthropist John D. Rockefeller Jr., proposed to build a New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute in Cairo. The Egyptian government ultimately rejected the proposal and the museum was never built as suggested. The project’s failure was attributed to “suspicious” or “irrational” nationalism and “Egyptian vanity.” The archives, however, demonstrate otherwise.

This thesis analyzes the Breasted-Rockefeller museum’s conception, trajectory and failure, using the team’s lengthy correspondence. The archives show that the project was an early example of U.S. cultural imperialism, disguised as a gift of “Science,” from the “Great Democracy of the West,” to an Egypt desirous of independence from British and French empires. Deploying the twin themes of post World War I “opportunity” (political) and “obligation” (civilizational, scientific, philanthropic) to demonstrate the imperial possibilities of the particular political and cultural moment in 1926, Breasted mobilized Rockefeller first and the U.S. State Department later, to pry open the political field in Egypt for U.S. entry through archaeology and appropriation of antiquity. The Breasted-Rockefeller team’s strategy was to create an Anglo-American alliance in the Near East, by beginning with the creation of a private-philanthropic corporation for the New Egyptian Museum, controlled by Western archaeologists, with token Egyptian representation. This ambitious and innovative approach to imperialism was spatially and architecturally revealed in the proposed museum’s design and in its location in Cairo.

That this project failed when it would succeed in later iterations elsewhere, is to be ascribed both to the lack of U.S. power against competing British and French imperialisms at this early stage, as well as to Egyptian nationalism, which identified the Breasted-Rockefeller proposal for the imperial project that it was, and which had begun to recognize Egyptian antiquity as a metaphor for nationalism.

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INTRODUCTION

View of Suggested New Egyptian Museum Buildings Seen From Across The Nile.
During the riots that preceded the 1952 Nasserist revolution in Egypt, the son of the United States’ Egyptologist James Henry Breasted wrote to the industrialist and philanthropist, John D. Rockefeller Jr.:

When the holocaust befell Cairo recently, I resisted the impulse to write you, to express my profound sense of gratitude that there was no Rockefeller museum there to be pillaged and destroyed.¹

Charles Breasted was referring to an unrealized proposal for the New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo. His father – James Breasted – masterminded the proposal and led the project between 1924 and 1926, and Rockefeller agreed to fund its construction, future upkeep, and endowment for the generous sum of $10 million. Rockefeller’s personal architect, William Welles Bosworth, proposed a museum complex with two grand and elegant neoclassical / neo-Pharaonic buildings designed in the Beaux-Arts tradition. The project’s design, its terms and conditions, and introductory letters from Rockefeller and Breasted were compiled in a proposal book,² which the Breasted-Rockefeller³ team presented to the Egyptian government in 1926. The new museum would replace the existing Cairo Museum, which Breasted described as

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³ Jeffrey Abt uses the term “Breasted-Rockefeller” to refer to the Egyptologist and the patron, in his articles on the museum. See, Jeffrey Abt, “Toward a Historian’s Laboratory: The Breasted-Rockefeller Museum Projects in Egypt, Palestine, and America,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* XXXIII (1996): 173-194. In my usage, the term refers to the entire team, which is comprised of: John D. Rockefeller Jr., James Henry Breasted, Raymond Fosdick, William Welles Bosworth, V. E. Macy, Martin Ryerson, Chauncey Belknap, Merzbach Bey (the team’s Egyptian lawyer), and Charles Breasted. The team’s principal players, however, are Rockefeller, Breasted, and Fosdick.
a generation behind in its architecture, arrangement, and scientific facilities. Key monuments and items from this museum (primarily those belonging to the Pharaonic era) would be housed in the new museum.

To the surprise of the team, the Egyptians subjected the proposal to a series of negotiations, refusing to approve it without some fundamental changes to its terms and conditions, which resulted in the team’s withdrawal of the offer. When, months later, the museum’s soon-to-be defunct Board of Trustees mailed copies of the original proposal book to “opinion leaders” throughout the world, they included a card, which read:

The Trustees take pleasure … in sending to you these suggestions of the spirit in which this project was conceived and the purposes which it was hoped would be carried out if the Egyptian Government had found it possible to cooperate.

The card oversimplified the reality, and was emblematic of the general U.S. view that the project’s failure was due to Egyptian intransigence: the Egyptian government had rejected its

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4 The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo, 12.

5 Jeffrey Abt uses the term “opinion leaders” in his articles on the museum. See, Jeffrey Abt, “Toward a Historian’s Laboratory: The Breasted-Rockefeller Museum Projects in Egypt, Palestine, and America,” Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt XXXIII (1996): 173-194. See also, Publisher to Raymond Fosdick (hereafter designated Fosdick), December 2, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence, Curtis, Fosdick and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, Oriental Institute Archives at the University of Chicago (hereafter designated OIA). Of the 5,000 opinion leaders, this particular letter features a dozen names, including the following: Professor Henry F. Lutz (University of California, Berkeley, California), Mr. Arthur C. Mace (Associate Curator, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City) and other museum directors and professors within the U.S. In later correspondences, Breasted discussed mailing (or having mailed) the books to political leaders in the Near East, and to museum directors and archaeologists in the West.

6 The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo (England: Oxford University Press, 1925), folder 0258A, box 025, series E, Record Group 02, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC. Emphasis in the quote is mine.
'own' terms and conditions and, in the process, derailed a generous gift to 'science.' This official (U.S.) version of the project's failure masked a complex, international network of political maneuverings, Western imperial ambitions, Orientalist assumptions, cultural attitudes, and emerging nationalism that sank the project.

My thesis aims to historically analyze the conception and failure of the New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo. The primary question — indeed the question — is of course, "Why was the museum proposed in the first place?" Answering this question will provide clues to the answer for the logical follow-up question, "Why did the project fail?" As this work will show, the proposal and its failure were both lodged in the political and cultural moment between the First and Second World Wars. By foregrounding this moment, it becomes clear that although the museum's conception was ostensibly motivated by science and cultural philanthropy, and although it was presented as a gift from "the Great Democracy of the West," the project was fueled in part by the Breasted-Rockefeller team's desire to pry open the political field in Egypt, which was dominated by the British and French empires and by Egyptian nationalists, and to allow the United States to partake of it. The museum, with its stately and majestic architecture, was to be the bait.

That the project is an example of U.S. imperialism is not a hypothesis on my part. It has emerged as such from the Breasted-Rockefeller archives. However, the private funding of the project complicates the claim, and I aim to understand the nature of U.S. imperialism in this instance, and its spatial and architectural manifestation. Chapter 1 lays out the theories of

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8 The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo, 14.
imperialism, which I use to understand the conception and trajectory of the project. In addition to providing a basic theoretical background for the thesis, Chapter 1 also provides a foundational background for the Breasted-Rockefeller project as derived from the archives, a structure for the rest of the thesis, and a status of the literature on the project.

My investigation of the project’s conception, trajectory, and fate, primarily spans the period between 1924 (when the project was conceived) and 1926 (when Breasted presented it to the Egyptian King). I argue that the project was an early example of U.S. imperialism in the Near East at a time of declining Old World Empires and rising nationalism. It is important to establish the context of these different imperial and national interests; therefore, I begin by looking back briefly at Napoleon’s 1798 Egyptian Expedition, which marked the beginning of European engagement with Egypt. I end my thesis by presenting three important post-failure projects that shed light on the Breasted-Rockefeller project: the team’s next collaboration in the Near East in Jerusalem, the design for the mausoleum of Egypt’s nationalist leader, and the fate of the original desired site for the Breasted-Rockefeller project.
Tympanum (designed by James Henry Breasted) above the entrance of the Oriental Institute building on the University of Chicago campus. It shows an Egyptian scribe representing the East, presenting a wall fragment from a temple to the personification of the West on the right. It demonstrates the Eastern origins of Western writing, according to the Institute’s website.
Source: The Oriental Institute website.
The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute’s conception and failure is well documented in the Oriental Institute Archives and the Rockefeller Archive Center. Using these archives, I have singled out two decisive letters, both authored by James Breasted, which provide a crucial framework for our understanding of the genesis and collapse of the project. The first letter is dated 1919, and it successfully launched the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago (the first major Breasted-Rockefeller collaboration). The second letter dated 1924 launched the proposal for the museum. Together, these letters reveal Breasted’s ambitions for the Near East and for the museum. The 1919 letter introduces Breasted’s notion of the United States’ political “opportunity”\(^1\) and civilizational “obligation” with regards to the Near East. These themes are picked up again in the 1924 letter, but of particular importance here is an understanding of the museum’s architecture and site as an embodiment of Breasted’s vision and as bait for the Egyptians. Both letters were addressed to prominent individuals within Rockefeller’s vast philanthropic network. Though the earlier (1919) letter pre-dates the proposal for the museum, in many ways it is the foundational letter for it, and for all subsequent Breasted-Rockefeller projects, and I will begin with it.

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**Launching the Institute: The 1919 Letter(s)**

On January 13, 1919, a few weeks after the departure of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson for the Paris Peace Conference, which marked the end of World War I, Breasted wrote to Dr.  

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\(^1\) Breasted’s concept of “opportunity” and “obligation” is explained and cited later in this chapter.
Wallace Buttrick, President of the Rockefeller-endowed General Education Board (GEB),\(^2\) of an unparalleled turn of events in the Near East:

As I realize that in these last few weeks since we last met in New York, the opportunity of the ages has come to us, - such an opportunity as no other generation has ever had or ever will have, - it thrills me beyond all expression. For the first time in history the birth-lands of religion and civilization lie open to unrestricted research and discovery. Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Assyria, and Babylonia have suddenly become ours.\(^3\)

The three-page letter was accompanied by a document titled, “Plan for the Organization of an Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago,” in which Breasted wrote:

The study of these lands is the birthright and the sacred legacy of all civilized peoples. Their delivery from the Turk brings to us an opportunity such as the world has never seen before and will never see again. Our Allies in Europe are financially too exhausted to take advantage of the great opportunity. This makes both the opportunity and the obligation all the greater for us in America.\(^4\) [Emphasis mine]

Buttrick responded with interest in Breasted’s vision, but he believed that the creation of such an institution was not within the GEB’s purview.\(^5\) Undeterred, the following month

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\(^2\) The General Education Board was a philanthropic foundation created by Rockefeller Jr.’s father, John D. Rockefeller, in 1902.

\(^3\) James Henry Breasted (hereafter designated Breasted) to Wallace Buttrick (hereafter designated Buttrick), January 13, 1919, folder 6851, box 659, sub-series 4, series 1, General Education Board Archives (hereafter designated GEB), Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (hereafter designated RAC).

\(^4\) “Plan for the Organization of an Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago,” January 13, 1919, folder 6851, box 659, sub-series 4, series 1, GEB, RAC.

\(^5\) Buttrick to Breasted, January 28, 1919, folder 6851, box 659, sub-series 4, series 1, GEB, RAC.

Buttrick suggested that the University of Chicago or some other university should directly undertake such a mission.
Breasted wrote directly to Rockefeller and included the “Plan” here as well.\textsuperscript{6} The letter to Rockefeller was shorter, but contained similar themes. It was, however, tailored for its recipient, whom Breasted suggested exhibited the same high moral and social values as were first found in the ancient civilizations. Together, I will treat these three documents – the letter to Buttrick, the letter to Rockefeller and the “Plan” – as the decisive 1919 letter(s) for the Oriental Institute.

Breasted’s understanding of the nature of the United States’ “opportunity” and “obligation” with respect to the Near East, and his subsequent appeal for the creation of the Oriental Institute is key to understanding the future museum project. He based his argument for the New Egyptian Museum on these same grounds. (An Egyptologist, by definition, is a scholar of ancient Egypt. Such a scholar’s active participation in modern-day political developments in Egypt may seem incongruent, unless we understand his goals).

Although the First World War was fought in modern times against modern rivals, Breasted celebrated the “delivery” of ancient lands from the Ottomans. He used his scholarship to demonstrate that these lands and their ancient civilizations were the origins of the ‘American civilization.’ To make the claim, he denied this heritage to the lands’ modern-day inhabitants, whom he described as ignorant and uninterested. Breasted’s dismissal of the modern-day inhabitants of the Near East, through scholarly means, demonstrates a discernable Orientalism.\textsuperscript{7} With combined Western victory over the “Turk”, the lands were finally under control of the civilized people of the West, who alone could protect and study their ancient civilizations. The

\textsuperscript{6} Breasted to John D. Rockefeller Jr. (hereafter designated Rockefeller), February 16, 1919, folder 812, box 112, series G, Record Group 2, The Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller (hereafter designated OMR), RAC.

financial incapacitation of the Europeans and the defeat of the Ottomans meant that the U.S. must – and finally could – step into the field of Near Eastern studies and, presumably, the Near East.

The 1919 letters were Breasted’s second appeal to Rockefeller’s philanthropic network for the creation of the Oriental Institute. His failure to engage the GEB shows that the Board did not share his originary view of the Near East, nor recognize the need for, or benefit of, U.S. involvement in this field, and hints at the obstacles to Breasted’s ambitions.

The obstacles, as Breasted perceived them, were many. Internationally, Breasted was competing with established European, and rising native, Egyptologists. To contend with them, Breasted required funding from U.S. patrons. On the home front, however, due to the field’s associations with purely philological pursuits and biblical archaeology, Near Eastern studies were perceived as an “oddity at the county fair” on the outer fringes of science, at a time of scientific enthusiasm in the United States. And within the humanities, Near Eastern studies were pushed aside by a strong classical bias. From 1895 (the beginning of Breasted’s career as an Egyptologist) to 1914 (the beginning of the First World War) Breasted struggled to raise funds, turning primarily to the Rockefeller network because of its reputation for supporting unexplored areas of study, and its association with the University of Chicago (where Breasted held a

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8 Charles Breasted, Pioneer to the Past: The Story of James Henry Breasted, Archaeologist, Told by His Son Charles Breasted (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2009), 96.

9 For example, in 1903, Breasted wrote to Frederick T. Gates (Rockefeller Sr.’s advisor) to secure a grant on behalf of the University of Chicago for archaeological field expeditions in the Near East. This grant – the Oriental Exploration Fund – resulted in the 1906-1907 Nubian and Egyptian Expedition. In 1907, Breasted outlined a scheme for more thorough documentation of ancient Egyptian monuments. He proposed a floating, archaeological research laboratory on the Nile, but Gates rejected the proposal arguing that a project of this scope should be undertaken by the Egyptian government itself, and not by an American enterprise. Egyptian archaeology was not yet considered an established science, worthy of such private philanthropic funding. Furthermore, the U.S. public and philanthropists...
professorship and where he was the Assistant Director of the Haskell Oriental Museum, which was associated with the Department of Semitic Languages). He met with limited success. Eventually, the outbreak of World War I in 1914 put an end to all further possibilities of field work in Egypt.

He used his years of “exile” from the Near East, to systematically attack the unfavorable perception of Near Eastern studies through a succession of academic and popular books on the field. Breasted’s books conveyed his scholarly view that the Near East – particularly ancient Egypt – was the origins of Western civilization and modern religion, preceding the Greco-Roman civilizations. He presented Near Eastern civilizations as the “keystone of the arch, with prehistoric man on one side and civilized Europe on the other,” and with Americans as the ultimate heirs of this civilization. As such, men like Rockefeller were duty-bound to ensure the protection, documentation and study of the ancient Near East. The books were hugely popular so that when the war ended, Breasted felt confident enough to turn

did not view the study of ancient Egyptian civilizations as fundamental or foundational to an understanding of Western civilization. See also, ———, Pioneer to the Past; the Story of James Henry Breasted, Archaeologist (New York.: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1943).

10 John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s father, Rockefeller Sr., founded the University of Chicago.


12 He wrote the following books (amongst others) during this time:

13 ———, The Oriental Institute (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1933), 11.

14 See, “Plan for the Organization of an Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago,” January 13, 1919, folder 6851, box 659, sub-series 4, series 1, GEB, RAC, 2.
once again to the Rockefeller philanthropic network with his vision for U.S. involvement in the Near East.

Breasted demonstrated the urgency of such an involvement. He wrote, “sources for the recovery of the whole [human] story lie thousands of miles away, scattered through the Near East and the museums of Europe.” With the opening up of the modern Near East to “enlightened exploitation” such as railroads, agriculture etc., the ancient cities faced destruction. He compared U.S. scientific and scholarly work against what he termed “alleged scientific excavators” (referring to European archaeologists) and “illicit native diggings.” In comparison to these native and European methods, U.S. methods would be precise, rational, and scientific. In order to protect and document the ancient ruins, he wrote, U.S. archaeologists and Orientalists needed time and funds. The imperially motivated British and French dominated the field, presenting themselves as responsible custodians of the ancient ruins and modern heirs to the ancient civilizations and, by extension, of the lands themselves. Just prior to the First World War, the Germans commanded the field, particularly in Mesopotamia, in the Ottoman Empire.

15 Breasted to Buttrick, January 13, 1919, folder 6851, box 659, sub-series 4, series 1, GEB, RAC.
16 “Plan for the Organization of an Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago,” January 13, 1919, folder 6851, box 659, sub-series 4, series 1, GEB, RAC.
17 Ibid. In this instance, Breasted is referring to Italian archaeologists and to items that mysteriously found their way to the Museum in Turin. Usually though, he attributes unscientific methods to French Egyptologists, with whom he had a combative relationship. (He had a higher opinion of German Egyptologists, as he himself had studied Egyptology in Germany).
18 Ibid.
By virtue of their ambitions, European archaeologists were very well funded. For the American archaeologist, the problems of time, distance and money loomed large. National organizations or government bodies that might fund this work did not exist. And as in Europe, there was no unified organization or institution where these records could be filed, archived, and properly studied.

Since Breasted knew that both the GEB and Rockefeller were interested in funding research and education in medical and scientific fields, he asserted that archaeology was a science, requiring scientific methods for the excavating, archiving, and studying of the remains of ancient civilizations. Comparing archaeology to an established science such as astronomy, Breasted wrote:

"The astronomer is sometimes required to visit distant regions in order to make his observations. This is constantly true of the Orientalist and ancient historian. To secure his materials, he must be granted the time and the funds to become a kind of permanent archaeological ambassador-at-large to the Near Orient."

To construct such an Orientalist, Breasted looked to the archaeologist, the Americanist, and the astronomer. He imagined a free-lance historian not tethered by university protocol, a man equipped with the tools of technology: the camera and the airplane. And a man assisted by a

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21 "Plan for the Organization of an Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago," January 13, 1919, folder 6851, box 659, sub-series 4, series 1, GEB, RAC. Giving an example of official European support for Near Eastern archaeology, Breasted wrote that the National Academy in France granted subventions to French savants to visit the Orient. (However, the records produced by these men were not organized in a single location: they were dispersed throughout France).

22 "Plan for the Organization of an Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago," January 13, 1919, Folder 6851, Box 659, Series 1, GEB, RAC.
team of specialists, fully equipped and organized around a scientific laboratory and archive. The Oriental Institute, in fact.

The argument worked in Breasted’s direct appeal to Rockefeller.\textsuperscript{23} The latter funded the creation of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago in 1919. Between the two World Wars the Institute dominated archaeological work in the Near East, surpassing European activities and other U.S. institutions such as the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Breasted organized the Institute as a research facility for Near Eastern studies, incorporating an existing home-based philology department and a new archaeological field operations arm.\textsuperscript{24} The Institute included the existing Haskell Oriental Museum, which housed a collection of Near Eastern artifacts.\textsuperscript{25}

Breasted’s idea of “opportunity” was two-fold. On the one hand, he wrote to Buttrick that it would be a great boost to the United States, if a U.S. institution could be the first to methodically study and archive the ancient records. He seemed to suggest a boost for U.S. archaeology. On the other hand, he presented a more political view of “opportunity,” and suggested that the creation of the Oriental Institute could politically benefit the United States.

The transformed political landscape at the end of the First World War crucially provided the Institute and its expeditions with access to the Near East for fieldwork. Though the United

\textsuperscript{23} Prior to this, however, the GEB had rejected Breasted’s request, resulting in the latter’s direct appeal to Rockefeller Jr.

\textsuperscript{24} See, James Henry Breasted, \textit{The Oriental Institute}. The University of Chicago Survey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1933).

\textsuperscript{25} Prior to the creation of the Oriental Institute, the Haskell Oriental Museum did not have enough funding for excavation work in the Near East. Most items in its collection were acquired from British excavation teams.
States was never really isolationist, it took the Spanish-American war of 1898 for the U.S. to see potential for imperial and political engagement with the larger world. Even so, until its involvement in the First World War, the U.S. focused primarily on its interests in North America, the Caribbean, and in the Pacific Ocean, and had little to no political involvement across the Atlantic in the Near East, Western Asia and Europe. But it was the United States’ participation in the First World War, and particularly Wilson’s formulation of the Fourteen Points, which signaled the United States’ emergence from political periphery and its engagement across the Atlantic, with Europe and the Near East.

The War resulted in the collapse and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire (finalized in 1920 under the Treaty of Sevres), with large parts of it falling under British and French control. The British and French struggled to hold onto these territories and to their empires in the wake of Arab nationalism and their own financial troubles. The Paris Peace Conference briefly resulted in German financial incapacitation. Meanwhile, the United States emerged as part of the “Big Four,” along with Great Britain, France and Italy. Although the U.S. remained wary of full engagement with the Near East, it had – through support for self-determination in the former Ottoman territories – built up a large reserve of goodwill with the Muslims, which its private interest groups could use to their advantage. In the eyes of the Muslims, the United States

26 See, George C. Herring, From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). However, there were some private U.S. interest groups operating in the Near East at the time, such as missionaries, early archaeological expeditions, small businesses, etc. See also, John A. DeNoyo, American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939 (Minneapolis,: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), 26.

27 The Fourteen Points was a speech delivered by Woodrow Wilson to Congress in January 1918. In this speech he outlined his vision for post war peace in Europe and talked about the idea of other nationalities under Turkish rule being granted “an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development.” See, Stephen Lucas and Martin J. Medhurst, Words of a Century: The Top 100 American Speeches, 1900-1999 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 124-28.
emerged as a ‘benevolent’ power. In the good graces of all involved in Europe and the Near East, it seemed to Breasted an opportune moment for U.S. archaeologists to intensify their activities in the ancient lands that had opened up. Breasted and his Oriental Institute’s dominance was established through this political opportunity.

The process suggests a fascinating and paradoxical beginning for imperialism: U.S. cultural imperialism (through archaeological dominance) would seem to be founded on goodwill generated by U.S. support for self-determination and democratic ideals in the Near East, even though this support was not offered with an imperial ambition in mind. This hints at a difference in the aims of the individuals and institutions within the U.S., such as between private interest groups and the government.

Breasted further strengthened the Oriental Institute’s position and future funding, by pointing out the side benefits of a research organization with a team on the ground. Such a team could alert U.S. museums and buyers about new items on the market, or, provide valuable information to the government and businesses about the state of affairs in the Near East. This, then, was the political (and perhaps economic) opportunity.

As an extension of the Institute’s operations, Breasted created satellite expedition houses throughout the Near East in which scholars and scientists could study their materials. The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo – had it succeeded – would have been the largest, and certainly the grandest, example of such a cultural “outpost.” The themes of opportunity and obligation, which I have just unraveled from Breasted’s 1919 letters, are also

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28 Breasted to Abraham Flexner, June 25th, 1926, folder 6851, box 659, series 1, GEB, RAC: “… entire Luxor plant [expedition house] is outpost of University of Chicago specifically designed to build up American science.”
evident in the 1924 letter: cultural philanthropy, archaeology as a science, U.S. supremacy in
science, appropriation of origins, and the political opportunity of the moment. In addition to
these themes, the 1924 letter introduces architecture and site as a crucial component of U.S. entry
into Near Eastern archaeology and the Near East.

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**Launching the Museum: The 1924 Letter**

On October 7th, 1924, Breasted telegrammed the following message to Rockefeller’s
trusted legal advisor, Raymond Fosdick:

> Your letter fundamentally important. You have discerned unparalleled
opportunity. Am writing.29

Breasted followed this telegram with a lengthy, passionate response, in which he
addressed Fosdick’s enquiry regarding the condition of the existing Cairo Museum in Egypt.30
George E. Vincent, the President of the Rockefeller Foundation, had visited Breasted earlier that
year in Cairo. Breasted showed Vincent around the Cairo Museum, pointing out its state of
disrepair.31 On his return from Cairo, Vincent briefed Fosdick, who then wrote to Breasted. The
latter was particularly encouraged that Fosdick – who said he was writing on behalf of “other

29 Breasted to Fosdick (Cablegram), October 7, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis,
Fosdick and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project, Breasted Papers (Proposed Gift of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 1925-
1926), Oriental Institute Archives at the University of Chicago (hereafter designated OIA).

30 Breasted to Fosdick (Letter), October 7, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis, Fosdick
and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project, Breasted Papers, OIA.

31 See, Jeffrey Abt, “Toward a Historian’s Laboratory: The Breasted-Rockefeller Museum Projects in Egypt,
sources [of money]," 32 and not the Rockefeller Foundation itself – had displayed "unprompted" 33 interest in this very pressing matter.

While this is seemingly true, we know from Breasted’s archives that he was a convincing and articulate champion on behalf of U.S. involvement in Near Eastern studies and archaeology. Very likely, he convinced Vincent of the need for repairs to the Cairo Museum. In his letter to Fosdick, he addressed the Cairo Museum’s state of disrepair, and then – completely unprompted himself – suggested that an altogether new museum should be built.

Breasted began his letter by establishing the Cairo Museum’s significance as the greatest Museum in the world. His declaration was based on more than just the sheer quantity of artifacts in the museum’s collection. It grew out of his scholarship and belief in ancient Egyptian civilization as the origin of the religious and moral values that he believed the West had inherited. Such a key civilization’s material legacy faced imminent danger, because of “official Egyptian indifference” to the collections. But it faced yet another danger. The Egyptian Antiquities Service that ran the museum was headed by a French Director-General, Pierre Lacau, with whom Breasted had a combative relationship. In his letter to Fosdick, Breasted lamented the French museum administration’s disinterest and financial inability to maintain and repair the Museum, the poor construction of the French-built museum, and, most egregiously, the

32 Fosdick to Breasted, October 2, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis, Fosdick and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project, Breasted Papers, OIA.

33 Breasted to Fosdick, October 7, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis, Fosdick and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project, Breasted Papers, OIA.
museum’s lack of scientific facilities for the study of Egyptian antiquity.\textsuperscript{34} Summing up the problem, Breasted wrote:

(1) The very survival of these collections themselves is in danger in such a building.
(2) They are so badly housed, and lighting provisions for working scientists are so totally lacking, that if the collections survive, it is impossible for Science to utilize them.

In short, such a heritage from the past is sheltered by no other building in the world, and at present it is neither safe nor accessible to scientists.\textsuperscript{35}

To remedy this situation, Breasted proposed that the United States provide “...a safe building, affording adequate facilities for the scientists of the civilized world who gather there every year.”

But Breasted was concerned with more than just practical and technical requirements. He was motivated by visions of U.S. domination in the field, and he presented the beginnings of an architectural and urban vision for the new museum that could convey this message. Breasted’s choice of site is particularly important and symbolic, hinting at a double-displacement. He proposed to locate the new museum close to the existing French-run Cairo Museum (which it would administratively displace), on the site of the “hideous” Kasr al-Nil barracks where the British military was then garrisoned. Of this land, Breasted believed the British did not have any legal right, except that of “long occupancy.”

\textsuperscript{34} He wrote that the collection faced physical danger from “tawdry” French construction, which had resulted in falling ceilings, flooded basements etc. The building was too cramped for its vast collection and left no space for such recent discoveries as the items from the tomb of Tutankhamun.

\textsuperscript{35} Breasted to Fosdick, October 7, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis, Fosdick and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project, Breasted Papers, OIA.
Using the idea of political “opportunity” from Breasted’s earlier 1919 letter, it would seem that the creation of the New Egyptian Museum and the subsequent ‘double displacement’ suggested by Breasted’s choice of site, hint at a purpose other than scientific care of Egyptian antiquity. Simply put, it suggests U.S. entry into Egyptian politics. The museum would facilitate this process.

Breasted had spent a considerable amount of time working and living in Egypt and had plenty of opportunity to observe the political situation in the country. Despite this, he seems to have perceived the physical displacement of a British Army garrison and the institutional displacement of a French-run museum as easy tasks. Furthermore, in his letter he fails to mention or account for any possible Egyptian resistance to the project. In 1926, Egypt was officially ruled by a constitutional monarchy, but the Egyptians did not have full and absolute control over their country. In fact, the British – who had invaded Egypt in 1882 – still held rights to four spheres of influence, which included military defense of, and presence in, Egypt. To complicate matters, as a result of the Anglo-French treaty in 1904, the French had been guaranteed control of the Egyptian Antiquities Service – although this treaty’s validity was now uncertain.36

The concepts of formal and informal empire, of cultural imperialism, of local collaborators and of nationalism and Orientalism, are crucial to our understanding of both British and French presence in Egypt, as well as the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s proposal, its failure, and the complicated imperial and nationalist maneuverings during the negotiations. The theories are outlined here, and tested with respect to the Breasted-Rockefeller project throughout the thesis.

36 Britain’s declaration of a constitutional monarchy in Egypt threw the Anglo-French Treaty – and French control of the EAS – into uncertainty. I discuss this further in the following chapters.
Theoretical Foundations

I begin with Orientalism, for which I use Edward Said’s three-part definition. Said describes Orientalism as “the Western approach to the Orient,” “the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice,” and “that collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line.” Certainly, the Western approach to, and bias towards, modern Egypt can be explained through all three definitions. However, a popular criticism of Said has been the lack of agency that he allows the Orient. As we shall see in the case of the Egyptian nation, they did have agency and were able to resist U.S. ambitions in this instance.

This brings us to the concept of ‘nation,’ for which I use Benedict Anderson’s definition. Anderson describes the nation as an “imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign,” but he is careful to differentiate between imaginative “invention” and outright “fabrication,” favoring the former. This definition explains the processes by which Egyptian nationalists defined an Egyptian nation; they united Coptic Christians and Muslims under the rubric of a common ancestry – ancient Egypt – to achieve this. But nations are also defined as reverse processes of imperialism, as I will show later in this section.

37 Said, Orientalism, 73.

Empire and imperialism are much harder concepts to define. Here, I introduce some theories that help shed light on the varieties of imperialisms and empires active in Egypt, in 1926.

In their seminal paper, "The Imperialism of Free Trade,"39 John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson introduced the concept of formal and informal empire. They argued that the old (classical) models of imperialism imagined physical occupation and annexation of territories by a metropolitan center as the only proof of an empire, and of the metropolitan center's imperial interest with respect to said country. But this model contradicted actual facts, leading Robinson and Gallagher to conclude that, "Refusals to annex are no proof of reluctance to control."40 Elaborating on this, using the example of the British Empire in the Victorian period, they argue that instead of sharp distinctions between imperialism and anti-imperialism, there was instead continuity in imperial policy. This policy was to secure British economic interests. If indirect means could secure Britain's interests in a country, then it would not physically annex that country. But where free trade could not flourish without direct intervention, Britain would in fact directly intervene. Robinson and Gallagher defined imperialism as "a sufficient political function of this process of integrating new regions into the expanding economy; its character is largely decided by the various and changing relationships between the political and economic elements of expansion in any particular region and time."41 Such an explanation allows us to see that although Egypt was no longer officially a British colony and was ostensibly a constitutional

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40 Ibid., 3
41 Ibid., 5-6.
monarchy in 1926, it was in fact part of Britain’s informal empire. The Breasted-Rockefeller team was aware of this, and devised a strategy for Anglo-American alliance, as I show in Chapter 3.

In 1970, Robinson elaborated on this theory in a further article, “Non-European foundations of European imperialism: sketch for a theory of collaboration,” which was written to respond to Euro-centric theories of imperialism. Robinson argued that the reasons for transition from informal to formal empire lay primarily in the periphery, specifically in the actions of “local collaborators.” He used the idea of collaborating elites to give agency to local elements, and explain how nations may eventually replace empires through a policy of non-collaboration. Robinson explains key characteristics of collaborating elites that are valuable to this thesis. Collaborators do not form an identifiable group, rather, they are shifting collections of political groups or parties. The perception of a certain group as collaborator depends on its effectiveness as a mediator between the empire and the colony. The collaborating elite have the difficult role of appeasing the empire while simultaneously reconciling its demands with local and proto-nationalist agitators. To do the latter, the empire must grant local collaborators some semblance of power and authority in the imperial equation. Faced with nationalist leaders such as Sa’d Zaghlul, Western powers in Egypt (including the Breasted-Rockefeller team), considered the King, the Prime Minister, and various Ministers in the Cabinet, as their collaborating elite. Although the notion of local collaborators and the idea of the periphery shaping the metropolitan center’s approach to imperialism are useful with respect to U.S. imperialism in Egypt (and to

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some extent British imperialism), the theory weakens with respect to the very beginnings of modern European engagement with Egypt, as I show with Napoleon’s Egyptian Expedition in Chapter 2.

In addition to Robinson and Gallagher, writings by George Steinmetz are illuminating with respect to the museum. In his article, “Imperialism or Colonialism?” Steinmetz writes of imperialism and empire. He defines empire as “… a relationship of political domination between a core state and one or more peripheries,” and describes four types of empires: classical land-based empires, modern land-based empires, colonial empires and imperialism (which he terms as the “control of far-flung areas without territorial annexation.”) With respect to U.S. interests in the Near East, in 1926, this last definition of empire – imperialism – is most suitable; the United States did not appear to have any ambitions of physical annexation in the Near East, in 1926. What it did seem to show, is a desire for archaeological “bases” throughout the Near East. And this we see clearly in Breasted’s idea of establishing expedition houses (offshoots or “outposts” of the Oriental Institute) in all major civilizational centers in the Near East. The museum, of course, was imagined as one such “outpost.”

What Steinmetz refers to as “imperialism,” Robinson and Gallagher would term, “informal empire.” His definition of colonialism corresponds to Robinson and Gallagher’s term,


44 Ibid., 153.

45 Ibid., 140.

46 Steinmetz includes a quote by Chalmers Johnson, “The developing American form of empire… is solely an empire of bases, not of territories, and these bases now encircle the earth.” (2004).
“formal” empire. Like Robinson and Gallagher, Steinmetz argues that colonialism and imperialism are continuous: where colonialism depends on “on the spot” decision making, imperialism takes a broader view of the situation, sometimes putting the two at odds with each other, within the same empire. (This may explain the different positions of the British Foreign Office in London and the British Army in Cairo, to the Breasted-Rockefeller project, as I show later in the thesis).

Most pertinent to this thesis, however, is Steinmetz’s further definition of imperialism as the “political ordering of space” vs. acquisition of territory. Of the strategies for politically ordering space, Steinmetz writes of cultural imperialism, in which the empire’s contribution to medicine, education, and science are more effective ways of establishing hegemony and ensuring compliance, as opposed to “bullying.” Finally, Steinmetz writes of the importance of imagined relations between past and present empires, whereby present empires model themselves in the image of past empires to establish their legitimacy. To illustrate this concept, Steinmetz describes how both Germany and the United States drew on the powerful symbolism of ancient Rome. In my thesis, I show how Breasted’s appropriation of the ancient Near East – specifically ancient Egypt – was used to establish both the U.S. right to be in these ancient lands and to create what Breasted termed, a “New Past” for a new emerging power.

Breasted also understood the use of cultural institutions in the “political ordering of space.” To Fosdick, he wrote of the benefits to be gained from the generous act of creating a

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museum. The excerpt below is one of the few from his correspondences in which he allows the “Orient” their ancient past:

... New World to the Old, - from the youngest of the great nations to the oldest, - apart from its peculiar fitness would by its very presence in the greatest city of Islam, form a moral lesson of tremendous power. It would go far toward healing the present unhappy breach between the Near East and the West; it would proclaim to the men of the Orient the sacredness of their past, which brought forth the great religions of the modern world; and it would demonstrate to them the unselfish zeal of the men of the West to preserve forever the priceless values which they find in our great common heritage from the Ancient Orient. 48

That this diplomatic, cultural project would be funded by a private source, leads to questions of the relationship between private philanthropy, cultural imperialism, and the government, and hints at the role of the United States’ private philanthropists in the creation of U.S. hegemony.

Are these drives for empire visible in architecture and site? In his 1924 letter, Breasted does not specify a particular architectural style, but he does address what the architecture (and site) of the museum must convey: permanence, solidity, and arrival.

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Thesis Structure

Four overarching themes thus appear across the 1919 letter(s) and the 1924 letter, which I use to structure my thesis: the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s imperial vision and its private character, its “civilizing mission,” the political deployment of architecture and site, and the use

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48 Breasted to Fosdick, October 7, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis, Fosdick and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project, Breasted Papers, OIA.
of science and ideology to achieve political goals. In Chapter 2, I trace the political and archaeological circumstances of Egypt in 1926, back to British and French engagement with the country through the long nineteenth century, beginning with Napoleon’s 1798 Egyptian Expedition. I describe why these rival empires were interested in Egypt, and how their rivalry played out in the realm of Egyptian archaeology. Understanding this larger imperial field helps to situate and interpret Breasted’s subsequent interest in controlling Egyptian archaeology, which I also describe in this chapter. Chapter 3 chronicles and analyzes the complete story of the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s failed negotiations with the British, French, and Egyptians over the New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute in Cairo: from the careful formulation of the team’s overall strategy in New York, to consultations with the State Department in Washington and the British Foreign Office in London, to political maneuverings in Cairo. The team’s ambitions were embodied in the design and site of the museum. Design and site were also used as a lure to convince the Egyptians to agree to the otherwise unfavorable terms and conditions of the gift, and Chapter 4 focuses on an architectural and spatial analysis of the museum complex. Chapter 5 concludes the main body of the thesis by analyzing the mechanism of cultural philanthropy in the project, and the relationship between scholar, philanthropist and the U.S. government. Something failed. What succeeded? The Epilogue will answer this question, and examine the afterlife of the project.
Status of Literature

The museum’s conception and failure has been interpreted and chronicled in two types of writings: earlier books written by men closely involved in formulating the proposal,49 and recent articles and books by scholars writing on cultural imperialism. The first category includes such books as Raymond Fosdick’s biography of John D. Rockefeller Jr., Charles Breasted’s biography of James Henry Breasted, and the memoirs of the Oriental Institute Egyptologist, John A. Wilson.50 These books present the proposal as an altruistic gift to Egypt and science, and its failure arising primarily from the pettiness of the Egyptian government, with hints of French and British interference. Wilson, for example, writes:

> We shall never know all of the forces of uncertainty, suspicious nationalism, and international jealousy that led to the withdrawal of this offer in the spring of 1926.⁵¹

The second category approaches the museum project as an example of cultural imperialism, rather than an altruistic project. This category includes (amongst other writings) two articles by Jeffrey Abt, and two chapters in a book by James F. Goode. Abt’s articles are titled, “The Breasted-Rockefeller Egyptian Museum Project: Philanthropy, Cultural Imperialism

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49 The earlier books were published no later than 1972.

Fosdick, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a Portrait*.

51 Wilson, *Thousands of Years; an Archaeologist's Search for Ancient Egypt*, 51.
and National Resistance,”52 and “Towards a Historian’s Laboratory: The Breasted-Rockefeller Museum Projects in Egypt, Palestine and America.”53 Goode’s book is titled, Negotiating for the Past.54

Abt examines the museum in the light of “…successful nationalist resistance to western cultural hegemony,”55 cultural philanthropy, Breasted’s ideological view of the ancient Near East and his Orientalism, and he ends by writing, “The seed of the project’s failure was contained within its very conception.”56 He perceives the museum’s design as bait for the Egyptians, but makes no mention of the importance of site and the negotiations over it, which I consider crucial.

Goode, drawing more widely from the archives, begins the story with Breasted’s role as a mediator between Howard Carter and the Egyptian government in the Tutankhamun controversy, and describes Breasted’s resulting contentious relationship with Pierre Lacau (the French Director-General of the EAS).57 He writes that Breasted was probably motivated by the new antiquities law which restricted acquisition of archaeological artifacts by Western museums, and was concerned by what he perceived as unscientific methods of native Egyptologists. Goode


55 Abt, “Toward a Historian’s Laboratory: The Breasted-Rockefeller Museum Projects in Egypt, Palestine, and America.”

56 Ibid.

57 See, Goode, Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919-1941.
gives more agency to the British and the French players and he mentions official US support for the museum.

My thesis also approaches the museum as a project of cultural imperialism, but it does not perceive the failure of the project only in terms of a unified nationalist Egyptian resistance against a homogeneous West. Rather, I argue that the project’s conception and failure reveal rivalries and shifting alliances within the Western bloc, within the Egyptian ruling elite, and across the Western powers and Egyptian elite. I show how the Breasted-Rockefeller team deployed Near Eastern archaeology – and the museum – as a means of establishing U.S. interests abroad. In the process, the team – led by Breasted – used both science and Egyptian antiquity to define an emerging U.S. power. I describe the ‘private’ aspect of U.S. imperialism.

Breasted contrasted the United States’ ‘rationality,’ ‘logic,’ and ‘democratic ideals,’ in varying degrees against the British, the French, and the Egyptians. I show how he used ancient Egypt as a metaphor for an emerging U.S. civilization, thereby directly confronting the Egyptians who looked to this past to define themselves as a nation. And I show how site and architecture embody these concepts and ambitions.
Chapter 2

BREASTED IN EGYPT

“The University of Chicago Egyptian Expedition measures the façade of the temple of Ramses II at Abu Simbel, February 1906. Breasted [the man in the white hat] sits atop the statue’s uraeus, his wife and son are near the base of the ladder.”

Historians consider the long nineteenth century, ending with the First World War, as the "European century" in the Near East: the United States’ rise as an imperial power in these lands began with the Second World War. The inter-war period in the Near East was marked by uncertain U.S. foreign policy, gradual weakening of the British and French empires, and the rise of Arab nationalism. The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo was conceived in this politically volatile period.

This chapter establishes the political and cultural circumstances in Egypt in 1926, which shaped the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s vision for the New Egyptian Museum and the team’s political strategy of achieving a favorable outcome for the project in the face of conflicting political interests in Egypt. The failure of this strategy was in turn a direct result of this same political and cultural moment. With the project, the Breasted-Rockefeller team sought to translate Arab goodwill towards the United States at the end of the First World War, into a political opportunity for the U.S. In turn, the vision of a larger political opportunity for the United States provided a professional and personal opening for James Henry Breasted, neatly dovetailing his professional ambitions with his imperial vision in the context of Egypt and the greater Near East. A fuller version of his story is central to this thesis: ultimately, he is the main protagonist of the project’s conception.

To understand Breasted’s motivations on behalf of the United States, the museum, and his own career, to comprehend John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s support, and to contextualize the conception and failure of the project, I begin with Great Britain and France’s rivalry in Egypt in

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the long nineteenth century. This rivalry demonstrates both the geo-political and the symbolic significance of Egypt for rising, competing Western empires. The British and French wished to outdo each other in their imperial conquests.\textsuperscript{2} Control of Egypt was crucial to this ambition, but its manifestation was very different. The British eventually colonized Egypt militarily and administratively, but the French turned it into their "archaeological protectorate."\textsuperscript{3} Archaeology became a contested field in Egypt and was intimately tied in with imperial ambitions. Eventually, the Egyptians themselves came to recognize the political power of Egyptian archaeology and began to contest the Europeans in this field, in their quest for independence. In this chapter, I chronicle the arrival of Britain and France in Egypt, and their political use of archaeology. I then describe the struggle over archaeology between Europeans and Egyptians during the nationalist period in Egypt; these struggles and aspirations peaked with the Tutankhamun controversy in 1922.

Meanwhile, Breasted was waging his own battles against European domination of the field and U.S. indifference to Near Eastern studies. In the second part of this chapter, I describe his calculated rise to power in Egyptian archaeology. In the process, I establish his professional and imperial ambitions. The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute was conceived in the wake of the Tutankhamun controversy and the creation of the Oriental Institute in

\textsuperscript{2} The French Revolution sparked a series of imperial conquests between the British and the French. The latter were motivated by their "mission civilisatrice." The British were less ideological at first; they were primarily concerned with their political and economic security. See also, Maya Jasanoff, \textit{Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850}, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 2005), 120.

\textsuperscript{3} Quoted in, Donald M. Reid, \textit{Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 175-76. Reid is quoting R. S. Poole, the founder of the Egyptian Exploration Fund. This quote is originally from Margaret Dowers, \textit{Flinders Petrie: A Life in Archaeology} (Madison, Wis., 1995), 312.
Chicago. The fiasco of the first and the success of the second shaped the museum’s conception. They also shaped Breasted’s appeal to Rockefeller. Breasted convinced Rockefeller to provide $10 million for the construction and upkeep of a museum and research institute in a field that the latter had at first shown little interest in, and in a country that he had never visited.4 This points to Breasted’s persuasive powers and the strength of his imperial vision. It also compels us to ask whether Rockefeller shared this vision or whether his motivations were purely altruistic. The fact that Breasted turned to Rockefeller instead of the U.S. government, demonstrates the power of U.S. foundations and philanthropists, and the unreliability and weakness of U.S. foreign policy in the Near East in the 1920s. The team eventually informed the U.S. State Department of the project, but dictated the Department’s level of engagement. What was the relationship and power balance between the scholar (visionary), the philanthropist, and the U.S. government? Where was the imperial drive ultimately located? Though Breasted seems to be the one with the imperial vision, Rockefeller and the U.S. State Department were not immune to such a vision themselves. I begin to address the question in this chapter and pick it up again in Chapter 5.

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European Engagement With Egypt

Although a constitutional monarchy ostensibly ruled Egypt at the time of the Breasted-Rockefeller proposal, a large British army was then garrisoned in Cairo in the Kasr al-Nil

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4 Rockefeller’s first visit to Egypt was in 1929 after the project failed. Breasted arranged this visit and took him to see the ancient sites of Egypt. When asked if he was there to restart the project, Rockefeller expressed surprise and stated that sightseeing was his only goal. But he did meet privately with the U.S. Minister to Cairo to discuss the project. What these discussions were, we do not know. See also, James F. Goode, Negotiating for the Past : Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919-1941, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 115. See also, Newspaper clipping, January 21, 1929, folder 259, box 25, RG 3, OMR, RAC.
barracks, which were located on the West edge of the city along the Nile (Fig. 1). British troops remained in Egypt in some capacity until 1956. The French-run Cairo Museum, which Breasted hoped to replace, was located adjacent to the barracks (Fig. 1). The Egyptian Antiquities Service (also called the Service des Antiquités and hereafter referred to as the EAS) was part of the Department of Public Works, and controlled the museum. But though the EAS was an Egyptian government department, a French Director-General, Pierre Lacau, presided over it. The French, in fact, founded the EAS in 1858 during the rule of Sa’id Pasha and controlled it until 1952. Also in 1926, the nationalists led by Sa’d Zaghlūl were fighting for complete independence from the British. On this political stage, with its complicated story line and multitude of characters, the Breasted-Rockefeller team entered with their project. The story of this bewildering tangle begins with Napoleon.

Napoleon’s 1798 Egyptian Expedition marked the beginning of modern European, and, subsequently, U.S. imperial interest in the country. Egypt had been part of important empires throughout history: the Persian, Ptolemaic, Roman and Islamic Caliphate empires followed the Pharaonic period. (Alexander the Great’s invasion and subsequent rule (332-323 BC) marked

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5 Lacau held the post from 1914-1936. He was preceded by the widely respected Gaston Maspero and succeeded by Étienne Drioton – the last Frenchman to hold the post.

6 Zaghlūl was the leader of the Wafd party and responsible for the nationalist movement of 1918-1919, which resulted in the creation of a constitutional monarchy. He was briefly Prime Minister in 1924. He died in 1927, in Cairo.

7 The Egypt that Breasted vested with human spirit and innovation, and which he called the birth-land of morals, justice and social values, was geographically well suited to be a part of major empires. The land’s strategic location turned it into a “bridgehead” between Africa and the Old World. See also, Ian Shaw, *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, New ed. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16. From a civilizational perspective, the land was also well suited as a stage for the “human career,” a term that Breasted frequently uses to refer to the rise of civilization from prehistoric barbarism to the high period of civilization as exemplified by ancient Egypt. The Nile created a fertile valley, and this allowed for the presence of man all the way back to the Paleolithic Period. This fact
the beginning of the Ptolemaic period in Egypt). In the middle of the 1st Century, local Egyptians converted to Christianity, resulting in the creation of the Coptic Christian community and the Coptic Church. In 639 AD, Arab armies conquered Egypt and introduced Islam. This multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and religiously diverse country, with its glorious past and geographically strategic location, caught the attention and imagination of Napoleon who, acting on a complex set of imperial motivations, invaded Egypt in 1798.9

The invasion marked a turning point in Anglo-French rivalry and in Egypt’s history. Napoleon’s invasion was not motivated by events at the periphery. It was the first “overt imperial conquest in modern history”10 and the “first Orientalist project.”11 The French occupation was motivated, in part, by geo-political considerations. The occupation threatened British trade routes to India.12 But Napoleon was also motivated by thoughts of grandeur and by notions of Western superiority.13 Egypt was also the birth-land of civilization and writing. Great empires and princes had conquered the land: taking control of Egypt was akin to making the ultimate claim to

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8 The Ottomans conquered Egypt and turned it into a province of the Ottoman Empire in 1517, but allowed the Mamluks to continue to rule. Mamluk rule was ended by Napoleon’s invasion and Muhammad ‘Ali’s dynasty.


11 Ibid.

12 In the future, in this same area, the Suez Canal would become an important short cut and trade route: safeguarding the security of the canal was the excuse for the British invasion of Egypt in 1882. Security concerns over the Canal also led to the Suez crisis of 1956.

13 Said, Orientalism, 79-81.
civilization, and to presenting oneself as the heir to past empires. By Steinmetz’s theory of the
significance of imagined relations between past and present empires, Egypt would be considered
an important notch in France’s imperial belt. The following extract from Jean-Baptiste-Joseph
Fourier’s preface to the Description de l’Egypte in 1809, demonstrates this:

Placed between Africa and Asia, and communicating easily with Europe, Egypt occupies the center of the ancient continent. This country presents only great memories; it is the homeland of the arts and conserves innumerable monuments; its principal temples and the palaces inhabited by its kings still exist... Homer, Lycurgus, Solon, Pythagoras, and Plato all went to Egypt to study the sciences, religion, and the laws. Alexander founded an opulent city there, which ... witnessed Pompey, Caesar, Mark Antony, and Augustus deciding between them the fate of Rome and that of the entire world. It is therefore proper for this country to attract the attention of illustrious princes who rule the destiny of nations.

No considerable power was ever amassed by any nation... that did not also turn that nation toward Egypt, which was regarded in some measure as its natural lot.  

Like Alexander, modern emperors and empires viewed Egypt as the land from which they could control the fate of the world. In light of the future attempted U.S. entry into Egypt (through the museum project), this would prove to be a prescient observation. Fourier’s view of Egypt as a land presenting “only great memories” points to the West’s selective vision with regards to Egypt’s full history: it was interested in only looking back to ancient Egypt, and in

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15 The Description de l’Egypte was compiled and published on Napoleon’s orders after France’s expulsion from Egypt (1809-1822).

16 Quoted in, Said, Orientalism, 84.
symbolically appropriating the ancient civilizations. To do so, Western powers chose to see modern-day Egyptian presence in the country as an unfortunate inconvenience.

French occupation also marked the beginning of Western scholarly interest in Egypt, as illustrated by the *Description de l’Egypte*, which was compiled and published under the orders of Napoleon. This scholarly interest was driven by a desire to control the “Other,” and to define France against Egypt.\(^\text{17}\)

In 1801, driven by strategic and imperial motivations, the British joined forces with the Ottomans to drive the French out of Egypt. In the power vacuum left behind, an Albanian soldier from the Ottoman army, Muhammad ‘Ali, became Viceroy of Egypt. The British military assured the Ottomans it would depart Egypt after liberating the province from the French. With the exception of one significant battle, it did so.\(^\text{18}\) For strategic reasons, Britain and France no longer directly occupied Egypt: further battles over an Ottoman province could trigger the Ottoman empire’s collapse – an outcome that both the British and French empires agreed was not in their interests yet.\(^\text{19}\) Instead, their rivalry with each other and their desire to control Egypt, found expression in a frenzied archaeological and collecting activity. In the words of the historian Maya Jasanoff, the two powers turned from their attempt to colonize Egypt towards an attempt to “collect” Egypt.\(^\text{20}\)

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\(^{17}\) Ibid., 79-81.


\(^{19}\) Ibid., 216.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.
Egypt’s Viceroy, Muhammad ‘Ali, facilitated this collecting activity when he embarked on a modernization campaign, which required European technical and financial assistance. To secure European assistance, Muhammad ‘Ali opened up Egypt to British and French archaeologists, allowing them to dig throughout the land and remove priceless Egyptian antiquities out of Egypt and into Europe, where they found their way into museum collections such as the ones in the British Museum and the Louvre. But by 1835, Muhammad ‘Ali was alarmed at the rate of flow of antiquities out of the country, and restricted this by trying to create a museum in Egypt itself, along the lines of existing collections in Europe:

It is also well-known that the Europeans have buildings for keeping antiquities; stones covered with paintings and inscriptions, and other similar objects are carefully conserved there and shown to the inhabitants of the country as well as to travelers…such establishments bring great renown to the countries which have them.

The Europeans interpreted this move as a deliberate attempt to “disrupt” their archaeological and collecting activities, rather than as a sign of either authentic interest in Egyptian antiquity or of Egypt’s recognition of Egyptian antiquity’s symbolic power, and nothing came of this decree. The next iteration was the Bulaq Museum created by the French Egyptologist and first Director-General of the Egyptian Antiquities Service, Auguste Mariette, in

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21 Reid, Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I, 55-56.

22 Ibid. In addition to European collections and to European Egyptian collections (such as the one at Musée Charles X), Muhammad ‘Ali may have been inspired by Greece’s Aigina National Museum created in 1829. He probably realized that he who controls the antiquity of Egypt, controls Egypt.

23 Ibid.
1858.

Although Mariette primarily targeted European tourists he also hoped to educate local Egyptians towards whom he had a paternal attitude and who he felt were not yet impressed by Pharaonic antiquity. The Bulaq Museum was an interlude to a more elaborate museum that Isma'il Pasha (Muhammad ‘Ali’s grandson, and Viceroy from 1863 to 1879) promised Mariette. Isma’il imagined a grand inclusive museum with separate buildings for Arab, Greek and Pharaonic Art – a “true scientific center of Egypt.”

Perhaps Isma’il conceived of this museum as part of his modernization scheme for Cairo, which had already resulted in urban changes, the construction of the Khedivial (Royal) Opera House, and the construction of bridges and palaces, all in preparation for the Suez Canal opening ceremonies in 1869, in which the Viceroy expected to entertain European monarchs and dignitaries. His plans for the museum, however, were derailed by Egypt’s bankruptcy and Britain’s subsequent invasion.

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24 Ibid., 99-100. Reid writes that the Louvre sent Auguste Mariette to Egypt in 1850, to find early Christian manuscripts. Failing this task, Mariette instead made an important archaeological discovery at Saqqara. Reid writes that the French, excited by the prospect of Mariette’s finds, made provisions for the export of items to the Louvre before Abbas Pasha (then Viceroy of Egypt) had agreed to the plan. In retaliation, and urged on by France’s British and Austrian rivals, Abbas stopped Mariette’s activities. The French consul general Arnaud Lemoine intervened; Mariette was allowed to send some objects back to the Louvre but all future archaeological findings had to stay in Egypt. Eventually, the French convinced Abbas’ successor, Said Pasha, to (re)found the Egyptian Antiquities Service and name Mariette, Director General. Mariette was given sweeping powers, which included corvée labor and exclusive excavation rights throughout the country. His successor, Maspero, would later say: “This was like taking possession of Egypt for the cause of science.” The antiquities that Mariette unearthed were housed in the Bulaq Museum, which Mariette founded.

25 Ibid., 106.

26 Ibid., 104. Isma’il also planned to house the Institut Egyptien in this complex. All information regarding Isma’il Pasha’s museum, has been synthesized from Reid’s book.
After Egypt became a British colony in 1882, archaeological societies from Britain and France revived the campaign for a new museum building.²⁷ In 1895, Lord Cromer (and others responsible for Egypt’s finances) decided that financially the time was right to move ahead with plans for a new museum. Accordingly, Egypt’s European community organized a design competition, which was juried by an all-European panel. The commission was awarded to the French architect Marcel Dourgnon, who drew up a neo-classical museum building in the Beaux-Arts tradition. After several delays caused by squabbling between the British (who were overseeing the finances) and the French, the new museum building finally opened to the public in 1902.²⁸

Although James Breasted was already active in Egyptology at this time, he and other U.S. Egyptologists were not as well recognized or long-established in the field as the Europeans – particularly the British, French, Germans, and Italians. Breasted was certainly the father of Egyptology in the United States and he was well respected by his professors in Germany (where he had studied Egyptology), but as the U.S. and Germany did not control Egypt, neither his national affiliation with the U.S., nor his scholarly affiliation with Germany carried much weight in Egypt. Instead, the British and the French made all decisions regarding the museum, its finances, and its design and administration, reflecting a political and archaeological period in

²⁷ Reid, Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I, 182.

²⁸ Ibid., 195. In between the transfer from Bulaq to the new museum (1889-1902), the collection was briefly housed at Isma’il’s palace in Giza.
Egypt dominated by these powers. Egyptians were completely excluded from these decisions as well, reflecting their peripheral status in their own country's archaeology and politics.

With Britain's 1882 invasion of Egypt, it was clear that in political and military matters Britain would reign supreme in the country. In exchange for French cooperation, however, the British officially recognized French authority in Egyptology and the EAS with the 1904 Anglo-French Treaty. British Viceroy to Egypt, Lord Cromer, went so far as to declare France "the mother of Egyptology." The French certainly believed this themselves. Napoleon's Egyptian Expedition uncovered the Rosetta Stone in 1799, a Frenchman, Jean-Francois Champollion, deciphered the hieroglyphics in 1822, and Frenchmen (Auguste Mariette with the help of Suez Canal engineer Ferdinand de Lessep) founded the EAS in 1858.

In its initial engagement with Egyptian antiquity, France was uninterested in the rights of modern Egypt. The idea of keeping antiquity in Egypt may have begun with Muhammad 'Ali's decree in 1835, but it only gathered force in 1858 with the founding of the EAS, eventually peaking in 1922 with the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. Until then (and often, even later) the French (and other Europeans) considered the removal of antiquity to Europe as part of good stewardship:

France, snatching an obelisk from the ever heightening mud of the Nile, or the savage ignorance of the Turks...earns a right to the thanks of the learned of Europe, to whom belong all the monuments of antiquity,

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because they alone know how to appreciate them. Antiquity is a garden that belongs by natural right to those who cultivate and harvest its fruits.  

(E. de Verninac Saint-Maur, 1835)

This quotation shows both a marked disdain for Egyptian ability to understand, appreciate, and safeguard Egyptian antiquity, and France’s unwavering belief in its right to claim this antiquity. It also shows France’s imperial and intellectual rivalry with Great Britain. As the French found themselves in a secondary position of political power in Egypt, behind the British, they turned once again to intellectual and cultural leadership.  

The French consul-general Cogordon, insisted on:

retaking here [at Cairo] the Egyptological terrain, the rightful place to which we are entitled by the French origin of this science, the work of Mariette, and the sacrifices France has always made for knowledge of Ancient Egypt, from the expedition of General Bonaparte to the creation of the Institut d’archéologie orientale du Caire.

French domination of Egyptology, however, was thrown into question as the balance of power tipped once again, this time in the inter-war period. At the beginning of the First World War in 1914, the British declared Egypt a Protectorate and imposed martial law. But by 1922 they had to declare a constitutional monarchy to appease nationalist sentiments, reserving their

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30 Quoted in, Reid, Whose Pharaohs? : Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I, 1. E. de Verninac Saint-Maur was a French naval captain.

31 See also, Jasanoff, Edge of Empire : Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850.

32 Donald M. Reid, “French Egyptology and the Architecture of Orientalism: deciphering the façade of Cairo’s Egyptian Museum,” in Franco-Arab encounters : studies in memory of David C. Gordon, ed. L. Carl Brown and Matthew S. Gordon (Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut, 1996), 54. The French dominated in other cultural areas as well. For example, French was the main language in the area until 1914.
right to only four spheres of control within Egypt.\footnote{The British reserved the right to defend Egypt against foreign aggression, to protect the Suez Canal, to protect foreign and minority interests, and to protect the Sudan.} Archaeology was not one of the four spheres: the British no longer had any official say in Egyptian antiquity. Furthermore, the creation of a constitutional monarchy put the 1904 Anglo-French treaty into question. Although the French were long entrenched in the EAS, their domination was no longer guaranteed; they now had to consider Egyptian sentiments in their management of Egyptian antiquities. In his book, \textit{Negotiating for the Past}, James Goode writes that nationalists, who came to power in early 1924, saw archaeology as a field that could be contested due to the absence of official British control over it.\footnote{Goode, \textit{Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919-1941}, 80-86.} Egyptians had come to see the Pharaonic past as their heritage. Writers, poets, and politicians wrote of finding Egyptian origins in this past. And non-Muslim Egyptians saw ancient Egypt as a ‘national’ symbol that could unite them with the Muslims. All of this coincided with Howard Carter’s discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922. Foreign archaeologists working in Egypt hoped to get a share of the findings for their museums. But for the Egyptians the discovery became a metaphor for nationalism.\footnote{Ibid., 83-84. Example: Muhammad Husayn Haykal. And the Egyptian poet Ahmad Shawqi who wrote, “...the pharaoh rising from the tomb only to be shocked by the lowly state of his country under foreign domination.”}

Carter discovered the tomb intact on November 4, 1922. News of the discovery swept through Egypt and the West. Carter’s sponsor, Lord Carnarvon, entered into an exclusive agreement with the \textit{London Times} for the story, and in the process upset the local press and the rest of the foreign press. To add to the situation, Lacau and the Egyptians believed that the
tomb’s contents belonged to Egypt. By most accounts Lacau was not pandering to Egyptian nationalists: he sincerely believed that Egypt should keep whatever it needed from any archaeological dig.\textsuperscript{36} His policies had upset most Western institutions and archaeologists, including his own countrymen.\textsuperscript{37} Carter, refusing to play by Lacau’s rules, shut down the tomb of his own accord. The government responded by taking it over, resulting in a lawsuit between Carter and the Egyptian government.

Signifying the complicated nature of Egyptian politics, the British authorities chose to remain in the background and apparently approached James Breasted instead, who was present for the tomb’s opening, to mediate in the case.\textsuperscript{38} But Breasted clearly sided with Carter, and in the course of these negotiations he made an enemy of Lacau.\textsuperscript{39}

Observing the pro-Egyptian attitude of Lacau, Breasted was concerned by the rising trend of local Egyptologists who could presumably threaten the standing of Western Egyptologists. He also believed that local Egyptologists were not qualified to care for Egyptian antiquity. His

\textsuperscript{36}See, Ibid., 67-97.

\textsuperscript{37}Lacau did have the support of some western archaeologists, such as George Reisner of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and Cecil M. Firth of the British Museum.

\textsuperscript{38}Goode, \textit{Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919-1941}, 88-89. Goode also writes that Lacau believed that archaeological finds should not be divided in half with their discoverers. Instead, the Egyptian Government should take whatever it considered necessary for its collection. Furthermore, antiquities should not become a part of private collections, and concessions were to be granted only to major museums. Goode writes, “He was anxious that antiquities go to established centers of Egyptology, where they would be studied, and not lost in such isolated outposts as Bucharest, Tokyo, or Sydney.” Goode also writes that though this policy would seem enlightened today, in 1922 it angered the western archaeologists, particularly Breasted. (The tomb was eventually reopened on January 13\textsuperscript{th}, 1925). See also, Breasted to Fosdick, October 30, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis, Fosdick and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project, Breasted Papers, Oriental Institute Archive (hereafter designated as OIA).

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., 89-90.
letters to colleagues are peppered with comments on the indifference and ignorance of the Egyptians to such an extent that it appears he could not under any circumstances believe that local Egyptologists could be qualified for this work. He wrote to his close friend and colleague, the astronomer and scientist George Ellery Hale, “... the result will be disastrous unless we can hold them off for another generation.” Breasted was also concerned with his own standing in the field. To add to the matter of European domination, he now had to contend with the Egyptians themselves. Breasted, on his own, could have no leverage: he did not have direct authority (unlike the British) or longstanding presence in the field (unlike the French). He realized that a collective Western effort was necessary, and that this must include the British and the French – the official and unofficial rulers of Egypt respectively. However, his vision for the New Egyptian Museum shows that he was clearly thinking of U.S. superiority in this relationship and in the general field.

George E. Vincent, the President of the Rockefeller Foundation, visited Egypt when Breasted was involved in the Tutankhamun case. Breasted showed Vincent around the French-run Cairo Museum, pointing out its state of disrepair. The tour ultimately led to the proposal for a new museum building and administrative body, which were Breasted’s way of asserting control over Egyptian antiquities and Egyptology. If antiquities could not leave Egypt, they would at least be housed in a U.S. museum, which he could control. Breasted’s role as mediator in the Tutankhamun case demonstrates his rising stature in the international field of Egyptology at the time. And his role in convincing Rockefeller Jr. to donate $10 million for the museum shows the

40 Ibid., 101.
importance and respect accorded to him within the United States. But it took him a long time to reach this point.

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**James Henry Breasted: A Brief Sketch**

Charles Breasted begins his father’s biography by describing him as “an intensely American scientist,”\(^1\) who achieved fame and respect that no one – least of all him – expected:

[His was a story] in the tradition of Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Howard Taylor Ricketts, William Rainey Harper, and a whole sturdy procession of American country boys who had wandered out of Main Street into the world.\(^2\)

This sentiment of unexpected, accidental success runs throughout Charles Breasted’s book. It begins with his recollection of Breasted’s reaction to the idea of publishing his life story. Breasted could not believe his was a story worth telling, but he eventually admitted that there could be some interest in “the long climb from the provincialism of a prairie village to the command of an archaeological ‘firing line’ stretching from the Black Sea to the Sudan.”\(^3\) This is a truer sentiment; it shows, perhaps unintentionally, Breasted’s connected vision of archaeology and imperialism, and hints at the difficulty of his “climb.” A study of his archives reveals that the rise was not accidental or unintentional; rather, Breasted was a meticulous, compelling, and

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\(^2\) Ibid., 3-4.

\(^3\) Quoted in, Ibid., 3.
convincing scholar and writer. At the same time he was politically ambitious and savvy, and
could play the part of a politician while maintaining his identity as an archaeologist.

The story of his personal life and struggles is irresistible in itself, but his professional
obstacles, his strategy for overcoming them, and his imperial ambition are the key to his (mostly)
successful career, of which the plan for, and conception of, the Breasted-Rockefeller museum
was a major aspect. Though the obstacles were significant, Breasted had a strong belief and faith
in his method and abilities and in the potential and skill of U.S. Egyptologists and institutions in
general. He wrote:

I began to see that it is not so much the comprehensiveness of a man’s 
learning, as his rational and careful method, which will bring reliable 
results, and I am very sure I have such a method.44

Breasted’s claim to logic, rationality, and precision, was designed to counter the
advantages of European and native competitors. Europeans, funded by their governments, had
years of experience in the field. But Breasted believed he could claim superior, accurate
scholarship, through the use of scientific methods. Science and rationality gave him the upper
hand with respect to local Egyptologists as well.

A “rational” approach supported his belief that the study of ancient Egypt was the United
States’ birthright and duty. The ‘American civilization’ was heir to ancient Egypt. Egypt had
invented early technology, writing, religion, law, morals, and social justice; all inventions and

44 Ibid., 48.
disciplines that Breasted asserted had re-emerged in the United States.45 This ideological standpoint and positivist view shaped the conception of the New Egyptian Museum and Breasted’s approach to the larger field of Near Eastern studies.

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Before Breasted became an Egyptologist, he was a minister-in-training, and a Hebraist.46 Through a process of self-realization he decided to join the ministry.47 But Breasted’s mastery of Hebrew had the unexpected consequence of revealing to him mistranslations in the scriptures, and this in turn worried him about his “intellectual receptivity to the ministry which lay imminently beyond.” 48 His faith remained strong, but he did abandon his training as a minister and instead became a scholar of Hebrew and Oriental languages at Yale, under William Rainey Harper – a Hebraist and future President of the University of Chicago.

During Breasted’s days at Yale, the U.S. capitalist John Rockefeller Sr. created and endowed the University of Chicago. Rockefeller recruited Harper as the first President of this nascent institution. Breasted, meanwhile, was considering a career in Egyptology, and Harper promised him a position at the new university if he were to enter the field. Accordingly, Breasted

45 Breasted to Rockefeller, February 16, 1919, folder 812, box 112, series G, Record Group 2, OMR, RAC.

46 Breasted, Pioneer to the Past: The Story of James Henry Breasted, Archaeologist, Told by His Son Charles Breasted, 18-20. Breasted was born on August 27, 1865 in Chicago, Illinois (to Charles and Harriet Breasted) but grew up in Downer’s Grove. The Illinois native showed an early inclination towards science (he had ambitions in chemistry and botany) and became a pharmacist at age twenty-one. He renounced this career for one in the ministry.

47 Ibid., 14-17. To this end, in 1887, he was admitted to the Congregational Institute (Chicago Theological Seminary, and wrote, “And though it has cost me more than in my best moments I ever imagined I could renounce, yet by God’s help, I am now where I can say, ‘I would rather be a useful man than rich man!’ and I am happier, far happier than ever I would have been, since I am accounted to ‘spread His banner upon the mountain tops.’”

48 Ibid., 18.
went to Germany (like many other U.S. academics and scholars at the time), where he pursued a doctorate in Egyptology at the University of Berlin, under the premier Egyptologist, Adolf Erman.

On Erman’s recommendation, the Royal Prussian Academy hired Breasted to compile the first comprehensive Egyptian dictionary, and the latter went to Egypt for the first time in 1894.49 On this journey Breasted formed his impressions of the political and archaeological situation in the country, and the role of the British, French, and ‘confirmed’ his impressions of the natives in both respects. These opinions remained essentially unchanged and would affect the conception of the New Egyptian Museum. Breasted believed the British were doing admirable work in Egypt, helping it to recover from “some two thousand years of depredation, persecution, enslavement and warfare.”50 The British had delivered the ‘fellahin’ (Egypt’s peasant class) from the “infinitely cruel, dissolute, shambling sovereignty of Egypt’s foreign overlords.”51 Charles Breasted writes that for James it was, “a fascinating time to be in Egypt and to watch the passing of an era.”52 But though Breasted admired British political administration, he felt they neglected the archaeological situation in Egypt. The EAS met once a year to dole out excavation sites. The

49 Ibid., 52.

50 Ibid., 60. Unless specified, these quotations are Charles’ description and impression of Breasted’s feelings and opinions. However, I argue that they can be a reliable measure of how Breasted felt. Father and son were very close and often traveled and worked together. Furthermore, most of the biography was written with the help of James Breasted.

51 Ibid., 61. By “foreign overlords,” Breasted is referring to Mohammad ‘Ali’s Albanian dynasty.

52 Ibid., 61.
best sites went to the Egyptians, whereas the least promising ones were given to the Europeans. Breasted blamed this state of affairs on the French who he believed had usurped the EAS, on the British who as was their “custom” had neglected archaeology in their conquered lands, and even on an “unsavory” German individual who then controlled the Cairo Museum, Emil Brugsch. As for the Egyptians, Breasted believed they haphazardly dug through the country and were interested only in profit. Charles makes an interesting observation about Breasted’s perception of Egypt and Egyptians:

James had been so long submerged in Egyptian history that he felt almost as if in some previous incarnation he had lived among the scenes he was now beholding. From a thousand Egyptian inscriptions and Arabic texts he had pictured the clamorous actuality of oriental life with its extremes of drabness and beauty, disease and hardiness, its stenches and filth, its color and unconscious grace, its immemorial din of barking dogs, braying donkeys, wailing children, imploring beggars, chaffering merchants, pedlars calling their wares, muezzin chanting the call to prayer, fellahin singing to the rhythm of creaking well sweeps scooping Nile water into thirsting fields.

During this first trip to Egypt, Breasted confirmed all of his pre-formed impressions regarding Egypt, Egyptians, and very likely, Egyptian archaeologists.

The trip revealed to Breasted the lack of scientific precision in Egyptology. In Germany he had become familiar with the methods and work of French Egyptologists and considered their

53 If this is true, it already demonstrates the effects of a proto-nationalist movement in 1894.

54 Breasted, Pioneer to the Past : The Story of James Henry Breasted, Archaeologist, Told by His Son Charles Breasted, 76.

55 Ibid., 61.
scholarship, "slipshod." He was surprised that even eminent French Egyptologists such as Gaston Maspero (the Director-General of the EAS at the time and someone with whom Breasted developed a good working relationship) would be similarly "inaccurate" and unfree of scientific errors. Charles writes that a sense of his scientific mission apparently dawned on Breasted during this trip: his life’s work would be to gather and reconstruct the story of human progress and civilization in Egypt, for the first time in history.

Here then, is the stuff that Breasted’s ambitions were made of. His first visit to Egypt defined his professional and imperial goals and strategy. Science, logic and rationality could result in superiority over deeply entrenched scholars and allow an opening for U.S. archaeologists. The United States had the duty and birthright to study these lands. Breasted’s dismissive view of the natives, of the former “foreign overlords,” and of French control of the EAS, convinced him of the duty of U.S. institutions to take the lead in archaeological work in Egypt. And, although he admired the administrative work the British were doing in Egypt, he believed that their neglect of Egyptology had allowed the French and the Egyptians to wreck Egyptian archaeology. The time seemed right for U.S. entry in the field, but Breasted was aware of his own marginal status. He lacked financial backing. His work in Egypt was at the behest of the Germans. And he was aware of European domination in the field:

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56 Ibid., 83.
57 Ibid., 83.
58 Ibid., 78.
[He was] hypersensitized by the realization that he was a lone young American Egyptologist pitted against the rather self-superior complacency of Old World scholarship. With a sense of elation he set about copying and translating the historical inscriptions, which Erman had designated in the Cairo Museum. 59

Though the obstacles worried him, they clearly also inspired him and gave him a sense of his own pioneering role in the field.

Back in the United States, the U.S. public and scientific community’s disregard for Egyptology deflated some of this tenacious enthusiasm. If Egyptology was filled with challengers in Egypt and Europe, in the United States it had yet to be recognized as a worthy pursuit. 60 At the University of Chicago, it was temporarily given a backseat:

Amid the hurly-burly and travail of a great university’s birth Egyptology was a supernumerary item of antiquarian bric-a-brac to be laid aside until the rest of the house was in order. 61

Dismayed by this indifference, and beset with financial concerns, Breasted took to the lecture circuits to educate the public about Near Eastern studies and to supplement his income. Finally, in 1899, he left the United States again for a two-year stint in Germany, the “land of his

59 Ibid., 65.

60 At this time, there were few U.S. institutions active in the field: The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and Boston Museum of Fine Arts are two examples.

61 Breasted, Pioneer to the Past: The Story of James Henry Breasted, Archaeologist, Told by His Son Charles Breasted, 93. President Harper was also administrative head of the Department of Semitic Languages, which had few books, no original monuments, and no dedicated building. The latter was remedied by a generous donation from an Elizabeth Haskell, which resulted in the creation of the Haskell Oriental Museum in 1894. The building housed a museum, the Departments of Comparative Religion and Semitic Languages, and the University’s Baptist Divinity School. Breasted was made Associate Director of the museum, but the museum only had a minor collection.
scientific salvation," to copy inscriptions in European museums for the Royal Academy in Berlin. When he returned to the U.S. in 1901, he made the first of a series of appeals – some successful, others less so – to philanthropists and foundations, such as the Rockefellers Sr. and Jr., and the Rockefeller-endowed foundation, the General Education Board. The 1919 foundational letter, and the themes I have already distilled from it, resulted in the creation of the Oriental Institute.

Science, rationality, and logic – the tools that Breasted used to rise above European and native archaeologists – also helped transform U.S. perception of Near Eastern archaeology in the early twentieth century from merely a curiosity to a scientific field with scientific techniques of research and documentation, such as stratigraphy and photography. By redefining Near Eastern studies as a scientific field, Breasted attracted the Rockefeller philanthropic network, due to its interest in scientific work. In his book, American Genesis, Thomas Hughes writes that more than a democratic nation, the United States was “the modern technological nation.” He terms the century from 1870 to 1970 as the “American Genesis,” describing it as a time of

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62 Ibid., 102.

63 For example, between 1907 and 1948, the Rockefeller Foundation funded George Hale, (Breasted’s friend) an astronomer partially based at the University of Chicago, to build a series of telescopes and observatories in California that were the first to measure the size of the galaxy and the solar system’s position within it. Hale was the foreign secretary of the National Academy of Sciences, which was created during the Civil War to advise the government in its military efforts. He nominated Breasted to the NAS, making him the first archaeologist on the Academy. Breasted gained recognition as a legitimate scientist through association with Hale, and promoted archaeology by comparing its methods and techniques with astronomy – an established science. The archives show that Breasted and Hale corresponded regularly and took a keen interest in each other’s work. See, Raymond B. Fosdick, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a Portrait, [1st ed. (New York,: Harper, 1956). See also Chapter 1 of this thesis.


65 Ibid.
technological achievement and invention in the U.S., when processes of acquiring, archiving, and studying information were celebrated. Cognizant of this enthrallment with science, technology, and rationality in the U.S., Breasted had positioned himself as a ‘New Orientalist,’ a man of science.

As American astronomers used scientific technology to look to the skies to understand the place of the Earth in the galaxy, Breasted used scientific technology and looked to the Near East to construct the story of the modern American. Particularly interesting is his use of photography to construct the idea of superior U.S. scientific archaeology and responsible custodianship (Fig. 2). These themes appear in stereographs produced for Breasted’s popular guidebook, *Egypt through the stereoscope.*

(Fig. 3-4) The guidebook used stereographs to transport those Americans who could not afford to travel, to the ancient sites. Breasted used the three-dimensionality of landscapes, monuments, and natives, achieved through stereoscopy to present the captured scenes as absolutely true reproductions – as good as being in Egypt and seeing for oneself. In the accompanying text, he writes about the people in Egypt that one would find on an actual trip:

> Egypt still survives with a people of the same mental characteristics and the same physical peculiarities as we find in those subjects of the Pharaohs who built the pyramids.

> They have changed their language once and their religion twice, but they are still Egyptians as of old, pursuing the same arts, following the same occupations, holding the same superstitions ... which the student of the

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monuments finds among their ancestors five thousand years ago.\textsuperscript{67}

Reminiscent of his earlier pre-conceived impressions of Egyptians, Breasted here demonstrates an unchanging people, their unchanging life and, significantly, their unchanging technology in the face of modern U.S. technology: a kind of technological Orientalism.

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Rationality and science did many things for Breasted. They gave him the upper hand in Egyptian archaeology. They attracted Rockefeller. They ‘proved’ that the ancient Egyptian civilization was the forerunner to the ‘American civilization.’ Emphasis on rationality and science, allowed Breasted to present the New Egyptian Museum proposal to the Egyptians as a gift to science, and the building as a “Temple to Science.”\textsuperscript{68} Indeed, Breasted ‘rationally’ and ‘logically’ conceived of the entire plan for the museum, and the strategy he would adopt for its successful outcome. The failure was blamed on Egyptian irrationality. Chapter 3 examines the strategy and presents the complete negotiations over the museum.

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\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 17. (Emphasis mine)

\textsuperscript{68} See, \textit{The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo} (England, 1925).
YOUR MAJESTY:

The present transition period in the national life of Egypt has necessarily created many new responsibilities which are to be met by the Egyptian people for the first time. Among these there is perhaps none which has excited wider interest and sympathy among the other peoples of the world than the responsibility to Egypt's wonderful heritage from the past,—a heritage of noble monuments which have in recent years attracted increasing numbers of deeply interested teachers. These scholars from all the world find in the Nile Valley the common cultural ancestry of us all, and returning to their native homes, they carry back a vivid feeling of kinship with all other civilized peoples. The value and significance of Egypt's wonderful past have made the land of the Nile, therefore, a common center of interest and international good will.

Because of my profound interest in this matter I would venture to make a gift of one million dollars to be primarily devoted: first, to the erection of a new and more commodious building for the Cairo Museum and an additional building for archaeological research; and second, to the maintenance of these buildings and collections, with special reference to their educational value and their usefulness as a great treasury of materials for scientific research.

In presenting this gift to the Egyptian people and to their King, I venture to hope that the progress of cooperation which it would permit may prove acceptable to Your Majesty and to the Egyptian Government. May I call the attention of Your Majesty to the accompanying plans and drawings and to the papers, particularly the indenture of trust, more fully setting forth the project and the proposed gift?

I have the honor to remain, Your Majesty, with expressions of all good will and profound respect.

Very faithfully yours,

(Signed)

J. D. Rockefeller

THE NEW EGYPTIAN MUSEUM AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE AT CAIRO

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THE PROPOSED NEW EGYPTIAN MUSEUM AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE AT CAIRO A SKETCH BY JAMES HENRY BREASTED

Views of the Proposal Book (Publicity Brochure)
Source: The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo (England, 1925).
The correspondence of the Breasted-Rockefeller team at the Oriental Institute Archives and the Rockefeller Archive Center shows us how the team perceived the political and archaeological state of affairs in Egypt in 1926, and how it systematically planned to negotiate them. I use the evidence to chronicle and analyze the team’s strategy to gain approval for the museum project, thereby maintaining foreign (Western) control of Egyptian antiquities, while allowing for the first time U.S. Egyptologists and institutions, such as the Oriental Institute, to directly steer the course of Egyptian archaeology. When the project was finally launched, it immediately encountered a series of failures and setbacks that revealed flaws in its overall conception, in the team’s strategy, and in their understanding of the situation. First, the team entered into negotiations with the British for evacuation of the existing barracks, in place of which they wished to build their new museum. Despite a promising beginning, the negotiations failed and the Americans had to switch to an alternate site. In the process they sacrificed what they believed to be their “trump card” \(^1\) – the symbolic displacement of the British. When the project was finally presented to the Egyptians, they subjected it to a round of negotiations surprising the Americans who were expecting gratitude and immediate acceptance. During the negotiations, Breasted and his son, Charles, released a press statement announcing the proposed gift. Although the announcement was met with nearly resounding approval in the local and

\(^1\) William Welles Bosworth (hereafter designated Bosworth) to Breasted, August 4, 1926, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: B, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA. Bosworth wrote to Breasted describing a meeting with Lord Balfour in England, after Rockefeller withdrew the offer, where Bosworth said, “I reminded him that we could not adequately reply to many of the criticisms that were being made about the way the matter was presented to the Egyptians without sufficient introduction because, as he so well knew, we had had to sacrifice our trump card in the barrack situation, and that our loyalty to the British forbad [sic] our making any mention whatever of this fact…”
foreign press, it reportedly angered the French Director-General, who – much like the Egyptian government itself – had no prior knowledge of the project and had not been consulted in its conception. In addition, he had been left entirely out of the proceedings and negotiations that followed the project’s presentation to the Egyptian King and Prime Minister. A second round of negotiations resulted in the Egyptians asking for further concessions, which the Breasted-Rockefeller team was not willing to grant. Instead, after assessing the situation the team concluded that Egyptian approval was unlikely and withdrew their offer, thereby ending the project. A few months after the project’s failure, the Egyptian government and the Breasted-Rockefeller team tried to re-engage with each other, but despite a few tentative attempts, they failed.

As with Egyptology, Breasted believed in a rational, scientific approach to politics. He had carefully studied the overall political situation and believed he understood it. The team’s strategy – guided in large part by Breasted – was based on this understanding. Breasted believed he ‘knew’ the Egyptian mind. He believed it could be led down a desired path by gratifying Egyptian vanity. He believed he was on excellent terms with the British army and could convince them to evacuate their only barracks in Cairo. As for the French, Breasted’s personal rivalry with Pierre Lacau (and indeed, rivalry with other French Director-Generals in the Near East) had combined with his disdain for the ‘unscientific’ methods of French scholars. As it turns out, Breasted had underestimated and misunderstood all three political players in Egypt, particularly the Egyptians. He had also underestimated the shifting political alliances between
the three, and the divisions within each side. Throughout this Chapter, I will demonstrate how
the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s carefully conceived strategy unraveled.

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Presentation to the King

Breasted and his son, Charles, sailed for England in the fall of 1925 to check on the
progress of the proposal book (publicity brochures) and for further meetings with the British
before proceeding on to Egypt, where they met up with Chauncey Belknap (a partner in the law
firm representing Rockefeller Jr.: Curtis, Fosdick and Belknap) who had traveled separately from
New York. Breasted, Charles, and Belknap were the men on the ground, representing the rest of
the Breasted-Rockefeller team in New York.

On January 4th, 1926, James Breasted, accompanied by the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, J.
Morton Howell, presented the proposal for the New Egyptian Museum & Research Institute at
Cairo to King Fua’d I. The proposal was in the form of a beautifully illustrated leather-bound
book and had four parts to it:

- Letter to His Majesty King Fuad The First From James Henry Breasted.
- Letter to His Majesty King Fuad The First From John D. Rockefeller Jr.
- The Proposed New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo: A
  Sketch by James Henry Breasted.
- Sixteen plates: Frontispiece and Illustrations.

2 Formality dictated that the U.S. foreign minister / ambassador to Egypt officially introduce Breasted to the King. Breasted and Howell actually did not have good relations, and the former would have probably preferred to handle the meeting without Howell. Breasted at one point tried to remove Howell from his post. He felt that Howell was not sympathetic to the needs of U.S. Egyptologists working in Egypt. Also, Howell was not told of the project until just before the audience with the King. See also, James F. Goode, Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919-1941, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 105.

3 The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo (England, 1925).
An Indenture of Trust and an Agreement drawn up by Rockefeller’s lawyers in New York, accompanied the book. 4 If the Egyptian Government approved the proposal, it would be expected to sign off on the Agreement.

In a calculated move, Breasted chose to begin the book with a black and white photograph of King Fuad I in full regalia, followed by open letters from both himself and Rockefeller, and then by fifteen beautifully illustrated perspectives and plans of the museum and research institute. The book was meant to flatter and impress the King, but the Breasted-Rockefeller team also had a larger audience in mind: the book was designed to double as a publicity brochure announcing the American gift to archaeologists, museum directors, and

4 I am unable to locate the original Indenture of Trust and Agreement at the RAC. However, I did find the revised Indenture of Trust as well as several significant letters between the team, which allowed me to reconstruct the original Indenture and Agreement. An explanation of this process follows: The original Indenture and Agreement are extensively discussed in internal correspondence throughout the project. The revised Indenture and Agreement were also carefully analyzed in official documents by both the Egyptian government and the Breasted-Rockefeller team, by referring back to the original. Both the Egyptian government’s analysis and the team’s analysis of the revised Indenture and Agreement are at the RAC, and they correspond with each other on the details. Using these analyses and the actual revised Indenture and Agreement (also at the RAC), it is possible to reconstruct the terms and conditions of the original Indenture and Agreement. The following documents provide us with the information regarding the original Indenture and Agreement:

1. “[Egyptian] Government Communiqué on the Rockefeller Gift to Egypt: (Translated from the French original, appearing in L’Esprit, a Cairo daily, of May 1, 1926),” May, 1926, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG 3, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller (hereafter designated OMR), RAC. Charles Watson at the American University of Cairo sent this report to Rockefeller for his records.

2. “Egyptian Museum Negotiations: 1925-1926. Report by Chauncey Belknap,” Received March 10, 1926, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG 3, OMR, RAC. Belknap sent this advance report to Rockefeller and Fosdick, as he was heading back to New York for the purpose of revising the original Agreement and Indenture based on the Egyptian government’s demands.


4. “[Revised] Indenture,” March 10, 1926, folder 260, box 25, series 2E, RG 3, OMR, RAC.

5. Chauncey Belknap (hereafter designated Belknap) to Breasted, March 10, 1926, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA. Belknap sent this letter to Breasted to explain the revised Indenture and Agreement. He noted the changes item-by-item that had been made to the document, based on the Egyptian government’s demands. He also noted that Rockefeller and Fosdick had modified these demands and inserted some new stipulations: the revised Indenture and Agreement did not correspond exactly with the Egyptian government’s demands.
politicians in the Near East, Europe, and the United States. The team included a card in each book, which read, "With compliments of His Majesty King Fuad the First of Egypt," presumably to indulge the King's 'vanity.' When the book was published the team was certain of the King's approval, and in its presumption, it ordered 5000 copies, of which amount 200 were definitely printed prior to Breasted's audience with the monarch.

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**Indenture of Trust and Agreement**

With the exception of a 'gentle' reference to the transfer of Egyptian antiquity to an international corporation, the legal details of the project were not contained in the book. They were in the Indenture of Trust and the Agreement, and are outlined below. The heavy-handedness of the team's approach to the control of Egyptian antiquity is immediately apparent.

The two parties named in the Agreement were the Council of Ministers (the Egyptian Cabinet, headed by the Prime Minister) and the Board of Trustees for the Museum: James Henry Breasted (Chair), V. Everit Macy, and Raymond B. Fosdick. The Indenture of Trust (called Exhibit A) was between the Donor (John D. Rockefeller Jr.) and the Board, and would go into effect only if the Egyptian Government approved both documents. The package also included (as

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5 Jeffrey Abt, "Toward a Historian's Laboratory: The Breasted-Rockefeller Museum Projects in Egypt, Palestine, and America." *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* XXXIII (1996): 175. When the project failed, the team removed the card, inserting it with a new one describing their view of the failure (Egyptian stubbornness) before mailing out the proposal books. See also, Charles Breasted to John Johnson (Director, Oxford University Press), May 1, 1926, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: O, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence, Breasted Papers, OIA.

6 James Breasted to Raymond Fosdick, October 26, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

7 V. Everit Macy was a close friend and confidant of Rockefeller Jr. Incidentally, Rockefeller and William Welles Bosworth knew each other through Macy.
Exhibit B), a site map for the proposed plot of land for the museum and research institute (Fig. 5). Although the Indenture of Trust and the Agreement (hereafter designated Indenture-Agreement) made references to the new buildings for the museum and research institute on Plots A and B respectively, they were mostly concerned with details of administration and control. The buildings, meanwhile, were given their due in the proposal book.

The Indenture-Agreement called for the creation and incorporation of an “Egyptian Museum Commission,” consisting of six foreign and two Egyptian members. Of the foreign members, there would be two each from the United States, Great Britain, and France.\(^8\) One of the two members from each country would be chosen by a major museum in that country. The other member would be chosen by an overarching archaeological or scientific organization within said country.\(^9\) The Egyptian government was expected to agree to this “in recognition of [the] generous offer and in order to demonstrate its great appreciation of the value of foreign scientific collaboration in the preservation and study of Egyptian Antiquities.”\(^10\) The government would have no input or say in the appointment of these permanent members. The two Egyptian members were the Minister of Public Works and the Director General of the Egyptian Antiquities Service (EAS). Additionally, the Commission could choose to include – for brief periods only – members from other countries active in Egyptology. The Commission was the main administrative and finance body for the project. It would manage the Donor’s funds and

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\(^8\) The team left out any German representation due to expected French objections. This is covered later in the thesis.

\(^9\) American members would be appointed by the National Academy of Sciences at Washington and by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NY, British members by the British Academy and by the Trustees of the British Museum, and the French members by the Academie des Inscriptions of the Institut Francais and by the Musee du Louvre.

appoint all staff members without any input or interference from the Egyptian government. Reflecting just how much the Commission was not an Egyptian body, a provision in the Indenture-Agreement stated that it could be incorporated in “such jurisdiction as they [Trustees] shall deem best.”

Although the Indenture does not state possible options, the Breasted-Rockefeller team was internally considering England, as a way of safeguarding the funds.

About the plot and buildings, the Indenture-Agreement only stated that the Egyptian government would agree to authorize the Trustees to build the new museum on Plot A on the map. The government would issue the Trustees – upon signing the document – a license granting them permission to take over the land. For the Research Institute, the Indenture-Agreement asked for a more permanent “absolute title” to Plot B. Both buildings would be constructed according to plans approved by the Trustees, but these could be modified at the suggestion of the EAS. Here, the Trustees reserved the right to make these changes only if they were “practicable,” thereby maintaining overall control of the design and layout. This underscores the importance and centrality of the museum’s design to the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s conception of the museum and overall strategy. The Egyptian government was also asked to permit importation and entry of all materials and equipment needed for the construction and maintenance of these buildings, and for future work, without levying any import tax or duty. Upon completion of construction, the antiquities from the current Cairo Museum would be transferred over to the

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12 Thomas Debevoise (hereafter designated Debevoise) to Gumbel, July 28, 1925, folder 0258, box 025, series 2E, RG 03, OMR, RAC.
new museum. All future items that the government acquired through native excavation, or as a result of its share from foreign excavation, would be turned over to the Commission.

Rockefeller's total monetary contribution was $10 million. Upon acceptance of the terms and conditions stated by the Indenture-Agreement, the Donor would transfer $5.4 million of this money to the Commission, via the Board of Trustees, for construction of the new buildings.13 After the completion of construction, the remaining $4.6 million would be handed over to the Commission, whereupon the Commission would undertake to move all the items from the existing museum to the new one.14

In the "spirit in which the … gift is proffered,"15 the Egyptian Government would agree to turn over its collection to the Commission for a period of thirty-three years. (The antiquities would technically remain government property, but the latter would have practically no control over them). The Commission would hand back the collection to the government at the end of the agreement period or to "such Service [organization] as it [Egyptian government] may designate." The principal of $4.6 million would remain untouched (by the Commission) during the thirty-three years. Only the income from it would be used to run the museum and research institute. Though the government would get control of the collection at the end of thirty-three years, it would have no further claim on the principal of $4.6 million or the income from it. Instead, the Commission would keep this sum and continue to use the resulting income for the work of the

13 A sum of $5 million was earmarked for the museum and $400,000 for the research institute.

14 Several of the heavier items would be moved before this payment, to facilitate their installation in the new building at an earlier stage.

15 The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo (England, 1925), 13.
Research Institute for seventeen more years – completing a period of fifty years.\(^{16}\) After this time, the Commission (not the Egyptian government) could begin to use the principal. As a final condition of the Indenture-Agreement, the government would take whatever legal or parliamentary steps necessary to achieve the goals of the project.

In the Indenture-Agreement, Rockefeller’s lawyers noted that the money would be “devoted primarily” to research and museum administration in Egypt. The word, “primarily” was added for legal reasons as a qualification to the original statement.\(^{17}\) The funds would actually be

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\(^{16}\) After thirty-three years, the Commission, the Research Institute and Rockefeller’s endowment would spin off from the museum. It would seem from the Indenture-Agreement that the Egyptian government would have to assume financial responsibility of maintaining the museum after the stipulated period. The Indenture also stated that the Commission would pay for any damages or losses to the antiquities at the end of the thirty-three year period. However, it was unclear how this would work if the principal sum could not be accessed for a further seventeen years.

\(^{17}\) There was some internal debate between Rockefeller’s lawyers and the rest of the Breasted-Rockefeller team, regarding the purpose of the Commission and whether it should be explicitly stated in the proposal. The lawyer Thomas B. Debevoise initiated this debate, “[The Indenture-Agreement] does not show ‘the intent of the donor’ that the research building shall be maintained by the corporation [Commission] after the expiration of the thirty [three] year period, nor does it seem to me to state satisfactorily the conditions for the payment of the additional sum of $4,600,000. In this connection it may be noted that the first recital does not state accurately how the sum of $10,000,000 is to be used.”

Similarly, Debevoise wrote on July 22\(^{nd}\), 1925 to say that the reference to a gift for the “Egyptian People” was misleading, “...for only part of the money goes to Egypt and that in the form of a building erected on land which belongs to the Egyptian Government and is to be leased for a long term of years to trustees appointed by Mr. Rockefeller, the trustees after the building is completed assigning the lease to a corporation organized as provided in Mr. Rockefeller’s deed of trust.

In a later letter, Debevoise seemed to meet the rest of the team halfway. He understood that if the agreement between government and Trustees were to be terminated for any reason – with respect to either the museum or the research institute – the land and the buildings would go to the government of Egypt, ultimately benefitting it. And the Commission – though its work would not be limited to Egypt – was in fact representing the Egyptian government in the rest of the Near East. But he maintained that the corporation was independent enough to chart its own course and that the Egyptian people would only indirectly benefit from it. He therefore suggested that the phraseology be amended to give legal reference to this. So in the letter written by Rockefeller for the proposal book, the team added the word “primarily” after “devoted” to show that the money was not entirely allocated for work in Egypt. And – on Debevoise’s advice – the team did make explicit reference to the Indenture-Agreement in Rockefeller’s letter, though the earlier decision was not to do so. It is important to note that Debevoise’ concerns are entirely from a legal standpoint. He wished to make sure that the documents would hold up to legal scrutiny in the future. There is no evidence that his concerns stemmed from general welfare of the Egyptian people.
used in whichever way the Commission saw fit. They could be used for archaeological research anywhere in the world and to make available monuments for study, located in any part of the world.

Contrary to the claims made by Rockefeller and Breasted in their introductory letters to the King, the Commission in effect was designed to solidify – rather than decrease – foreign control of Egyptian antiquity. French control of the EAS was no longer guaranteed in the aftermath of British declaration of a constitutional monarchy in Egypt. Antiquities were the one area in which the British had no official power, and it was therefore the easiest, and one of the most prominent spheres, in which the emerging Egyptian nation could begin to assert its rights. 18 Western Egyptologists worried that Egyptians would oust all European (mostly French) officials and Egyptologists from the EAS, despite their long history of running the Department. They were also concerned about the French Director-General himself, but for the opposite reason. Pierre Lacau had incurred the wrath and displeasure of most U.S. and European Egyptologists (including his own country men) by changing the antiquities law in Egypt, thereby severely limiting the antiquities that could be taken out of the country. The terms and conditions of the Breasted-Rockefeller project were designed to guarantee Western control of Egyptian antiquity while simultaneously diluting Pierre Lacau’s authority and, for the first time, expanding the idea of “Western” control to include the United States. In fact, U.S. interests actually outweighed

See, Thomas B. Debevoise to Chauncey Belknap, June 13, 1925, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG 3, OMR, RAC. And, Debevoise to Gumbel, July 22, 1925, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG 3, OMR, RAC. And, Debevoise to Gumbel, July 28,1925, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG 3, OMR, RAC.

18 Goode, Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919-1941, 86.
those of Europeans in the proposal. They were better represented. For instance, the Trustees (all of them Americans) had the right to modify the Commission’s powers. Furthermore, the Director of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago (an American) would be appointed as Research Director at the Research Institute.\(^{19}\) The terms of the gift proposed to create a foreign base in Egypt, from which this Western (U.S.) Commission could control and command archaeology anywhere outside of Egypt.

The Commission was in effect a microcosm of the political situation in Egypt. Representatives of foreign countries would control Egyptian antiquity, and the future of the museum and research institute, with the required token gesture of Egyptian membership. The inclusion of Egyptians was conceived as a tactic for giving the collaborator, agency.\(^{20}\) On the other hand, the Breasted-Rockefeller team also required British and French cooperation in the matter and their inclusion in the Commission was also a tactical decision.\(^{21}\) (The idea of “local” collaborators has been expanded here to include other imperial powers – the British and the French – who were actively present in Egypt). Furthermore, despite Breasted’s rivalry with the

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\(^{19}\) The Research Director would appoint research staff and oversee and manage all research work at the Institute and the museum. In 1926, the Director of the Oriental Institute (and therefore Research Director-in-waiting for the museum) was James Henry Breasted.


\(^{21}\) The Indenture of Trust between Rockefeller and the Trustees actually stated that the project could not succeed without British and French cooperation. The Trustees were expected to garner this support. The British were the official colonizers in Egypt, as it was their army that was stationed in Cairo. Though the French were now only unofficial holders of Egyptian archaeology, Pierre Lacau had a close relationship with King Fau’d, giving the notion of “local collaborators” an interesting twist. French inclusion and support for the project was therefore essential. In fact, a “Franco-Egyptian” alliance was the greatest worry for the Breasted-Rockefeller team. See, Breasted to Fosdick, May 16, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.
French and his dismissal of their scholarship and methods, he clearly saw them as better custodians of Egyptian antiquity than the Egyptians themselves. Anticipating French objection to any inclusion of German Egyptologists in the wake of the First World War, the Breasted-Rockefeller team purposely left the Germans out of the Commission despite the fact that German scholarship had arguably become more important than French scholarship. The initial inclination to include the Germans obviously points to scientific considerations in the make-up of the Commission, since the Germans did not have any real power in Egypt. But their eventual exclusion undermines Breasted’s scientific reasoning for the entire project. Ultimately, the French Egyptologists had closer connections to the King. By virtue of a shaky but still lingering 1904 Treaty, and by virtue of their longstanding involvement in Egypt, the French trumped German scholarship.

After 1882, each Department or Ministry of the Egyptian government had included one British and one French officer. The Commission seems to have been modeled on this earlier colonial administrative make-up in Egypt, with the difference being that the Americans were hoping to partake of it in the antiquities sector.

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22 Breasted to Fosdick, October 5, 1926, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA. (Breasted himself had studied Egyptology at the University of Berlin under Adolf Erman, whom he considered the foremost Egyptologist at the time).
The Book and its Presentation to the King

An Indenture-Agreement drawn up by lawyers in New York is bound to be formal, legally tight, and dry. In addition to legal jargon, the terms and conditions were clearly not favorable to the Egyptians. U.S. and Western control was almost absolute. It was the job of the proposal book, however, to cast the project in a softer light. The book was conceived with the intention to flatter the King, to impress him with the size and scope of the proposed gift, and to lead him down a desired path. Confident that he understood the Egyptian mind and Egyptian vanity, Breasted arrogantly declared to his friend, George Hale:

...with this ammunition [the book’s illustrations] I hope to intoxicate the King and give him such a pipe-dream of the Arabian Nights possibilities presented by our project that we shall be able to stampede him and his whole group into it.23

Breasted expected the book and its illustrations to stun the Egyptians, so that they would—presumably in a daze and incapable of coherent thought—align themselves with the project. The book, as we have seen, was also for the benefit of opinion leaders, and Breasted was particularly gratified that all those who had so far seen it (before even the Egyptians) were impressed with it.24

23 Breasted to Hale, July 20, 1925, OIA, folder 1925, box Correspondence between George Ellery Hale and James Henry Breasted, James Henry Breasted Papers, OIA. See also, Breasted to Hale, February 23, 1925, OIA.

24 Such as, Lord Balfour, Sir Frederick Kenyon at the British Museum, The American ambassador to London, etc.
Rather than focusing on U.S. and European control, the book presented the museum as a gift of cooperation from the "great Democracy of the West" (the United States) to an Egypt that was struggling to gain its full independence from the British and French imperial machinery.²⁵ A key tactic was to identify Egypt’s political and cultural struggles with the United States’ political and cultural struggles:

We in America, like you in Egypt, are politically a very young nation; and culturally too, the higher development of America has been very recent.²⁶

The Breasted-Rockefeller team was clearly aware of nationalist sentiments in Egypt. It was also very aware of the favorable image of the United States in the Near East after the First World War, as a result of Wilson’s support for self-determination in these lands. The team tried to use this to its own advantage. Initial correspondence shows an awareness of Egyptian sentiments and perhaps a wary recognition that Egyptian independence was imminent. This recognition mobilized Breasted into strategizing to control Egyptian antiquities. Part of this strategy was to emphasize to the Egyptians that the gift came from a "democracy." Emphasizing the United States as a democratic nation, also allowed Breasted to assume the moral high ground when necessary, such as during negotiations with the British army over the initial site. But as the general museum negotiations drew on, Breasted (and Belknap) admitted to the team in New

²⁵ The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo (England, 1925), 11.

²⁶ Ibid.
York that it was probably beneficial to their project that the British army was staying on in Egypt.\footnote{27}

In the letter to the King, Breasted drew further comparisons between the United States and Egypt, this time of a scientific nature. He wrote that the obstacles to Egyptology in Egypt were similar to those that the U.S. had faced (obstacles that Breasted, himself, had directly overcome):

The scientific administration of these precious survivals is a great and difficult responsibility. In this connection it may be of interest to Your Majesty to know that a little over thirty years ago there was not a single teacher of the Ancient Egyptian language and writing in any American university.\footnote{28}

Emphasizing ancient Egypt as the common heritage of both Egyptians and the West, Breasted wrote that for all these reasons Rockefeller Jr. had agreed to fund the construction and maintenance of the new museum and research institute. The terms and conditions of the Indenture-Agreement are referred to only obliquely in this letter:

We hope that the spirit in which the above gift is proffered will lead Your Majesty and the Egyptian Government to accept as a condition of the gift the cooperation of America and other nations of the West, in the maintenance of the Museum during the next thirty years.\footnote{29}

\footnote{27} “Egyptian Museum Negotiations: 1925-1926. Report by Chauncey Belknap,” Received March 10, 1926, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG 3, OMR, RAC.

\footnote{28} The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo (England, 1925), 11. Breasted writes that the existing French run Cairo Museum was a generation behind.

\footnote{29} The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo (England, 1925), 13.
Moving on from this mention of U.S. and Western “cooperation,” Breasted emphasized the value of the gift: the building would be the most magnificent museum in the world and the finest modern monument in Egypt. Rockefeller’s letter was brief and characteristically restrained, but along the same lines.\textsuperscript{30} Though Breasted’s initial letter was somewhat restrained as well, he allowed himself free rein in a lengthier outline of the gift.\textsuperscript{31} While establishing “Egypt’s unique place in the course of man’s unfolding life,” he wrote of how western civilization was now heir to ancient Egypt, betraying his ideological standpoint.

The proposal book and the Indenture-Agreement reportedly met with a strange, unexpected reception from the King, who barely looked at it and tossed it aside.\textsuperscript{32} He is said to have claimed that the funds marked out for the project were too limited, and complained about U.S. interference in Egyptian matters.\textsuperscript{33} Insulted by these remarks, Breasted prepared to leave but stated that the King changed his tune at once, and asked that the matter be brought before Ziwar Pasha (the Prime Minister). James Breasted put the King’s unfavorable response down to jealousy and greed for money that he could not “get a single finger on” due to the tight legal

\textsuperscript{30} Rockefeller’s correspondence is typically quite restrained. A letter from Breasted to Rockefeller on August 20, 1925 shows that Rockefeller advocated toning down the language and downplaying his own importance. Accordingly, Breasted replied: “I enclose also the new revision of the text of the brochure, which includes all over-explicit statements which might later prove embarrassing. The change you suggested regarding Bosworth’s work for you in France has of course been carried out carefully, but pray forgive me for retaining the reference to your splendid gift for restoring Rheims, Versailles, etc., which you struck out. The world ought to know it, and I think it will help both in England and France.”

See, Breasted to Rockefeller, August 20, 1925, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG 3, OMR, RAC.

\textsuperscript{31} The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo (England, 1925), 21.

\textsuperscript{32} Charles Breasted, Pioneer to the Past: The Story of James Henry Breasted, Archaeologist, Told by His Son Charles Breasted (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2009), 388.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
terms and conditions. But did Breasted judge the King’s reasons or motives accurately? Did he come to this conclusion because of his preconceived idea of Egyptian vanity? It is possible that the King, in fact, was negotiating with Breasted in the only manner possible by pretending disinterest. At about this time the new British High Commissioner, Lord Lloyd, acting under instructions from London informed the Egyptian Prime Minister of the British government’s support for the project. The American team had a favorable opinion of Ziwar Pasha, who they believed was honest and brave. It helped that when Breasted presented the project to Ziwar, the latter supposedly flattered him:

You know, Egypt has no civilization except what comes to us from Europe and America. We must rely on foreign scientists – but I cannot say that in public! Therein lies our chief difficulty in carrying out your project.

Breasted, despite his shrewdness – and perhaps betraying some vanity of his own – took this statement at face value, without considering if Ziwar did indeed hold this opinion, or if he hoped to present himself as an ally of the Breasted-Rockefeller team, while simultaneously distancing himself from a likely rejection of the offer. Ziwar’s political position as Prime Minister was rather tenuous at the time.

Charles Breasted, who helped his father manage the project, presented his version of its failure in, Pioneer to the Past. He wrote that the Egyptian Ministers “consumed weeks objecting

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34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 389.
to every constructive suggestion from the American side,\textsuperscript{36} causing Belknap to suggest that they
draft up their own version of the proposal. They did so, Belknap approved it, and took it with
back with him to New York. The Prime Minister assured Breasted and Belknap that if
Rockefeller accepted the changes he would recommend to his Council of Ministers that they
approve the project.\textsuperscript{37} Charles writes that Rockefeller and the rest of the Trustees approved the
project without making a single change (this is not true, as I will show).\textsuperscript{38}

In the meantime, apparently enough people had come to know of the proposal in Egypt to
cause Breasted and Charles some concern of its leakage in the press,\textsuperscript{39} and the two issued a press
release to pre-empt any negative publicity. This was done immediately after Belknap sailed for
New York, and was a decision made entirely by Breasted and his son. Were Breasted and
Charles using the press to generate public support for the project, thereby forcing the
government’s decision? If that was their intention, they were quite successful in generating
generally positive support.

Charles believed that they made a crucial mistake by not specifying that the terms and
conditions now drawn up were by the Egyptians themselves. Again, this is not true: the revised
proposal represented Egyptian modifications to what were American terms and conditions.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{39} Breasted to Belknap, February 12, 1926, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA. Breasted cabled Belknap on the latter’s
voyage back to New York with the revised contract.
Regarding the press release, Charles wrote that the press (and general public) reaction was favorable without exception (mostly true, if we assume the clippings in the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s archives are representative). The press release, of course, made the project known to the French in the EAS, although it is possible that they may have been aware of it already, especially if Pierre Lacau was indeed close to the King, as Breasted suspected he was. In any case, the publicity allowed French reaction out into the open. Charles writes that the “excitable” and “garrulous” French Director-General believed that Americans were usurping his position. 

Lacau, of course, was right. (The team’s second mistake, in Charles’ opinion, was that they had kept the project from the French, as per British instructions, thereby increasing French discontent).

When Belknap forwarded the revised contract from New York, the team presented it to the Prime Minister, who rejected it, apparently saying:

We cannot sign this document! The conditions are absolutely unacceptable, they infringe upon the sovereignty of Egypt! My colleagues in the council of ministers decline to consider the matter until the conditions of the contract have been fundamentally revised!

Breasted refused revision to “a contract drawn by the Egyptian Government itself.” He informed the Prime Minister that he would leave for New York soon. If an offer of acceptance were not waiting for him in New York, he would advise Rockefeller to withdraw the project.

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41 Ibid., 396. Conversation reported by Breasted.

42 Ibid., 397.
following day the Egyptian government – itself demonstrating strategic use of the media – issued a press release stating that Rockefeller’s conditions were unacceptable as they currently stood. When the government did not change its position within the allotted time, Rockefeller formally withdrew the offer.\(^{43}\)

Charles’ recollection of the proceedings is important because it represents the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s view of the failure of the project. It also, incidentally, represents the general Western view. It lays the blame for the failure squarely on Egyptian stubbornness, something that most newspapers and opinion leaders in the West readily believed. The evidence suggests otherwise. The first part of the evidence is the Indenture-Agreement and its unfavorable terms, as I have already described. The second part comes from the archives, and reveals the motivations, prejudices and goals behind the project. The archives show that the downfall of the project resulted in large part from British and French interference as well. But significantly, the failure was contained within the American conception of the project.\(^ {44}\)

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**Archives: The Evidence**

Though Raymond Fosdick initiated the project with his “unprompted”\(^ {45}\) enquiry into the need for repairs to the existing French-built museum, James Breasted must be credited with

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\(^{43}\) Ibid., 397.

\(^{44}\) See also, Jeffrey Abt, “Toward a Historian’s Laboratory: The Breasted-Rockefeller Museum Projects in Egypt, Palestine, and America.” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* XXXIII (1996): 173-194. Abt expresses the failure of the museum in similar terms.

\(^{45}\) Breasted to Fosdick, October 7, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.
launching the project. He first presented the idea for an entirely new building in his 1924 foundational letter to Fosdick, who was “deeply moved”\textsuperscript{46} by Breasted’s passionate response, and forwarded the letter to Rockefeller Jr. The latter wrote back agreeing on the need for a new Egyptian museum, but with doubts about the feasibility of the proposal. These doubts were founded on Breasted’s description of the Egyptian government’s neglect of its antiquities and on newspaper reports of political trouble in Egypt, leading Rockefeller to wonder if a museum should indeed be built in Cairo, and whether it might not perhaps be moved to a location out of Egypt, somewhere in the West.\textsuperscript{47}

Fosdick accordingly wrote to Breasted describing both the deep interest and the doubts of his associates regarding the project.\textsuperscript{48} The latter responded immediately to allay Fosdick’s fears.

\textsuperscript{46} Fosdick to Breasted, October 21, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

\textsuperscript{47} Rockefeller to Fosdick, October 28, 1924, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, Record Group III, OMR, RAC:

“Whether the Egyptian Government is interested enough in its works of art to appreciate having such a gift would seem rather doubtful, and whether, were such a building provided, it would be properly kept up is also questionable.

If the Egyptian Government has had in mind the possibility of selling its collections to pay its national debt, might it not be a far greater contribution to the archeological interests of the world, should the matter be brought around in the right way, to consider buying the valuable part of the collections, including the things from the tomb of Tutankhamen, and setting them up in some museum where the would be sure of being permanently cared for and being made available for scholars?

But if the thought of building a new museum in Cairo to house the present collection of things waiting to be added thereto should seem both wise and feasible, who is there in the Egyptian Government who could be trusted to carry out such an enterprise?”

\textsuperscript{48} Fosdick to Breasted, October 28\textsuperscript{th}, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

“The grave doubt is expressed as to the possibility of extending any help while the Egyptian Government is in its present chaotic and unstable shape…it would seem that conditions in Egypt are very unsettled, and the recent failure of the conference in London, where the Egyptian demands for complete autonomy were refused, does not promise very much hope for the immediate future.”
His letter from October 30th, 1924 is revealing. It underscores some of his impressions of local (native) government in Egypt. And it shows a high level of confidence and self-regard with respect to his understanding of the situation in Egypt. It also shows how much Breasted – previously on the periphery – had become central to Egyptology, as well as to Egyptian politics, demonstrating the hand-in-hand relationship of archaeology and politics.

First, Breasted stressed to Fosdick that nationalist sentiments in Egypt would not amount to anything, and that the U.S. team could be assured of some sort of security and continued “maintenance of a sufficient British garrison in Egypt.” Breasted stated that he was confident:

... the Egyptians know perfectly well that the British Government will never yield [on this point]. The noise they make in opposition is simply for home consumption.

He used British presence to put to rest any fears that Fosdick and his associates might have as to who was ultimately in control of Egypt. And, he downplayed the nationalists by calling them an “ignorant mob” and asserting that there were in fact Egyptians in government positions “who remain quietly in the background” and did not look for any trouble: they could be counted on to mediate with the nationalist elements. In the letter, Breasted demonstrated his authority in Egyptian matters by presenting himself as an insider to Egyptian politics and the British imperial machinery. After the founding of the Oriental Institute in 1919, he had led a reconnaissance trip

49 Breasted to Fosdick, October 30, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

through the Near East and Egypt. As part of this trip, he experienced firsthand the political lay of the land. This was before the Treaty of Sevres was signed, and the future of the Arab and Turkish lands determined. Breasted’s trip provided him direct exposure to the political sentiment in these lands. Upon his return to Cairo in 1920, he was asked by Lord Allenby (then British High Commissioner to Egypt and Sudan) to report his findings to David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister. Breasted wrote that in 1922, the British government asked him to help settle the Tutankhamun case out of court. He therefore had, Breasted argued, a strong relationship with the British. He was not exaggerating. At this time, as a matter of fact, the United States Vice President wished to appoint Breasted as the American Minister to Egypt, probably in view of the political experience he had gained during his archaeological work in the country.

Breasted’s letter must have soothed Fosdick’s fears, because at their face-to-face meeting later that year – at which Rockefeller was present – he instructed Breasted to put together a sketch proposal for the new museum and to undertake a visit to Cairo in the winter to ascertain some facts regarding building and site. Breasted would determine the physical condition of the

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52 Clarification: David Lloyd George was the British Prime Minister. Coincidentally, within this same time frame, George Lloyd became Lord Allenby’s successor as the British High Commissioner to Egypt and Sudan.

present building and the “legal status” of the proposed site: the barracks and drill ground in front of the museum.\textsuperscript{54}

In his draft proposal for the museum, Breasted first touched on the need for an architectural sketch. He saw two purposes for this, one would be to present it to the King so that he could grasp the “material side” of the project, and the other would be to present it to Rockefeller Jr. (To this end he enquired of Fosdick if one of the many architects who visit Egypt could be recruited to prepare such a sketch, under an oath of secrecy).

In the draft, he also put down his thoughts on how the project should be presented. Taking stock of the political situation, he saw that the team must deal with three parties: the British, the Egyptians, and the French. He believed that the real power lay with the British; therefore the primary goal was to get them on board with the project, and then deal with the Egyptians and French. The latter two dealings he considered merely a formality. Accordingly he advised that the project be presented in confidence first to Lord Allenby, the British High Commissioner to Egypt and Sudan. Allenby should be asked in turn to present the project to his government. Then, reducing the project’s scope to its simplest terms, a representative of the donor, accompanied by the American Ambassador, should present it to King Fua’d. Breasted was confident of the King’s approval:

There would not be the slightest doubt but that King Fuad would regard the magnificent gift as a very gracious and welcome tribute to himself and his people, - a superb gesture of friendliness and cooperation from the

\textsuperscript{54} Breasted to Fosdick, December 6, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA. This letter also contained the draft proposal.
Western World to the Orient. It would be necessary to emphasize to His Majesty that aspect of the project, which ensures to foreign scientists permanent facilities for the work of foreign scientists in Egypt as a proposal of friendly cooperation to which the future availability of funds for maintaining the building would be merely an accessory. I believe that in this way we could avoid hurting the Egyptians’ feelings in the tacitly involved suggestion that they are unequal to these responsibilities themselves.55

After the King approved the project, the U.S. team would run the proposal past the “actual machinery of the Government itself.” This would include a “ceremonious call on the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, with assurances that the whole project is one of friendly cooperation, - of a totally unofficial character.” After this, he suggested consulting with the Minister of Public Works. Breasted left dealings with his nemesis Pierre Lacau, the French-Director General of the EAS, to the very end.

As per Fosdick’s instructions, Breasted visited Cairo in the beginning of 1925 to scope out the situation. By the time of his trip, the team seems to have made an internal decision (which is not directly documented in the archives, but emerges as a side note from the contents of the correspondence) to entrust the U.S. architect William Welles Bosworth with the preliminary design of the buildings. Rockefeller’s later correspondence with the team shows that Bosworth’s selection was determined by the fact that he was Rockefeller’s personal architect and could be trusted to keep the matter confidential at this early, sensitive stage.56 Bosworth and

55 Breasted to Fosdick, December 6, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

56 Rockefeller to Martin Ryerson (hereafter designated Ryerson), August 4, 1925, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, Record Group III, OMR, RAC.
Breasted met in Cairo for the first time, in February 1925. Breasted also met with Lord Allenby and presented the team’s plan to him. He reported to Fosdick that Allenby was “sympathetic” to the entire enterprise, and had forwarded the plans to the British Foreign Office for its assessment of them.\(^{57}\)

Breasted’s letter to Fosdick of February 26\(^{th}\), 1925 is one full of confidence in a satisfactory outcome of the project. It is also the letter in which he makes a final break with Fosdick’s original idea of funding repairs to the existing museum. So, to the larger objective of the project – U.S. (and continued Western) control of Egyptian Antiquities – was added a grand architectural complex. Writing of the problems with the existing building, Breasted used Bosworth’s unfavorable assessment of its architecture, structure and practical considerations:

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\ldots \text{We went over the old building several times and he [Bosworth] agreed that architecturally the structure is grotesquely ugly, that functionally it is totally unfitted to its purpose, and that structurally it is unsafe and even destructive. He saw, also, the crowded condition of the exhibits and being a man of the finest taste, at once caught the possibilities for the new building. With a few hours after these examinations, he produced a very beautiful and suggestive sketch for the new building. He then very quickly and skillfully developed these sketches into plans of a really noble and impressive building. It seemed to me at once to be the most splendidly conceived museum building in the world.}\(^{58}\)
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His meetings with Allenby gave Breasted further confidence in British cooperation. Allenby approved of Breasted’s scheme for presenting the proposal to the King first, and then the

\(^{57}\) Breasted to Fosdick, February 5, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

\(^{58}\) Breasted to Fosdick, February 26, 1925, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, Record Group III, OMR, RAC.
Council of Ministers under the Prime Minister. He also noted that the chief obstacle to the site would be the evacuation of the British barracks. The British worried that construction of the new barracks elsewhere would pointedly call attention to continued British presence in Egypt. Breasted reassured him that this would not be a problem and, as a potential site for new barracks, he suggested the Gezira Island across from the present barracks. To this letter to Fosdick, Breasted also attached a document outlining the projected annual maintenance and upkeep cost for the museum. Meanwhile, Bosworth spent his time in Cairo preparing drawings for the proposed museum, which Breasted brought back with him on his return to the U.S.

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Failed Engagements: The Breasted-Rockefeller Team & The British

The proposal book was the end result of the conception stage. During this phase, Breasted had not only discussed the barracks site favorably with Allenby in Cairo, he had also made a

59 Breasted to Fosdick, February 26, 1925, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, Record Group III, OMR, RAC. Allenby put Breasted in touch with Mr. P. M. Tottenham, Under Secretary of State in the Department of Public Works. Tottenham was the only British Secretary in the Department of Public Works. He agreed to pencil in his suggestions on the draft for the letter to the King. (In his letter to Fosdick, Breasted warned that the proposal would be unacceptable to the Egyptians unless the gift was made without any expectation or mention of return of the money, revealing that this was initially part of the scheme. Breasted also suggested lessening the number of years that the institution should be under Western control, from thirty years to twenty.)

60 “Introductory notes on documents to be handed to the king.” February 26, 1925, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, Record Group III, OMR, RAC.

The document shows that – at least at this stage – the team considered putting the (French) Director-General on the payroll of the Egyptian Museum Commission, thereby making Pierre Lacau answerable to the Americans. Breasted also made some suggestions as to the documents that should be submitted to the King: a letter from the donor explaining the gift and an explanation of the gift agreement. He writes that the letter to the King should immediately include the value of the gift, in order to sway the Egyptians’ decision in favor of it:

“...it should be noted that the Oriental mind demands rather fulsome [sic] and highly colored statements in order to be moved and led to adopt a desired line of action.”
separate trip to London to discuss the project with the British Foreign Office (BFO) and important politicians such as, Lord Balfour and Austen Chamberlain, as well as the British Museum’s Sir Frederick Kenyon to ensure that all these important British politicians, archaeologists, museum directors etc. approved of the project. During this conception phase, Breasted did not consult with any Egyptians.

In London, the BFO had agreed that the barracks site should be freed up for the project. Prior to this journey to London, the team had reconsidered their approach with the French. Breasted was now planning a trip to Paris to meet with the French Foreign Office. However, the BFO believed that the team’s original plan of leaving dealings with the French to the very end was more suitable, and recommended that this should be the course of action. A relieved Breasted readily agreed; with his customary disapproval of the French, he had no wish to deal with them just yet. This is one of several instances where Breasted took British suggestions at face value. He did not suspect the British of subterfuge or scheming, whereas he readily attributed these qualities to the Egyptians.

Breasted’s visit to London was quite successful, and did not prepare him for future difficulties and failures to be encountered in Cairo. Armed with the proposal book in the fall of 1925, Breasted once again proceeded to Cairo, for the first of what would be a series of negotiations.

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61 Breasted, Pioneer to the Past : The Story of James Henry Breasted, Archaeologist, Told by His Son Charles Breasted, 390. See also, Breasted to Hale, July 20, 1925, folder 1925, box Correspondence between George Ellery Hale and James Henry Breasted, James Henry Breasted Papers, OIA.
Allenby was no longer the British High Commissioner to Egypt and Sudan. Instead, Sir George Lloyd had replaced him, transferring over from India. Breasted’s first meeting with George Lloyd did not give him cause for concern – the Commissioner was “distracted” with his new responsibilities, and requested time to consider the proposal. Breasted’s description of this meeting is rife with military terms:

…let me report the results of our first skirmish in the effort to dislodge a British battalion from a post, which as they put it in their own communications, “they have been occupying for forty years”…

Breasted evinced a genuine pleasure in political dealings with the British army. And although on the surface the British army and the U.S. team would provide a united front for the museum after the failed negotiations regarding the barracks’ site, the tensions evident in their initial association are illuminating. Even after the team agreed to compromise on the site, and the British ostensibly declared support for the project, British backing was perhaps not completely sincere. Breasted’s negotiations with the British in Cairo at this time were conducted in secrecy: the Egyptians and the French still did not know of the project. Breasted’s confidence in the

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62 Breasted to Fosdick, November 6, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

63 Ibid.

64 Charles seems to intimate as much in his book. When the project was first presented to the British in early 1925 during its preliminary stages, the then-High Commissioner Lord Allenby was receptive to it. But according to Charles, George Lloyd (the future High Commissioner) was present at the meeting and maintained an air of “malevolent neutrality” regarding the project. See, Breasted, Pioneer to the Past: The Story of James Henry Breasted, Archaeologist, Told by His Son Charles Breasted, 381.
superiority of the United States’ civilizing mission, which he felt should be given precedence over any British military maneuverings or Egyptian nationalist sentiments, comes across strongly in his reports to Fosdick. He wrote, perhaps too naively, that Lloyd was “unreserved in his conviction that the plan ought to be carried out. Regarding the merits of the plan there is no difference of opinion between us.” And he was confident of the right of the American museum to the land, and scornful of British presence on it:

Lord Lloyd’s next remark was, that to put the plan through will raise many serious snags for the British administration in Egypt, much opposition by the army, and troublesome difficulties in housing the displaced troops. I at once remarked, “I thought you would put them in the Abbassiyeh Barracks”. (I didn’t add, “The fine new ones built for you with $2,000,000 of Egyptian money, on the understanding that you would evacuate the Kasr en-Nil site, which we need for our project”!). Lloyd quickly responded that they could not send all the Kasr en-Nil battalion so far away. I let him know that there would be room for a portion of them north of our site, and that they need not evacuate for six months after their acceptance of our plans.

Finally, Breasted wrote that the British requested extra time to consider, because they wanted to discuss the American museum at a special meeting in the context of the “whole question of the British Army in Egypt.”

This meeting had an unfavorable outcome for the Breasted-Rockefeller team. The British army made an internal decision that they could not evacuate the site. The reasons were complex

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65 Breasted to Fosdick, November 9, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

66 Ibid.
and varied and will be recounted here briefly.\textsuperscript{67} Two serious political crises, one within Egypt and the other in French-held Damascus, led to this decision. The first crises was regarding the competing interests of local Egyptian parties:

Lord Lloyd is now obliged to steer a safe and sane course among three contending groups; first, the extreme and dangerous nationalists incapable of maintaining public safety, led by Zaghloul; second, a palace coterie forming a little irresponsible autocracy led by the King who is flouting constitutional government; third, a Ministry of the worthiest and ablest Egyptians, who are now being fought by both the nationalists and the palace. The hostility between the King and the English is new, and fundamentally affects the situation of our project, as I will presently indicate.\textsuperscript{68}

Not yet willing to concede defeat in this “skirmish,” Breasted met with Major General Sir Richard Haking who was Commander-in-Chief of the British army in Egypt. He wrote that Haking was forthright in his recognition of the fact that the British army had no real right to occupy the Kasr al-Nil site: they had received money for new barracks from the Egyptians, and the Home Government had instructed them to evacuate the site for the museum. Here, there is a hint of fragmentation within the British ranks, for Haking asserted that, “...such a policy was

\textsuperscript{67} Breasted to Fosdick, November 29, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

\textsuperscript{68} Breasted to Fosdick, November 29, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA. The British High Commissioner apparently asked Breasted for his suggestion on handling the situation. Breasted advised him that the British should use the one group to counter the other, “I said: ‘Stand by the Ministry now, in order to clean up the palace, and then rule through the palace.’ This advice is based on the fundamental fact that real substance of power here is and will continue to be the British Army. Public safety exists and will be maintained by this means alone. In the crisis of last Saturday, reported in the enclosed clipping, the Zaghloulists who attempted to hold an illegal session of parliament, were prevented from doing so only by the British troops.”
very easy for a gentleman comfortably and safely occupying a swivel chair in a London office, but it was quite different for a responsible officer on the ground.” 69

In view of the difficulties, Breasted asked Rockefeller (and Fosdick) to reconsider the issue of the site, and presented the almost certain failure of the original site in a positive light:

...our effort to secure the evacuation of Cairo to make room for this great project, will inevitably leak out, and produce a profound impression, the more profound because we failed. Even our failure therefore, will not be entirely without good results. 70

The Kasr al-Nil site was originally selected because the displacement of British barracks by a cultural institution would present the whole U.S. enterprise to the Egyptian government in a positive light, considering that the Egyptians themselves desired removal of the barracks. The site’s selection as a strategic move is confirmed by one of Fosdick’s cablegrams to Breasted:

REMOVAL TO ISLAND SITE NULLIFIES OUR MOST EFFECTIVE ARGUMENT WITH EGYPTIANS OF GETTING TROOPS OUT OF CAIRO 71

At first, Rockefeller would not consider an alternate site and instructed that the King should be informed of the project, the desired site, and the British army’s unwillingness to

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69 Breasted to Fosdick, November 29, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

70 Breasted to Rockefeller, November 29, 1925, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG III, OMR, RAC.

71 Fosdick to Breasted, November 27, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA. Decoded on the 28th.
evacuate said site. But Breasted had begun to see the British point of view and the futility of continued discussions over the barracks. Lloyd convinced Breasted that the British were trying to act in the best interest of Egypt and Cairo. Breasted pressed Rockefeller and Fosdick to reconsider. First, he argued that Haking and Lloyd were united in their efforts to oppose the Home Government from fulfilling its pledge to the Egyptian government, but he also began to see the Army’s point of view. Haking had explained to Breasted that the barracks by the water were necessary for both “defense and for victualing [sic] Cairo by water.” He admitted that he could “hold Cairo” from a post other than Kasr, but that protecting it would be hard. And here, Breasted explained to Rockefeller the second reason for the Army’s denial to move from the site (and in the process took a swipe at the French):

Into this internal situation has now come the distressing destruction of Damascus due primarily to the fact that a French garrison insufficient or improperly posted to recover control of a city suddenly overrun by a looting mob withdrew to their batteries commanding the city and opened a

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72 Gumbel to Breasted, November 27, 1925, folder 261, box 25, series 2E, RG III, OMR, RAC.

73 Lloyd and Breasted sent off a cablegram to Austen Chamberlain in the Foreign Office in London, in which both stated their respective positions regarding the site. Although Breasted was resigned to an alternate site – and was working to convince Rockefeller of the same, he did make one last attempt:

“My principals feel that so many important people now know of this project, that if it collapses they will insist on knowing the reasons, which will have a regrettable effect on public opinion, both in Egypt and America. As we have proceeded in reliance upon assurances of cooperation received in London, I am reluctant to sacrifice great opportunity for Anglo-American cooperation without inquiring whether you have any suggestions which might make this site available. Earnestly hope for early reply.”

He was not really hopeful of a favorable reply and wrote to Rockefeller to prepare him for the outcome. He was proven right. The British Foreign Office would ultimately not overrule the army’s stance. Conditions at the British and French empire’s periphery (the Near East) had led to a readjustment of the BFO’s earlier decision.
bombardment which to be sure drove out the mob, but also wrecked the city.\textsuperscript{74}

The French had held Damascus, but they had failed to protect it. Breasted warned Rockefeller that if the Americans insisted on the matter and brought it to the Egyptians’ attention as Rockefeller had suggested, the project would be irrevocably “dead”:

The reason is this: British retention of the barracks will become such a valuable fighting point, that in order to keep it and continue to use against the British, the Egyptians will not be willing to lose it by granting a museum site to the project anywhere! Our project will have become a political football, or better, merely a political club which the Egyptians will not be willing to surrender by furnishing the museum with the needed site!\textsuperscript{75}

If the Americans on the other hand convinced the British to shift their troops to new barracks, then the project would risk “being regarded as the occasion for the building of new British barracks in Cairo.”\textsuperscript{76} Keeping all these points in mind, Breasted advocated exploring an alternate site on the Gezira Island (across the water) that he described as a “charming park” of “unusual beauty” planted with foreign trees. Located on this site, at the tip of the Gezira, the buildings

\textsuperscript{74} Breasted to Fosdick, November 29, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76} In Breasted’s opinion, insisting on the site would therefore have none of the advantages originally envisioned by the team, save one: proximity of the new museum to the old and ease in moving the large sculptures. He argued that if men thousands of years ago could find a way to move these heavy artifacts, surely a U.S. team could do the same today.
would “make a very impressive prospect from the city [w]ater front.” Rockefeller was unhappy with the decision at first, but eventually relented and when the Indenture-Agreement was finally presented to the King, Exhibit A showed this site (Fig. 5).

Chauncey Belknap reported subsequent developments to Fosdick. Writing on behalf of Breasted, he portrayed the newly strengthened position of the British army due to the removal of Nashaat Pasha, a palace official who was regarded with suspicion by both the nationalists and the Ministry, and the resolution of a territorial claim made by the Italians. Belknap wrote that despite his initial feelings on the matter, the British army had demonstrated the necessity of its presence in Egypt to both the Egyptians and the U.S., and was consequently in a strong position. Now that the issue of the site was resolved, and the army was – on the surface at least – firmly behind the museum proposal, the project should be presented to the Egyptians without any further delay. He ended the letter on a high note expecting the King to approve the project.

Failed Engagements – The Breasted-Rockefeller Team & The Egyptians:

On February 8th, 1926, Breasted wrote Fosdick apprising him about the project’s progress since its presentation to the King and, subsequently, to the Prime Minister. He characterized the

77 Breasted to Fosdick, November 29, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

78 The drawings in the proposal book (which had already been published) continued to show the preferred barracks site, but since most of the urban context of Cairo was not distinguishable in these drawings, the team felt comfortable using the proposal book. Close inspection of a few of the water-color plates does reveal the barracks site, if one knows what to look for.

79 Belknap to Fosdick, December 28, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.
complex political situation as, “a shifting kaleidoscope much too complicated to be caught and successfully reported to you.” \(^{80}\) But he took the opportunity nevertheless to write in more detail of:

... the misty background of ancient oriental experience and the resulting traits of a mentality so remote from ours as to shift us into a different world very difficult for modern men of western experience to understand or even to conceive. \(^{81}\)

This remote mentality, so far removed from western understanding and experience, manifested itself in the inefficiency of the Egyptian government and its inability to accomplish anything. \(^{82}\) Breasted wrote that he was able to “move” the Egyptian government and to accelerate their usual slowness. He listed the most important men in the negotiations: King Fua’d I, Ahmed Hassanein Bey (the Royal Chamberlain, whom Breasted considered the “finest of the Egyptian”), Ziwar Pasha, his Crown Counselor (the Italian Attorney General Signor Piola Caselli), the Judicial Advisor of the Ministry of Justice (Judge Percival, an Englishman), the British Minister to Egypt (Neville Henderson), and Lord Lloyd. Interestingly, he did not include the American Ambassador to Egypt, Howell, whom he considered inept. \(^{83}\)

\(^{80}\) Breasted to Fosdick, February 8, 1925, folder 261, box 25, series 2E, RG III, OMR, RAC.

\(^{81}\) Ibid.

\(^{82}\) Ibid.: “It may be instructive to recall that under their new constitution the Egyptians have held and dissolved two parliaments. These two parliaments talked for weeks and eventually succeeded in enacting one law and one only. That law contained only one provision: it decreed an increase in the salaries of all members of parliament!” (Emphasis Breasted’s)

\(^{83}\) Due to his poor relations with the American Minister, Breasted had schemed with the State Department to leave the Minister out of the conception stage and to bring him in only at the last minute, for the official audience with the King. The Department agreed and urged him “...not to use this pompous and stupid old country doctor, from Ohio,
Of his dealings with the King, Breasted wrote that after “his initial fit of sulks” he was now much more cooperative. Perhaps this cooperation allowed Breasted to be gracious towards him and to describe him as a man interested in science. ⁸⁴ Breasted had a very high opinion of Hassanein Bey. Hassanein was an Oxford graduate and a man of science, and strongly believed that the museum and research institute – “those splendid buildings over there on the island” – must be built as a “symbol of American friendship for Egypt.” Of Ziwar Pasha, he also had a very favorable opinion. It helped that Ziwar apparently agreed on the need for foreign scientists in Egypt. ⁸⁵

To illustrate Ziwar’s point to Fosdick – and his own – Breasted described his encounters with Ministers in the Egyptian government who were sympathetic to his cause and who agreed with Breasted that Egypt had not produced her own scientists. For example, the Minister of Education (Maher Pasha) lamented to Breasted that there was only one modern Egyptian who had ever learned to read ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. ⁸⁶ To Breasted, the solution lay in a small town product.” See, Goode, Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919-1941, 105.

⁸⁴ The King had financed Hassanein Bey’s Sahara explorations.

⁸⁵ Breasted to Fosdick, February 8, 1925, folder 261, box 25, series 2E, RG III, OMR, RAC.

⁸⁶ Here, Maher Pasha was referring to Ahmed Pasha Kamal. Maher told Breasted that Kamal had prepared a manuscript for a book in Arabic on the monuments of Egypt, but Lacau felt it need some revisions before publication. Kamal in the meantime had passed away and there was no Egyptian scholar in his wake who could make the necessary revisions. In Whose Pharaohs? Reid writes about Ahmed Kamal’s struggle for acceptance in a field dominated by Europeans and uses this to explain the larger struggle for Egyptian Egyptologists. Kamal’s progress as an Egyptologist was a combination of passion for Egyptology, hard work, numerous publications and internal European rivalry, which sometimes resulted in the promotion of an Egyptian over a rival European. Kamal attended the School for Egyptology in Cairo, opened by the German Egyptologist, Henri Brugsch. But the Director-General of the EAS at the time, Mariette Pasha, refused to hire graduates from the school. When Gaston Maspero replaced Mariette as Director-General of the EAS, the policy was overturned. Mariette’s prejudice against the school and its graduates was only one of several obstacles that Egyptians faced – from Europeans – as they tried to achieve
creating more posts for Europeans, instead of addressing the problem directly. He complained that the government refused to create these additional posts, resulting in a loss to science.

In this same letter, Breasted reported that when the project was presented to Ziwar Pasha, the latter discussed it with his Council of Ministers and requested changes to the original terms and conditions. The Breasted-Rockefeller viewpoint of this account is best summarized in a report prepared by Chauncey Belknap, on his voyage back to New York in which he carried the Egyptian government’s revisions. Belknap wrote that due to repeated warnings to the Egyptian government of Rockefeller’s almost-certain resistance to major changes to the Indenture, the government had dropped many of its original requests. He stated that the pared down version of revisions that were being submitted to Rockefeller, were required to make the project “legally and politically feasible.”

He justified his (and Breasted’s) decision to proceed with the presentation to the King, instead of waiting for the political situation to further improve. Aside from the British army’s improved standing, they believed that the government of Ziwar Pasha would not last much longer. (Elections were expected in April or May). Ziwar was “reasonable”, “enlightened” and “receptive to suggestions of international cooperation,” as opposed to the nationalist party that was likely to succeed him. Belknap described the latter as a “low breed of nationalist politician

some standing in the field. See, Donald M. Reid, Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).


88 Belknap wrote, “Our first plan was simpler and more direct, but these are virtues which appeal more to western than to oriental minds.”
who misleads his helpless countrymen with the cry of ‘Egypt for the Egyptians’.” Belknap’s statement can be read as a hypocritical view of Egyptian nationalism, but a closer reading perhaps reveals that Belknap sincerely believed in Egypt’s inability to self-govern. Politicians advocating Egyptian nationalism were, in Belknap’s opinion, misleading their countrymen, whereas politicians who ‘understood’ that Egypt needed foreign assistance, were “enlightened.”

Belknap writes that the Americans were advised to have the project a “fait accompli” before the new party came into power. Belknap and Breasted were reassured by Europeans familiar with Egyptian ways, that “the Egyptians have great respect for an accomplished fact.” As Judge Percival (the English Judicial Adviser to the Egyptian government) said:

> It is a long and troublesome process to bring these people to make up their minds, but once a matter has been settled, it is always a surprise to see how quickly they forget their objections and accept the new fact. 89

Percival’s statement (and Belknap’s earlier statement) underscores Western conception of Egypt and Egyptians. The West did not believe that Egypt was ready to face the responsibilities of administration and maintenance of its antiquities, its future, and its governance. Their protests did not amount to much and they could be easily maneuvered to accept their reality. The decision was made to proceed.

Of the King’s hostile reception of the project, Belknap expressed surprise that Fua’d did not immediately accept the gift, given his recent unpopularity. The project would have boosted his image. Belknap writes that, “There was a string tied to the gift, and he [the King] thought

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more about the string than he did about the gift.” However, the King changed his mind rather quickly. Belknap’s twenty-one page document also included a four page section titled, “Egyptian Vanity,” in which he attributed the obstacles in the path of the team to said characteristic:

Vanity, an overweening, absurd and, to westerners, often incredible vanity, is the predominant trait of the Egyptian character. It is a vanity which places appearances ahead of realities, and will accept the most disagreeable dose if it is properly sugar-coated.

Egyptian vanity was the opposite of Anglo-Saxon traits:

… “amour proper.” The trait of character to which they [Egyptians] refer is at the opposite pole from the sturdy, self-respect of the Anglo-Saxon, proud of his independence and resentful of intrusion upon it.

These are interesting observations: Belknap has disdain for Egyptian vanity, but he was banking on it for the project’s approval. Egyptian refusal to immediately accept the project is not seen as a sign of “self-respect” or “independence,” rather it was seen as Oriental subterfuge or vanity.

90 King Fua’d apparently sent the following message to Belknap and Breasted after his initial hostile treatment of the proposal:

“The King is sincerely grateful for the Donor’s magnificent offer, and he wants exactly what you want, so far as administration so concerned. He knows Egypt has no scientists, and that there must be western control. If the gift had been made to him outright, he would have created just such a Commission as you plan, to operate the museum. But he must be on guard against criticism for seeming to acquiesce in any transfer of the great collections to foreign control. The Egyptian people have just received the gift of independence, and he must do nothing to wound their self-esteem. He hopes a solution can be found which will enable the Egyptian Government to participate, or at least to appear to participate, in the administration, not merely through the ministers who are members of the Commission, but in some more direct way.”


92 Ibid.
After this digression on Egyptian vanity, Belknap turned back to the actual negotiations. Ziwar asked Belknap to discuss the terms and conditions with Piola Caselli, the Royal Counselor. The main objection to the gift was that under Egyptian constitution only the Egyptian state could manage and operate museums. Antiquities were considered a natural resource. For a foreign corporation (the Egyptian Museum Commission) to take over this work, a special law would have to be passed. Even if the Cabinet (Council of Ministers) approved the proposal, Parliament could block passage of this law. Caselli and his Egyptian colleague, Bedawy Pasha, appealed for concessions that would allow the “appearance” of some kind of Egyptian control. For example, they suggested that the employees of the Commission be considered Egyptian officials, and that their appointment should be through dual control of the government and the Commission. Belknap and Breasted had wired New York, enquiring if this would be possible. Fosdick and Rockefeller wired back saying that it was absolutely unacceptable. (The Breasted-Rockefeller team seemed divided over the issue. Rockefeller had never been to Egypt. Meanwhile, Breasted and Belknap were on the ground and face-to-face with the Egyptians and could see the lengths to which they had gone in order to find a solution for the project. They probably began to realize the short-sightedness of their initial assumption that the project would be acceptable to the Egyptians exactly as the team had conceived of it.)

After Rockefeller refused to compromise over the Egyptian government’s inability to select museum staff, the government asked instead for veto power, which was also denied. As a last resort, they asked for veto power over the appointment of the Director of the museum. They lost this point too. The disappointed Egyptians then came up with a compromise that Belknap
believed would be acceptable to Rockefeller and Fosdick. The Commission’s functions – the administrative and financial control – were to be separated out. The Egyptians recommended creating another organizational body, the Egyptian Archaeology Foundation (EAF), for financial administration of Rockefeller’s donation. It could be incorporated in Great Britain, as the Breasted-Rockefeller team had desired. The Foundation would not include Egyptians; only two members each from Great Britain, France, and the United States. These same six members would be in the Commission as well, where the two Egyptian members would join them. The Commission would administer the museum, and its permanent President would be the Egyptian Minister of Public Works. In this way, the control and operations of the museum would remain an Egyptian government function, not that of an international corporation. Breasted and Belknap recognized how much the Egyptians had compromised in order to accommodate the proposal, and they wrote as much to Rockefeller.\(^\text{93}\)

On February 14\(^{th}\), Breasted and Charles apparently anticipating a leak, released a press statement hoping to control the news. Fosdick and Rockefeller reacted with dismay. The team – showing media savvy – had earlier taken the Associated Press into confidence regarding the project, so that when news of the project broke in Cairo, the press in the U.S. closely cooperated with the Breasted-Rockefeller team in its coverage.\(^\text{94}\) Regardless, once the story had broken, it

\(^{93}\) Breasted to Rockefeller, February 8, 1926, folder 261, box 25, series 2E, Record Group III, OMR, RAC.

\(^{94}\) Rockefeller to Adolph S. Ochs at the NY times, February 20, 1926, folder 259, box 25, series 2E, RG III, OMR, RAC. See also, Rockefeller to Mr. Cooper (General Manager The Associated Press), February 20, 1926, folder 259, box 25, series 2E, RG III, OMR, RAC.
picked up quickly and the team was unable to control all subsequent publicity, perceptions of the
project (though these were generally positive), and even statements from their own team.95

Rockefeller personally received responses and reactions from his U.S. colleagues and
friends. Cyrus McCormick, an American businessman, wrote to Rockefeller cautioning him that
any agreement must take into account Sa’d Zaghlul’s wishes.96 McCormick had visited Egypt
and had seen the Cairo Museum firsthand. He believed that the existing museum was actually
sufficient and that only a new building may be needed to serve as an annex. He suggested that
perhaps the Breasted-Rockefeller project was too ambitious in proposing two new buildings and
a corporation that would control Egyptian antiquity. He understood Breasted’s ambition, and
seemed to suggest that he had overreached.

Meanwhile, the team in New York reviewed Egyptian modifications to the proposal,
accepted some and altered others, and sent them back to Egypt with Belknap. In a letter to
Breasted on March 22nd, 1926, Rockefeller believed that the concessions made to Egypt – with
some safeguards – should be enough. He wrote:

95 “Egypt Accepts Museum, Says Rockefeller Aid,” New York Herald Tribune, February 19, 1926, folder 259, box 25, series 2E, RG III, OMR, RAC. The worst damage was done by an interview with Bosworth who, believing that the project had been approved, said as much to the press and released the details of the project including the control of antiquities for 30 years at the wish of Rockefeller Jr.

96 Cyrus McCormick to Rockefeller, February 19, 1926, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG III, OMR, RAC. McCormick described the events of spring 1925, when the King “prorogued the parliament” to void an overwhelming majority received by Zaghlul. Without Zaghlul’s consent, nothing would come of the museum project. As far as the security situation in Egypt, the only elements keeping things under control were the “moral and military power of the English.” If the English were to leave, “intelligent observers of political events” believed that Egypt would be fought over by Turkey or Italy, and in either case the outcome would be unfortunate.
Whatever the outcome may be, and of course of that we are uncertain, we have the feeling that everything possible has been done to get the Egyptian Government to permit itself to be helped in this important and far-reaching enterprise.  

Charles Breasted’s view that not a single change had been made was untrue. Rockefeller and Fosdick’s modifications included the creation of the post of Vice President under the permanent President of the Commission. The Vice President would not be an Egyptian. He was entrusted with the primary workings of the Commission and the President was reduced to a figurehead. The Egyptian government would have no say in the Vice President’s appointment. In an internal communication, Rockefeller’s lawyers advised Breasted that he need not explicitly call attention to this (and some other) changes. But they also warned him that he had to use his judgment. Above all, Rockefeller had to be protected against any future charge that he was “trying to put one over the Egyptians.”

The modified proposal was presented to Ziwar Pasha, who apparently rejected it outright. Breasted, under instructions from New York, refused to make further changes. He gave the Egyptian government a fixed amount of time in which to respond and change its mind. When nothing came of this, Rockefeller withdrew the offer.

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97 Rockefeller to Breasted, March 22, 1926, folder 261, box 25, series 2E, Record Group III, OMR, RAC.

98 Belknap to Breasted, March 10, 1926, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.
On May 1, 1926, the Egyptian government presented its point of view regarding the project's failure, in a communique in the French Cairo daily, *L'Espoir*. In it, the Council of Ministers (the Prime Minister's cabinet) presented their case. The document demonstrates Egyptian willingness to cooperate and compromise with the Americans. But it also demonstrates the difficulty of their endeavor. The Prime Minister and his Council of Ministers were not on the same page necessarily, but both were trying in their own way to accept the proposal, while asserting Egypt's right to control its own antiquity in the face of absolute Western opposition to such an idea.

In a text devoid of Egyptian vanity and any associated "mistiness," the Government stated the facts. The fact was that when His Excellency, the President of the Council (Ziwar Pasha) received the gift, he asked his contentieux (Royal Counsels) to meet with Belknap in order to understand the terms and conditions:

…it was not a question of an outright gift but of a gift subject to conditions. It was, therefore, necessary to determine the extent of these conditions and to consider the possibility of reconciling them with Egyptian legislation.

The communiqué then stated that the task was difficult because Rockefeller had presented the Egyptian government with detailed terms and conditions, and expected the government to agree to them without any changes. After outlining the terms and conditions, the document went on to state the problems raised by the Indenture. The first problem was that a statute was necessary to

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99 "[Egyptian] Government Communiqué on the Rockefeller Gift to Egypt: (Translated from the French original, appearing in L'Espoir, a Cairo daily, of May 1, 1926)," May, 1926, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG 3, OMR, RAC.
accept the gift; as per the Egyptian constitution, only the Egyptian government could control Egyptian antiquity. A foreign corporation was not allowed to do so without the passage of a special legislation. Even then, it could control Egyptian antiquity only for a short period. In order to bypass this and simply receive an Executive Order, the Commission would have to be an Egyptian government body, but Rockefeller was unwilling to accept this. The Egyptians’ solution in the end was to create the EAF, which took over financial control of the endowment and its income. The Commission would now just control the museum. To “harmonize” their functions, the six European members of the Commission (leaving aside the two Egyptian members) constituted the Foundation’s membership. The two Egyptian members in the Commission were the Minister of Public Works and the Director-General of the EAS. The Egyptian government stipulated that if the Director-General were a foreigner, a second Egyptian member should be appointed: the Minister of Public Education. After this point, the communiqué seems to suggest a division within the Egyptian government. It states that though the division of labor made the project legally feasible, it resulted in reduced Egyptian participation in it. With the creation of the Foundation, there were now two Egyptians to twelve Europeans and Americans. The document suggests that the revised agreement was never shown to the Council of Ministers. Instead, it was kept between the contentieux, Belknap, and Ziwar. This raises the question of whether the Council of Ministers would have agreed to the changes.

When Rockefeller accepted the proposed changes, modifying them in the process, the contract was presented to the Council of Ministers. The Cabinet raised the issues of Egyptian under-representation independently, and searched for a way to resolve that. In addition, they had

100 Six in the Commission and six in the Foundation.
to resolve the modifications that Rockefeller made to the Egyptians’ earlier draft, specifically the introduction of a Vice-President in the body of the Commission.

The Council prepared several suggestions. First, the appointment of members of the Foundation, and the foreign members of the Commission and the Vice President would have to be approved by the Egyptian government. (Something that Ziwar and the contentieux had asked for in the first round of negotiations and that Rockefeller had already rejected, with the exception of the Vice President’s appointment, since this post was a new creation that the Egyptians were learning of for the first time). Second, in accordance with the Egyptian constitution and “in conformity with the intentions of the donor to assist Egypt to assume her responsibilities for the conservation of her antiquities,” preference was to be given to Egyptians in the appointment of museum and institute staff. Finally, the parliament would need to approve the gift. The communique stated that while the Council was putting together these proposed changes, and was fully prepared to accept the gift if said changes were accepted, it was surprised by Rockefeller’s withdrawal of the offer.

The government’s version of the project’s failure contradicts Charles Breasted’s version. The interaction between Ziwar and Breasted, during which the former apparently told the latter that the proposal was “absolutely unacceptable,” is only documented in Charles Breasted’s book. Charles was not actually present at this meeting. Furthermore, he was not a neutral observer and recorder of events, as evidenced by his statement that Rockefeller had not made a single change to the Egyptians’ first draft. In the absence of accurate documentation, the Egyptian communique
and the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s lengthy correspondence assume importance. The merits of the gift and the reasons for its failure arise from these considerations and analyses.

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A third form of documentation also exists: the architectural design of the project. This can be culled for clues and evidence of American intention. As part of his campaign to gather support for the project, Breasted had earlier presented it to the British archaeologist, Cecil Firth. Firth was active in Egypt at the time of the Breasted-Rockefeller proposal, and he had a solid working relationship with Pierre Lacau, who he believed was acting in the best interests of Egypt. Firth saw U.S. control of Egyptian antiquity as a problematic proposal and wrote as much to Breasted:

Would your proposal have the slightest chance at success shorn of the attractive bait of a fine museum[?] This is I think the acid test.101

I argue that the design of the proposed New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute embodied Breasted’s concept of “obligation” and “opportunity.” Furthermore, the design, and its beautiful water-color illustrations, was used to cast the Breasted-Rockefeller “gift” in a softer light. The next chapter analyzes the importance of architecture and site with respect to the Breasted-Rockefeller gift.

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Proposed site plan showing the museum and research institute buildings overlaying the British barracks.
Source: Oriental Institute Archives.
Site and architecture were a fundamental part of the strategy of selling enhanced Western control of Egyptian antiquity to the Egyptians. At the same time, the two stately and majestic buildings and the original site with its important political associations would be used to send the message of U.S. ‘arrival’ in both Egypt and the field of Egyptology, to “opinion leaders” around the world. Therefore, from the very beginning, site, style, and materiality were major considerations in Breasted’s conception of the museum:

Under this land, the limestone lies thirty or forty feet deep. Rising on imperishable piers of concrete based on this limestone, the new museum should adorn this square. It should be built of massive white limestone masonry, a structure as enduring as the Pyramids themselves, and suited to shelter the priceless collections within its walls to the end of time. It makes my blood tingle to think of it even in imagination!

In the above excerpt from the 1924 foundational letter to Raymond Fosdick, Breasted envisioned a building and site that would suggest arrival, permanence, and solidity. Following in the footsteps of Napoleon and Cromer, he used comparisons with ancient Egypt to legitimize the project’s imperial ambitions. He invoked the “enduring” Pyramids as symbols not just of enduring construction, but also of a great empire and civilization, and used them to link the greatness of ancient Egypt and its monuments to the great mission of the modern U.S. civilization and the monuments it proposed to erect in Egypt.

These monuments – the museum and research institute – were designed as an elegant and sprawling Beaux-Arts complex, beautifully illustrated in sixteen watercolor presentation

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1 Breasted to Fosdick, October 7, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis, Fosdick and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.
drawings by the renowned architectural draftsman, William Walcot (Fig. 6-21). Originally, the proposal book would have included a seventeenth drawing: a map showing the location of the buildings (Fig. 23-24). Breasted instructed the architect, William Welles Bosworth, to prepare this drawing using a Baedeker travel map as template. On this drawing, the museum and research institute were inserted in the location of the British occupied Kasr al-Nil barracks, which in turn were completely erased from the map. The buildings were shown in close vicinity of the existing French-run Cairo Museum. But after the failed negotiations with the British, the Breasted-Rockefeller team switched to the new site across the Nile on to the tip of the Gezira Island, and this drawing was not used (Fig. 22, 5).

This chapter uses four types of spatial analyses to examine Breasted’s vision of the United States’ civilizational and imperial mission, as expressed in the New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute: architecture, site, interior circulation, and geographic representation in maps. Breasted based his arguments for a new museum on the “tawdry” construction and design of the existing museum and its lack of facilities for “Science.”

I begin with an architectural and urban analysis of the preceding iterations of Egyptian museums in Cairo, leading up to the French-built version (which still exists today and which the U.S. museum would have displaced). I briefly analyze the design of this museum to unpack the French ambitions embodied within it. In the third section, I describe Breasted’s vision for the new museum building and the selection of William Welles Bosworth as architect. Excepting one important and isolated communication

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2 Breasted to William Welles Bosworth (hereafter designated Bosworth), July 19, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Bosworth, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

3 Breasted to Fosdick, October 7, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis, Fosdick and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.
between Breasted and Bosworth, the team seems to have unanimously fallen behind the (neo-classical / neo-Pharaonic) Beaux-Arts scheme. What was the significance of this style? Why was it chosen over others, such as the Islamic revival style, which was actually quite prevalent in Cairo at the time? These questions are considered in this section. In the fourth section, I describe the final design of the museum and examine other factors that influenced it: Breasted’s positivist worldview, Taylorist concepts, references to ancient Egyptian architecture, and precedents set by other (U.S.) museums at the time. The political negotiations over the original site are covered in the previous chapter, and in the fifth section in this chapter, I turn to the symbolic and ideological considerations for the selection of the original site. Next, I focus on the interior of the museum, and examine Breasted’s prescribed circulation through it. What can we deduce from the hierarchy of spaces and the choice of artifacts in each space? What do these decisions tell us about the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s version of Egyptian – and world – history? Finally, I focus on two important objects (equipment) in the Research Institute: a map and a globe, both of which reveal Breasted’s larger mission and ambition.

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**A Collection of Egyptian Museums**

The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute – had the project succeeded – would have been the sixth iteration since 1835 of an Egyptian Museum in Cairo. All six dealt almost exclusively with Pharaonic Art, leaving out Egypt’s Islamic Art – and to varying degrees – the Coptic and Greco-Roman periods. The division and classification of the country’s material culture into four (4) distinct periods and fields of knowledge was crystallized at the turn of the
twentieth century by the creation of four (4) separate museums in Cairo and Alexandria – each
dealing exclusively with a different period. Egypt’s European community initiated the division at
a time of increasing European political and cultural influence in the country. 4

Museum critics argue that contrary to earlier thinking, the museum has never stood
“outside of time and historical processes.” Rather, it is a “committed participant” in the creation
of history. 5 Indeed, the history of the division of Egypt’s material culture and the creation of
Cairo’s Egyptian museums reflect the struggle between Egyptian nationalists and Westerners to
use Pharaonic antiquity to their respective political ends, such as imperialism or nationalism. 6
This history also reflects internal Western rivalries. The architecture, siting, and program of the
successive iterations of Egyptian museums in Cairo, articulate these struggles and rivalries, and
reflect the division of culture in Egypt.

4 Donald M. Reid, Whose Pharaohs? : Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to
World War I (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1-2, 6-7, 258-59. The Coptic Museum was actually
created by Marcus Simaika, a Copt. But instead of viewing this as an exception to the rule, we should understand
Simaika’s motivations within the context of the European creation of the Egyptian Museum, the Museum of Arab
Art, and the Greco-Roman Museum – all of which had been created prior to the Coptic Museum (which was
founded in 1908). Simaika used the museum to highlight the importance of the Coptic community and history to
Egypt. In the process, he unwittingly helped further the “division of culture.” Reid describes Simaika as a “pioneer
who struggled to kindle enthusiasm for the antiquities and history of a vital phase or aspect of the national past.”
Simaika was also influenced by European writings and scholarship, and his vision for the Coptic museum grew out
of these.

5 Tim Barringer, “Introduction,” in Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, eds., Colonialism and the Object: Empire,

6 See Reid, Whose Pharaohs? : Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World
War I, 9-10. See also, James F. Goode, Negotiating for the Past : Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the
Muhammad ‘Ali’s proposed, but never built, museum in 1835 was the first iteration of an Egyptian museum in Egypt, followed by Auguste Mariette’s Bulaq Museum in Cairo.\(^7\) (Fig. 25-26). The Bulaq Museum was temporary, to be replaced by a grander complex, envisioned by Mariette and Isma’il Pasha. Isma’il imagined this new museum as an inclusive institution with separate buildings for Arab, Greek and Pharaonic Art.\(^8\) He hoped to include the \textit{Institut Egyptien} in this complex, which he imagined as a “true scientific center of Egypt.” Mariette had several sites in mind for this complex, but eventually chose the tip of the Gezira – the same spot that the Breasted-Rockefeller team would reconcile itself to, six decades later.

Perhaps Isma’il conceived of the proposed museum as part of his modernization scheme for Cairo, which had already resulted in urban changes, construction of the Khedivial (Royal) Opera House, and construction of new bridges and palaces, all in preparation for the Suez Canal opening ceremonies in which the Khedive expected to entertain European monarchs and dignitaries. Egypt’s bankruptcy put the museum project on hold, and when it started back up, the Europeans, who were now firmly in control of both Egyptian antiquity and Egypt itself, directly guided its mission.

\(^7\) Reid, \textit{Whose Pharaohs? : Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I}, 104. At the Bulaq, Mariette renovated existing courts in a neo-Pharaonic style. He may have been influenced by other neo-Pharaonic buildings and interiors of the time, such as the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly (1812) and the interior of the Neues Museum in Berlin (1850). The arrangement of artifacts at the Bulaq museum resembled Champollion’s scientific arrangement at the Louvre, but Mariette occasionally deviated from this in favor of a more aesthetic layout, which he felt would attract local Egyptians.

\(^8\) Ibid. All information regarding Isma’il Pasha’s museum, has been synthesized from Reid’s book.
France’s Cairo Museum

In between the transfer from Bulaq to the new French-built Cairo museum (1889-1902), the collection was housed at Isma’il’s palace in Giza – a move that was opposed and derided by concerned individuals and archaeological societies (such as the Society for Preservation of the Monuments of Ancient Egypt). The Giza Palace had what was described as a “half-French, half Oriental” style that was deemed “incongruous” and unsuitable for Pharaonic artifacts (Fig. 27). The neo-classical façade of the new museum must have seemed much more suitable – and familiar. European museums at the time, such as the Altes Museum in Berlin and the British Museum in London, were built mostly in neo-classical styles (Fig. 28).

The architecture and urban setting of the new museum represented the political and cultural climate of Egypt in 1902. The French saw themselves as founders of Egyptology and leading scholars in the field, in comparison to other European scholars and “the savage ignorance of the Turks”. But in the face of British military presence in Egypt, the French aimed to set themselves apart as leaders in archaeology and to emphasize Egypt as their “archaeological protectorate.” To add to this, they (along with the British) were now in control of government departments in Egypt. Their power in Egypt, and their self-projection as leaders in the science of Egyptology, is reflected in the design of the Cairo Museum.

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9 Ibid., 193. The Giza Palace was built and decorated for Empress Eugene’s stay in Cairo, during the Suez Canal opening festivities.

10 Ibid., 192. The neo-classical tradition was by far the most prevalent style for museums at the time, such as the British Museum’s façade (built in 1901), the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s façade (added in 1902), the new building for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (1907-1909), and the Antiquities Museum designed by Antoine Vallaury in Istanbul (1891-1907).

11 E. de Verninac Saint-Maur as quoted in Ibid., 1. Saint-Maur was a French naval captain.
The French architect, Marcel Dourgnon, was chosen for the project. He designed the museum in the neo-classical tradition favored by the *École des Beaux-Arts*, France’s famed architectural academy¹² (Fig. 29). In order to relate the neo-classical façade to the collections within, Dourgnon included Pharaonic elements such as the pylons (inspired by ancient Egyptian temples), which framed the central entry arch and columns (Fig. 30). In his book, *Whose Pharaohs?* and his article, “French Egyptology and the Architecture of Orientalism,” Donald Malcolm Reid analyses Dourgnon’s design and finds in it further strong visual statements of a European, specifically French, claim to Egypt’s Pharaonic past. Honorary plaques on the façade placed ancient Greeks (who wrote about the Pharaonic past), and modern European scholars amongst the ancient Pharaohs themselves. France’s superiority in this science was literally inscribed on the façade; the plaques honored more French Egyptologists than those from any other country. Reid writes that the number of names awarded to each European power was determined by two principles: “scholarly achievement of the individual named (the ideal of scholarly internationalism) and the balance of foreign power in Egypt (competing imperialisms).”¹³ The balance of power seems to have won out; though the French did dominate

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¹² Dourgnon’s version of the Beaux-Arts tradition perhaps took its cue from Bramante’s Romanesque style, which was popularized by World Expositions, such as the Universal Exposition of 1900 in Paris. The Expo saw the design and construction of the Grand Palais and the Petit Palais, both of which were much-admired examples of the Beaux-Arts at the time. The competition for the Petit Palais was held in 1895, the same year as the competition for the French-built Cairo Museum. For more information on the Grand and Petit Palais see, Arthur Drexler et al., *The Architecture of the École Des Beaux-Arts* (New York Cambridge, Mass.: Museum of Modern Art; distributed by MIT Press, 1977).

the field for quite some time, in 1902 German Egyptologists such as Adolf Erman were equally – if not more – well-known. Germany, however, did not have the same influence in Egypt as the French and British, and this was evident on the façade. All major European Egyptologists were also represented by the installation of their busts in the museum’s garden, but French domination was again emphasized by an imposing statue of Mariette in this garden, and the naming of the street to the side of the museum, Shari’a Mariette Pasha.

No U.S. Egyptologists were named or honored, showing the lack of U.S. scholarship in the field and U.S. political power in Egypt. Though Breasted was active in Egyptology at this time, he and his U.S. contemporaries (such as George Reisner and Albert Lythgoe) were not that well known in the field. It would take several more years for the Oriental Institute – and for Breasted – to demonstrate the United States’ scholarly leadership in the field, and for the country to emerge as a player in Egyptian politics.

Local (native) Egyptologists – such as Ahmad Kamal who was active from 1881 to 1914 – were also excluded, sending a clear message to modern Egyptians that Egyptology was a European science and pursuit. However, the architect and sponsors did make a concession to the Egyptian sovereign. Abbas Pasha’s name appears above the entrance but, as Reid notes, it was in Latin and would have been incomprehensible to most Egyptians.14 The gesture signified his role

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14 Reid, Whose Pharaohs? : Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I.
as just a figurehead; a “collaborating elite” who had to nevertheless be acknowledged and granted some semblance of power by the empire(s).  

The museum was situated in Maidan al-Isma’ili’yah (Tahrir Square), in Isma’ili’yah, a modern (‘western’) quarter influenced by principles of French city planning. As a result of growing European influence in Cairo in the latter half of the nineteenth century, parts of the city had begun to take on the appearance of a Western city, resulting in the well-known phenomenon of a ‘dual city,’ with its ‘native’ quarters and its ‘European’ or ‘Western’ quarters. This modernization (Westernization) of Cairo was actually initiated by Egyptian rulers, particularly Isma’il Pasha, who was influenced by Western models. Today Tahrir Square is filled with buildings, but in 1902 it was fairly empty and imposing. It contained only two buildings: the museum and the British occupied Kasr al-nil barracks, respectively the symbols of French and British imperialism. The Square’s location in the so-called ‘Western’ quarter of the city emphasized the very ‘Western’ nature of this science, and Western (European) claim to it.


\[\text{17 Modernization was motivated by a desire to prepare Cairo for the Suez Canal opening ceremonies in 1869, when the Egyptians expected to entertain such foreign dignitaries as French Empress Eugenie of France. The urban changes were also motivated by problems of congestion and traffic in the older city, which later came to be called the “Arab” city. Urban changes resulted in the creation of boulevards radiating out from maydans. This “Haussmanization” of Cairo took place after Isma’il returned from his 1867 trip to Paris, where he met Baron Haussman. The larger result was a bifurcation of the city into what were perceived as “Arab” (native) quarters and “modern” (European) quarters, even though the urban changes were undertaken by the Egyptians (albeit with significant European architectural and engineering input).}\]
The creation of the Egyptian Museum coincided with the creation of the Museum for Arab Art (in 1900), the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria (in 1902), and the Coptic Museum (in 1908) (Fig. 31-33). Each was in an urban location and in an architectural style ‘appropriate’ to its contents (Fig. 34). Tourists – the main visitors – were instructed by early twentieth century guidebooks to visit the museums in “chronological” order, which meant visiting the Egyptian Museum in Cairo first, taking the train to the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, returning to Cairo for the Coptic Museum in the old quarters of Cairo, and ending their journey at the Museum of Arab Art, located in the ‘Arab’ or ‘Muslim’ quarters.18

In his essay, “The Crystalline Veil and the Phallomorphic Imaginary,” Donald Preziosi links the creation of the four (4) museums in Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century to the colonial exhibitionary order displayed in the essay title’s referents: the Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition. He writes of Europe’s vision of itself as the “brain of the earth’s body” and the Crystal Palace as a “laboratory table” upon which all things and peoples could be scientifically examined, objectively displayed, and categorized. Objects represented the cultures and individuals that produced them, and Art had a history that was coterminous with the history of the people who produced it. Like art history and the colonial exhibitionary order, the museum


was a “pantographic instrument for projecting that larger abstraction, ‘Egypt’, up from its relics and minutiae.”

Europeans emphasized, and were primarily interested in, Egypt’s Pharaonic past over its Coptic and Islamic pasts. By creating separate museums for each period, by assigning the name “Egyptian” to the museum housing almost exclusively Pharaonic art, and by giving this museum “urban centrality”, the Europeans created a museological order that reflected their “perspectival” view of Egyptian history. This positivist exhibitionary order (or perspectival view) reasserted itself in 1926, in the design and urban location of the New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute.

Breasted argued for new buildings on the basis of the state of disrepair of the existing museum; the French museum — according to him — was obsolete as a result of shoddy construction, poor aesthetic decisions, and lack of scientific facilities for the Egyptologist. Only about twenty years after it was opened to the public, he described the museum as dilapidated and overcrowded in the foundational letter to Fosdick in 1924. Members of the team who visited the museum firsthand, supported Breasted’s opinions. In another letter to Fosdick, he wrote that Bosworth had deemed the building “grotesquely ugly,” during his reconnaissance trip to Cairo in early 1925. At Breasted’s request, he inspected the existing building for structural insecurity, (which the former suspected):

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20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Breasted to Fosdick, February 26, 1925, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG III, OMR, RAC.
I conclude that it [structural insecurity] is so; for when the building was new it failed to stand up in more places than one, and when the French architect who built it was reproached for its insecurity he proudly replied, "Messieurs, je suis artiste." 23

Falling ceilings, flooding basements and generally cramped quarters had put the greatest collection in the world in "serious danger." 24 Apart from practical and real dangers in the museum, Breasted commented disparagingly on the design itself:

Like all of the tawdry buildings put up in Egypt by Italian and French architects, the Museum is built of brick masonry, plastered over with a hard stucco imitation of stone. This seems particularly regrettable in view of the fact that vast limestone quarries arise immediately east and south-east of Cairo, and furnish a magnificent quality of white limestone almost like marble. Moreover the masonry and stucco surfaces of the Museum are obviously very badly done. 25

In addition to neglecting to use majestic, readily available material, Breasted also wrote of French negligence and lethargy in the maintenance of the museum, such as the repair of damaged staircases, ceilings etc. French negligence also extended to the scientific facilities required of such a museum; though the library had a wonderful collection of books, it was housed in a windowless room and was closed two days a week, resulting in serious loss of time for the "visiting scientist." Summing up the situation, Breasted wrote that even if the collections

23 Breasted to William Welles Bosworth (hereafter designated as Bosworth), February 9, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Bosworth, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

24 Breasted to Fosdick, October 7, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis, Fosdick and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

25 Breasted to Fosdick, October 7, 1924, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis, Fosdick and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.
were to survive in such a dangerous, unremarkable building, the lack of facilities and of good lighting would make it “impossible for Science to utilize them.”

It is significant then that — by Breasted’s account — the museum that symbolized French authority and supremacy in Egyptology and French power in Egypt was, after only two decades of existence, dilapidated, crowded and hostile to ‘Science.’ This last was the ultimate insult to the French (who saw themselves as restorers of science to Egypt), and Breasted’s greatest weapon, since he predicated both his career as a ‘new’ Orientalist, and U.S. dominance in the field, on a scientific approach to Near Eastern archaeology. The existing museum’s structural, architectural, and scientific defects were physical signs of the end to French domination over Egyptology, Egyptian antiquity, and the power structure in Egypt.

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After inspecting the existing museum, Bosworth surveyed the barracks site, and worked out a preliminary plan for the museum and research institute and its site layout, which Breasted enthusiastically endorsed in letters to Fosdick and Rockefeller. Heading back to Europe, Bosworth fleshed out the design, keeping in close touch with Breasted. Working with Walcot, he produced watercolor illustrations for the proposal book.

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26 Ibid.

Bosworth and the Beaux-Arts

Though Breasted enthusiastically approved of Bosworth’s neo-Pharaonic – early Beaux-Arts scheme, he initially instructed the architect to look elsewhere for models:

I wish you would think about the feasibility of a new building in Saracen style, - especially as represented by the mosques of Cairo. Such a mosque as that of Sultan Hassan below the citadel suggests some imposing and grandiose exteriors; while the court of Mohammad Ali’s mosque, with reservations for its Stamboul [Istanbul] tawdriness, furnishes interesting hints of what a museum court in this style might be. All this brings up the whole question of the appropriateness of such a style, for a museum building, which might thus obtrude itself upon the observer at the expense of the collections it shelters. 28

This is the only recorded incidence of anyone involved in the project considering the “Saracen” (Islamic) architectural style for the new buildings. The eventual dismissal of the style as an appropriate representation for an “Egyptian” museum shows that the team ultimately considered it inappropriate or incongruent – despite its preponderance in Egypt at the time. Since the museum’s architecture had to portray ‘arrival’ and ‘solidity’ the rejection of the Islamic style as appropriate shows that the team believed that this style could not convey the necessary messages.

The Sultan Hassan mosque is a Mamluk structure built between 1356 and 1363. Mohammad Ali’s mosque was begun in 1828 and finished around the time of the Viceroy’s

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28 James Henry Breasted to Bosworth, February 9, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Bosworth, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA. (This is an ambiguous passage. I read it as Breasted’s suggestion to Bosworth to consider a Saracen style building. But, it can also be read as Breasted’s ambivalent or non-committal ‘response’ to Bosworth’s suggestion for the same. In the absence of such a suggestion by Bosworth in the archives, the first reading seems more appropriate).
death in 1849. The former was the greatest mosque in the Muslim world at the time of its construction. Following a shortage of labor in Egypt at the time, it was built and decorated by craftsmen from all over the Mamluk empire, and as a result is an eclectic, hybrid structure featuring architectural elements and details not typically found in Cairo. The mosque and the funerary building create a majestic, beautiful brick complex of Mamluk origins, but their massing and fenestrations also imbue the buildings with a contemporary aesthetic²⁹ (Fig. 35-36).

Muhammad Ali’s mosque was the largest one built in the first half of the nineteenth century. The admittedly unattractive structure is also the most imposing one in the Citadel of Cairo.³⁰ It departed from other nineteenth-century Cairene structures by consciously rejecting the prevalent Mamluk architectural style and instead adopting the Ottoman style as a means of politically confronting the Ottoman Porte. But the mosque also featured European and ancient Egyptian influences, both of which had come to Egypt through Istanbul, and through European architects practicing in Egypt (Fig. 37). By adopting the Ottoman style and by using architectural elements from European and ancient Egyptian traditions, it created a break with the Mamluk architectural tradition in Cairo and with Mamluk rule. The introduction of the new style heralded the new


³⁰ The mosque’s construction and location had symbolic meaning, since there was no practical need for it; an existing mosque adjacent to it could have served all congregational needs. Rather, the mosque was built as part of Muhammad ‘Ali’s legacy in Egypt, and by building it over an existing Mamluk “hall of justice,” the mosque symbolically – and literally – replaced the old rulers, their system, and their architecture.
ruling dynasty of Muhammad ‘Ali. Historians consider the structure as the first modern (and not necessarily, Western) Islamic structure. 31

Thus, both the Sultan Hassan and Mohammad ‘Ali mosques are historically and architecturally significant examples of the Islamic style and the Islamic revival style respectively, and both demonstrate how different architectural traditions and elements can be incorporated within Islamic architecture. Furthermore, Islamic revival architecture was popular in Cairo in the early twentieth century. European architects actually introduced the style to Cairo; Europeans had studied Islamic architecture out of intellectual curiosity, but also to ‘know’ the lands and people they wished to rule. The style was used in both private villas and public structures, such as the palace for Khayri Bay (1870), the Museum of Arab Art (1902) (Fig. 31), the Ministry of Waqf building (1915), and the first national bank of Egypt, the Bank Misr headquarters (1927). In Europe and the West, Islamic revival was considered appropriate for buildings serving exotic functions, but in the Islamic world, the style began to assume national and religious significance. 32 Breasted may have considered this style in order to communicate with Egypt’s modern-day inhabitants, in opposition to the French-built museum’s indifference to them. 33 He may have truly admired the style. But though he brought it to Bosworth’s attention,


33 We do not know if Breasted imagined a building solely in an Islamic revival style, or whether he imagined a hybrid aesthetic, which could take elements of “Saracen” style and combine it with the neo-classical – the prevalent museum style. One such example would have been the Indo-Saracenic Victoria Memorial in India (built between 1906 and 1921), which combined Mughal elements with Britain’s favored Gothic Revival style.
Breasted remained unsure if it were actually appropriate for the collection, or whether it might instead “intrude” on the observer. He deferred to the architect.

Bosworth was known for his discretion and for his ability to handle demanding jobs and clients, but he was able to manage these expectations without compromising his design concept and aesthetic vision. Perhaps he steered Breasted towards the Beaux-Arts style because he deemed the Islamic style ‘inappropriate’ for housing Egyptian antiquity. Perhaps he deemed it inappropriate for what was really a Western institution. Maybe the decision in favor of the Beaux-Arts was determined by the fact that most museum buildings in Europe and the U.S. at the time were built in a Beaux-Arts style. But most likely, Islamic revival was ultimately rejected because the team rejected modern Egyptian claim to Egyptian antiquity. With a few exceptions, most of Breasted and Bosworth’s discussions about the architecture of the museum took place in person when they met in Cairo and the archives are unfortunately light in matters of design decision. However, with some background knowledge of Bosworth, of his past collaborations with Rockefeller, and of the importance of U.S. affinity for the Beaux-Arts style, we can speculate why this style prevailed.

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Letters between Rockefeller, Breasted, and Martin Ryerson (a Trustee for the Field Museum in Chicago and Rockefeller’s advisor in matters relating to museum design) show that

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35 In the proposal book, Breasted presented Bosworth’s vision of the museum’s architecture, “In the words of the architect himself, “it is to be given a treatment as to style-expression which relates it harmoniously with what it is to contain, or as Viollet-le-Duc phrases it in his definition of style, ‘an expression appropriate in every respect to its’ use’.”
Rockefeller chose Bosworth for the initial design phase and presentation drawings, primarily because he could be trusted to keep the project confidential. Bosworth was Rockefeller’s personal architect and had catered to several other high profile clients, including V. E. Macy (one of the Trustees for the New Egyptian Museum). Bosworth’s connections in highly respected circles and his self-projection as a “gentleman’s architect,” assured Rockefeller that he could be trusted with this sensitive project.

Bosworth’s first job for Rockefeller (whom he met through Macy) was a landscape design commission. Over the course of their acquaintance, Bosworth designed townhouses, bridges, international houses, churches etc. Through these design commissions, the two developed a close relationship and Bosworth began to influence Rockefeller’s art and architectural pursuits. For example, he introduced Rockefeller to restoration needs at Versailles, Fontainebleau, and Reims, which resulted in a restoration project that spanned twelve years and

36 Rockefeller to Ryerson, August 14, 1925, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG III, OMR, RAC.


39 Interestingly, it was Bosworth who later strayed farthest from the team’s tightly orchestrated press release and publicity scheme. Misunderstanding the situation and unaware of recent developments, he told journalists in Paris that the project had been approved by the Egyptian government, while the government and the Breasted-Rockefeller team were actually in the middle of sensitive negotiations. See, Breasted to Belknap, February 28, 1926, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis, Fosdick and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

40 The landscape design commission was at Kykuit, an estate built for Rockefeller Sr.
cost $2.85 million.\textsuperscript{41} At the time of the New Egyptian Museum project, Bosworth was in France where he was supervising this work.\textsuperscript{42}

In addition to Rockefeller’s projects, Bosworth’s other notable commissions were the American Telephone and Telegraph headquarters in New York,\textsuperscript{43} and the campus for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge.\textsuperscript{44} The practical and symbolic needs of these projects were similar to the requirements of the New Egyptian Museum. In addition to accommodating rapidly expanding operations at both AT&T and MIT, Bosworth was asked to design buildings that could enhance the image of both institutions\textsuperscript{45} (Fig. 38-40).

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“As their friendship grew over the years, the architect helped the capitalist-philanthropist find a route to self-expression outside Rockefeller business and charitable concerns by cultivating John D., Jr.’s aesthetic sense through building, through the accumulation of art objects, and, in what may be seen as a logical progression from these first two activities, through the restoration of historic structures.”

\item[\textsuperscript{42}] For Breasted, the patron and architect’s collaboration over these restoration projects was beneficial for the New Egyptian Museum; he believed that when the time came, the collaboration would go a long way towards winning French approval for the project.

\item[\textsuperscript{43}] Quentin Jacobs, “William Welles Bosworth: Major Works,” 85: “the most consistently classical skyscraper ever built.”

\item[\textsuperscript{44}] See, Jarzombek, Designing Mit : Bosworth’s New Tech.


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As Bosworth himself described his client’s wishes:

“It was the aim of Mr. Vail that this vestibule [of the building] should express the ideal the Telephone Company stands for. A great public service of the highest character, where quality, durability and permanence are established in solid values. Not where quick and superficial effects for momentary gain are the aim, but where the spirit is that of a highly organized and fundamental public institution....”

AT&T had recently come under suspicion from the U.S. government because of its market monopoly. Simultaneously, the company was beginning to face local competition. Bosworth was hired to create a building that could accommodate not only the company’s expanding operations, but also one that could also make a statement of corporate stability, reliance and legitimacy. For the MIT campus, which Bosworth was hired to design in 1913 and which was his major commission prior to the museum, he was entrusted with a similar task. Leaving aside practical
For these projects, Bosworth consistently turned to the formal language of Beaux-Arts neo-classicism. The fact that the Beaux-Arts style was widely understood to represent these values, and that Bosworth was an “unabashed Beaux-Arts neo-classicist,” 46 is unsurprising. The style was derived from the academic teachings of the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, which opened in France in 1797, and went on to have an enormous influence in that country and in the U.S. 47

The *Ecole* emphasized a thorough knowledge and grounding in the architecture of antiquity. Reflecting general Western bias, the antiquity that the *Ecole* typically looked back to, was that of classical (Greco-roman) origins, which led to the neo-classical designs associated with the school and movement. Within this general neo-classical aesthetic, Beaux-Arts planning considerations, Bosworth had to send a clear, definitive message to Harvard – and the Boston public – that MIT would not consider merging with the more-established school. Bosworth received the MIT commission due to his connection with MIT’s benefactors, Rockefeller and Vail. See, Ibid. 46


In his thesis, Noffsinger writes that even prior to the *Ecole*, American architects (Jefferson being a prime example) were almost always influenced by French trends in architecture. The United States did not have a proper architecture school until MIT’s opened in 1865. Architectural influence therefore came from Europe. Of all European influences, French influence probably prevailed because of the sympathetic attitude of powerful Americans towards French culture at the time:

“The French influence felt in this period was in competition with a strong English influence. The general feeling in the United States, however, probably placed the French in better standing than the English. There had been two wars with Great Britain and powerful men like Jefferson and Franklin were always more in sympathy with the Gallic traditions of cultural excellence.” (p.6).

When the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* opened in 1797, American architecture students began to attend it. They brought the Beaux-Arts influence with them when they returned to the U.S. Moreover, when U.S. schools were created, they were headed either by French architects or academics, or by Americans trained in the French Beaux-Arts tradition. U.S. architecture schools were therefore modeled on the *Ecole*.

Bosworth, himself, studied both at MIT and the *Ecole*. The peak years of American attendance at the *Ecole* were between 1897 and 1921 and it is in this period that Bosworth attended the Academy.
principles emphasized spatial hierarchy, clear transitions, frontal axially, and logical circulation, all of which were expressed in the building’s façade, section, and plans. Ornament was usually symbolic (not overly decorative, though this would change later) and was used to provide a suitable ‘character’ for the buildings. The suitability – and hence the choice and placement of ornament – was determined by the function of the building, its social relevance, and the message that the client and architect wished to convey.

Bosworth, like other architects, found creative expression and synthetic freedom within the Beaux-Arts tradition. It allowed him to synthesize historical references from other nations and periods within the basic neo-classical framework. For Bosworth, the synthesis and use of these different styles and traditions (such as the neo-Pharaonic elements in the museum and research institute buildings) and the lack of a pure historical style, was appropriate for a country such as the United States; with its diversity of backgrounds and cultures, and the variety and scope of international interests of its wealthiest men (such as Rockefeller) the U.S. could accommodate and own all styles.

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48 S. Quentin Jacobs, *William Welles Bosworth: Major Works.* Bosworth’s landscape designs, such as those for Rockefeller at Kykuit (and for the lawyer, Samuel Untermyer at Greystone) were eclectic, and combined influences from various styles of national gardens, including Persian, English and French.

49 Ibid. Jacobs quotes Bosworth from an article the latter wrote:

“Thus in America to-day, the gardens have no pure historic style; and, we believe, very fitly so. A country composed of a population of such varied ancestry, so large that its local traditions are equally varied, and yet so bound together by the rapidity of intercommunication and the multiplicity of its publications … should rightly be bound down by no fixed historical styles.”

Analyzing Bosworth’s quote, Jacobs writes:

“Herein lies the key to the eclectic character of Bosworth’s designs for both Kykuit and Greystone. The terraces at Kykuit provide a platform for formal and botanical features of divergent national traditions synthesized into an
Though the Beaux-Arts began its decline in the U.S. around 1922, around the time of the Breasted-Rockefeller project, the style provided an authoritative compositional and formal language that was still easily recognizable and that was understood to represent major institutions. And after Breasted’s initial suggestion regarding the “Saracen” style, it was the accepted choice for the New Egyptian Museum:

He [Bosworth] undoubtedly has very good taste and is also, I understand, a Beaux Arts man – a distinct advantage for the monumental and formal treatment this building should receive.  
(Martin Ryerson to Rockefeller, 1925).

That the Islamic or Islamic-revival style was not used though it demonstrably had the ability to incorporate diverse elements and to indicate strength and grandeur, and though it was in fact used for other institutions in Egypt at the time, is indicative then of other biases. In a letter to Rockefeller, Bosworth wrote that the building was designed to give it a “typical Egyptian character while making it at the same glance look like a museum”. Breasted, Bosworth, and Rockefeller use “Egyptian” to refer solely to ancient Egypt, particularly the

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American garden, as befit a garden for patrons, father and son, whose business and cultural interests ranged no less widely than their gardens’ historical sources.”

50 Ryerson to Rockefeller, August 24, 1925, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG III, OMR, RAC.
Ryerson joined the Breasted-Rockefeller team in the capacity of an unofficial design advisor, after Bosworth had already prepared the preliminary Beaux-Arts design. Whether Bosworth would be the final architect or not, Rockefeller planned to use his illustrations to prepare the proposal book, and to sell the project. Rockefeller deferred to Ryerson, who was a Trustee at the Field Museum in Chicago, in matters of architecture and style. Ryerson (and Breasted) convinced Rockefeller to retain Bosworth for the final design.

51 Bosworth to Rockefeller, April 9, 1925, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG III, OMR, RAC.
temples at Karnak and Luxor. In designing the museum, the team had begun to think of defining a new modern style for presumably this Egypt. Were they thinking of a ‘national’ style? It is not clear. But whatever the case may be, the idea that the Islamic style and any variation on it could be appropriate for Egypt, was discarded. In a letter to Breasted, Bosworth wrote that Walcot (the draftsman) was thrilled at the prospect of a new architectural style for Egypt that would emerge out of its ancient past:

> He has grown to love the dignity & beauty of Egyptian architecture, in its adaptability to modern requirements. If these buildings go through it will have its effect on the architecture of modern Egypt & he thinks determine its style.\(^{52}\)

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**Architecture**

The new building...in lighting, planning, distribution of space and methods of construction, is to be thoroughly modern. While this is true it is at the same time to be Egyptian in spirit. In the words of the architect himself, “it is to be given a treatment as to style-expression which relates it harmoniously with what it is to contain, or as Viollet-le-Duc phrases it in his definition of style, ‘an expression appropriate in every respect to its’ use.’”\(^{53}\)

Breasted dedicated several pages to the museum’s architecture, site, and circulation, and throughout reinforced that the general aesthetic and layout were derived from these two influences: modern requirements for science (scientific display of objects, good lighting, etc.)

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\(^{52}\) Bosworth to Breasted, August 14, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Bosworth, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

and the spirit of ancient Egypt. The building’s neo-Pharaonic influence was evident in certain architectural or ornamental elements, but these were still included within a general neo-classical aesthetic. This is particularly true of the Research Institute, which fits the mould of a neo-classical institutional building, with its proportions, portico, front steps and general plan. To relate it to ancient Egypt, the portico and inner vestibule merely incorporated Egyptian columns, and a pair of sphinxes guarding the entrance (Fig. 17). That the neo-classical should frame the ancient Egyptian “spirit” demonstrates the still-existing Greco-Roman bias of the larger Breasted-Rockefeller team, despite the efforts of men such as Breasted to show the origins of Western civilization in Egypt.

Plate I (Fig. 7) of Bosworth’s design shows a bird’s eye-view of the complex: the two buildings are situated at the edge of Cairo along the Nile. The museum is the much larger building; the smaller one is the research institute. The background shows an indeterminate context, which stands in for Cairo. The building façades (a hybrid of neo-classical and neo-Pharaonic) engage the area in front of the museum and on the two sides, but do not engage the rear. Courtyards perforate the mass of the museum building. The frontispiece provides the same impression of airy outdoor rooms visible through the colonnaded zones (Fig. 6). The buildings’ exterior walls are surfaced with stone to resemble the architecture of ancient Egypt.54

54 The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo (England, 1925), 24:

“In harmony with the ancient buildings of the land, it is proposed that the exterior of the entire structure shall be of solid ashlar stone masonry, not faced with stucco like most of the modern buildings of Cairo and the Mediterranean world.”

While connecting the museum to Egypt’s ancient architecture, Breasted also dismissed the unfortunate and “tawdry” stucco-on-masonry exterior finishes that were to be found in such buildings as the French-built museum. The proposed building’s construction method actually uses structural steel columns and I-beams in the roof and ceiling,
The complex featured a riverside entrance, with ramps and staircases – lined with what look like sphinxes – leading down to the water\textsuperscript{55} (Fig. 8). Describing the waterfront entrance, Breasted once again referred back to ancient Egyptian architecture:

Like the great temple of Karnak the building will face the Nile (Plates I and II), and may therefore be embellished with a landing embankment and an imposing escalier leading up from the river to the main entrance in the center of a front which it is expected will measure nearly six hundred feet (180 meters).\textsuperscript{56}

On the street level, a driveway leads to a forecourt with steps leading up to a double-colonnaded porch, composed of richly painted columns with ancient Egyptian motifs. In an unusual move, the porch and inner vestibule have columns of the same height creating a grand interior scale, which continues throughout the building.\textsuperscript{57} The scale (the columns are forty-five feet high) is appropriate to the sculptures, but both eclipse the visitor.

\textsuperscript{55} This design feature is reminiscent of Bosworth’s proposal for a similar water entrance for MIT, which was never realized. See, ibid.

\textsuperscript{56} *The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo* (England, 1925), 24.

\textsuperscript{57} Bosworth was later hired by MIT once more, to create an entrance for the campus off of Massachusetts Avenue, and here he reuses this feature: same height columns at porch and inner vestibule. See, Jarzombek, *Designing MIT: Bosworth’s New Tech.*
In a move reminiscent of Dourgnon’s museum, the visitor would find the following inscription in the portico to one side, in Arabic, French, and English, “Erected in the Reign of His Majesty King Fuad I.” Perhaps the inclusion of Arabic and English was meant to contrast with the Latin inscription in the French-built museum, which the local Egyptians were unable to read, and to indulge the perceived “vanity” of the Egyptian King.

The plan consists of a main axis aligning with the river dock, the frontcourt and portico on the outside, and on the interior stretching from the vestibule to the rear chamber of the building, with three successive exterior courts in between (Fig. 14), featuring pools and desert foliage. The pools are ringed by halls, which form the interior exhibition and circulation spaces and act as transitions between individual courts.

Plate V shows a clerestory hypostyle hall, “suggested by the great colonnade of the Karnak hypostyle” (Fig. 11). The rear court featured graceful palm columns “reproducing those discovered in the pyramid Temple of Sahure, the oldest colonnades yet known (28th century BC).” The use of elements reminiscent of ancient Egyptian architecture in this ‘American’ building and the absence of any elements or features from modern Egypt, emphasized a dismissal of modern Egypt in order to create a link with ancient Egypt: a selective view of Egypt’s history and another tactic of legitimizing the team’s presence in Egypt.

Symmetrically arranged on either side of the main axis – from front to rear – are two small courts, separated by a larger court. Each side features an exit, which would relieve

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58 The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo (England, 1925), 25.

59 Ibid.
congestion. Running in between each side entrance is a second (transverse) axis, linking these entrances to the central courts on each side, and cutting across the transition space between the courts along the main axis.

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**Interior Layout**

In contrast to the existing French-run Cairo Museum, the New Egyptian Museum had a very specific interior layout, which adhered to the strict chronological framework of the development of man and the rise of Western civilizations, as Breasted perceived these. The strict Beaux-Arts axiality and symmetry of the museum’s plan allowed – or perhaps demanded – such a clear and determined sequence and hierarchy.\(^6^0\) Breasted prescribed two movements through the museum (Fig. 41). In the first, the central courtyards and hypostyle halls (with architectural elements reminiscent of the greatest epochs of ancient Egypt), would draw the visitor through the building along the long, main axis from portico to the rear apse – the “holy-of-holies”\(^6^1\) – where colossal statues of the important Eighteenth Dynasty pharaoh, Amenhotep III, and his wife Queen Tiy would be placed under a vaulted ceiling, suggested by the temple of Luxor. During the approach to the rear, the floor sloped up, placing the statues at a slightly more imposing height, and slowing the circulation to signify that the visitor had reached the apex of ancient Egyptian civilization (Fig. 13). This first axial movement – and the placement of the statues –

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\(^6^0\) This could have been true of the French-run museum as well, which was also a Beaux-Arts plan, but this earlier museum was too crowded with items and monuments to allow such a legible layout. Of course, lack of a clear layout could also point to the difference in ambitions of Breasted and the French museum authorities.

\(^6^1\) _The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo_ (England, 1925), 25.
resembles temple layouts such as those at Karnak and Luxor (to which Breasted continuously refers in his letter) where the holiest and most sacred spot is furthest back from the front.

After this initial movement through the museum, the visitor would return to the entrance, where he or she would then move through the museum in another manner, this time in a clockwise direction, to get a sense of the chronological arrangement of the collections (Fig. 41). The visitor would turn left to enter a hall containing Stone Age artifacts, then proceed toward the rear where he would find “monuments of the successive ages of Egyptian civilization”, until he reached the aforementioned sacred rear apse. In the preceding areas on either side, he or she would find items from the newly discovered Tutankhamun tomb. Continuing down from the rear apse, the visitor would survey the monuments of Egypt’s decline, enter the periods of Greco-Roman supremacy, followed by the monuments of Christian Egypt, and then exit the museum. In this “exclusively Egyptian museum” there was no space for modern monuments or monuments from Arab and Ottoman empires, betraying Breasted’s scholarly position and ideological view of the Near Eastern civilizations as part of Western origins. In his letter to King Fua’d, Breasted presented a clear picture of this worldview. While speaking of the West as the fortunate heirs to Egyptian ancestry, he wrote of surveying the development of man from:

…primitive savagery to a highly refined culture expressing itself in marvelous monuments and works of art, through a magnificent culmination to a decline which eventually resulted in European

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
supremacy, and after the Sixth Century B.C. in European leadership of civilization.\textsuperscript{64} [Emphasis mine]

Breasted is typically careful to present the project as a gift to science. How do we explain then his decision to inject the above sentiment of boldly appropriating Egyptian antiquity in a book, which was designed to sell the project to the Egyptian King? It seems to me that he wrote such an emphatic and direct statement to ‘remind’ the Egyptians of Western right to Egyptian antiquity. His use of the term “European” instead of “American” may have been a concession to the book’s future European audience.

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Unlike the French-built museum, other influences to the design and layout of the New Egyptian Museum are derived from requirements of scientific display, research, and efficient circulation.\textsuperscript{65} In his letter to the King, Breasted repeatedly stressed scientific concerns and

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{65} Corridor widths, moveable wall partitions, the heights of the window sills (high enough for the placement of large monuments underneath), side lighting, dark room and laboratory facilities, high ceiling in the basement (where monuments could be studied and stored), all point to these scientific, practical concerns. We can see the influence of MIT (and of the engineer Freeman) with regards to the scientific and technical aspects of the museum’s design. Freeman was influenced by Taylorist ideas of efficiency. His desire for natural light, natural ventilation, and efficient circulation, as well as his belief in concrete and structural steel bones manifested itself in the final design of MIT. The same concerns and influences can also be seen in the Museum design.

Contemporary museums in the United States were another important influence on the design of the New Egyptian Museum. Well after William Walcot completed the presentation drawings, and at the time the proposal book was being printed by Oxford University Press, Rockefeller instructed his design team to undertake a trip to U.S. museums so that they could finalize and improve the preliminary design as needed. During this trip, the team primarily focused on the technical aspects of these museums, such as lighting requirements, circulation, ceiling heights, and exhibition display requirements. Accordingly, in September 1925, Bosworth, Breasted, Ryerson, Macy, and Fosdick visited the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Field Museum in Chicago and the Cleveland Art Museum. Breasted also managed to procure drawings for the Detroit Institute of Arts, by Paul Cret, which was then under construction. At the end of this trip, Breasted reported to Rockefeller:
requirements, and explained that though the exterior of the museum was neo-Pharaonic, the interior was guided by practical concerns. In the proposal book, he tellingly collapsed the two influences and called the museum, a “Temple to Science.”

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The Site

The removal of artifacts to locations outside of their lands of origins is one of the major themes of Western imperialism with respect to Near Eastern archaeology. Removal, transportation to Europe (or the U.S.), and installation in a Western institution required modern technology, scientific know-how and financial means that the West possessed. Feats of removal

"Mr. Ryerson then expressed his conclusions on the leading fundamental questions involved in our proposed building. I should say these points were the following:

1. Size of Building and Advisability of a Third Floor. The possibilities for the construction of a 3rd floor were exhaustively discussed. Its inclusion had at first been favored by Mr. Ryerson. The group favored raising the ceiling of the basement (calling the Ground Floor, as distinct from the Main Floor) and making it fully available as exhibition space. On learning that this could afford considerably more than twice as much floor space as the old Museum contains, Mr. Ryerson very expressly approved omitting the 3rd floor, but favored roof construction strong enough to permit later erection of a low flat roof house for preparators’ studios, etc., if they should ever prove necessary.

2. Disposition and Architectural development of exhibition hall space. With architect and engineer both present, this discussion brought many valuable technical details from Mr. Dunn [engineer], who was very valuable to the conference.

3. Style of architecture and materials to be employed.

4. Position and extent of offices for the Museum Administration Staff.

5. A large number of miscellaneous lesser questions."

Breasted elaborates further only to say that of the above, 1, 3, and 4 were settled, 2 required further study, and with 5, a host of minor problems would arise. What these conclusions were, we do not know. And so our architectural analysis must remain limited to Bosworth’s preliminary design.

See, Breasted to Rockefeller, September 13, 1925, folder JHB and John D. Rockefeller Jr. – 1925, box JHB Correspondence with John D. Rockefeller Jr, Breasted Papers, OIA.

were celebrated in written accounts, such as those of the French removal of an obelisk in 1831 to Paris.67 Usually these accounts were accompanied by illustrations showing natives standing off to one side, observing these technical feats. The power to remove antiquity from these lands to the metropolitan centers demonstrated imperial might and imperial right to antiquity.68 The theme of removal – in a few different ways – is at work in the conception and failure of the New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute.

Physical removal was rendered impossible after Pierre Lacau’s restriction of the flow of antiquities outside of Egypt, around the time of the Tutankhamun controversy. This angered Breasted who, like other Western archaeologists, hoped to secure part of the tomb’s contents for institutions back home.69 If Egyptian artifacts could not be removed to the imperial center, then perhaps the empire could come to Egypt in the guise of a museum. The terms and conditions of the museum project amounted to such a move. Picking up on an Egyptian government official’s suggestion that the collection should be sold off to pay the national debt, Rockefeller had enquired of Fosdick at the beginning of the project whether this might indeed be possible.70 He hoped that perhaps the collection (and museum) could be located in the West, where they could be accessed more easily for research purposes. In the end, however, the museum remained in Cairo, but where in Cairo is an important issue and leads to yet another notion of displacement, this time with respect to the British, the French, and the modern Egyptian nation.


68 See, Ibid.

69 See, Goode, *Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919-1941*.

70 Rockefeller to Fosdick, October 28, 1924, folder 258, box 25, series 2E, RG III, OMR, RAC.
Khedive Sa’id Pasha commissioned the Kasr al-Nil as a palace around 1854 and an Italian team designed the project. During Isma’il’s urban reforms in Cairo, a swing bridge was built to the south of the palace, to provide the visiting French Empress, Eugenie, access to her apartments on the Gezira Island for the duration of the Suez Canal opening ceremonies. A further bridge from the Gezira to the West bank linked both sides of Cairo for the first time, providing easy access to the Gezira. (Bridge access made the future proposed relocation of the New Egyptian Museum to this site possible). In 1882, the British appropriated the site and turned into a barracks, with a training and parade ground behind it (Fig. 42-43). In 1903, the Cairo Museum was built behind these barracks and parade ground. In 1926, the Kasr al-Nil was the only British barracks within the city, and though the British had entered into a legal agreement with the Egyptian government to move out of these barracks into another location (the Abbassiyeh), they were hesitant to do so apparently for security reasons. The site, with its waterfront location, was ideal for military barracks. And Breasted and Rockefeller agreed that it would be ideal for their new museum. The Breasted-Rockefeller team hoped to appear sympathetic to the cause of Egyptian nationhood; by physically displacing British barracks and building over the site and next to the existing French-run museum (rendering the latter obsolete) the U.S. team wished to

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71 It was turned into an Egyptian government building and then an Egyptian Army headquarters, until the British appropriated it as their barracks.

72 Throughout the museum negotiations, Breasted corresponded at length with his friend and colleague, George Ellery Hale. During Breasted’s first round of negotiations with the British, Hale wrote to him recommending that he find another site – perhaps on the Gezira. Hale suggested that the Cairo Museum collection was not just in danger from a lack of scientific know-how, but also from Egyptian “mobs” who might destroy it during potential future nationalist insurrections. The barracks – in his opinion – were the only means of protecting the collection. He suggested that the new museum be built in close vicinity of the barracks, but that it should not displace them. In response, Breasted cited various reasons why this was not a feasible idea: the bridge connecting Cairo and the Gezira was not strong enough for the transportation of antiquities, for example. But his real reasons were the symbolic association with the barracks site.
appear to ‘help’ the Egyptians in their struggle for nationhood by removing the two dominant imperial forces in the country. To further demonstrate that the U.S. sympathized with the Egyptian struggle for nationhood and independence, Breasted referred to the former country as a “Great Democracy of the West.”

However, the preference for the barracks’ site also showed imperial ambitions. Perhaps this was evident to the British, who may have refused to evacuate the site for this reason. The idea of tearing down the barracks and building over them was strongly reminiscent of such actions by new conquerors and imperial hopefuls throughout time, including similar acts by ancient Pharaohs who built, rebuilt, tore down, and added to ancient sites such as Luxor and Karnak. By removing British barracks and erecting the museum right next to the French one, Breasted was trying to assert U.S. dominance over these two Western powers, in contradiction to the apparent U.S. support of Egyptian nationhood. In its site layout, the museum turned its back on to modern Cairo; it had no rear entrance and the urban context depicted in the illustrations was indeterminate (Fig. 7). Instead, the museum faced the Nile in the manner of ancient Egyptian temples and looked towards Giza with its famous pyramids. By proposing to locate the museum along the Nile and giving it a waterfront entrance, Breasted was also making other imperial and civilizational connections. He was thinking of the location of the museum vis-à-vis the ancient ruins further down the Nile (Fig. 44). He imagined tourists on steamships stopping at the New Egyptian Museum where they would presumably be indoctrinated in the U.S. version of Egyptian history and civilization, before proceeding down the river to the ancient sites, such as at Giza, Karnak and Philae etc. Breasted, of course, was not thinking just in terms of tourism, but

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73 The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo (England, 1925), 14.
rather with respect to making a larger, symbolic connection with past empires. For example, in the letter to the King, he made a symbolic connection with Alexander and the Ptolemaic Dynasty:

The first such institution ever founded by men arose on the Nile, - the famous Alexandrian Museum. It is indeed appropriate that the capital of a new and independent Egypt should now be embellished with what may prove to be the most magnificent museum of modern times.\(^{74}\)

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**A Larger Ambition**

The Research Institute, though a much smaller building than the museum, nevertheless housed a large ambition. The Library is the key feature of the building; it is the main room on the ground floor, facing the Vestibule and looking out onto the river, ringed by balconies at the top. Invisible in the plan layout, but revealed in the water color perspective, are two sizable maps — a large map of the Nile Valley with an East-West orientation covering one wall, and a huge globe situated in the center of the room — both charged cartographic presences in the Library, reminiscent perhaps of military command centers or palace map rooms\(^ {75}\) (Fig. 19-20). In his letter to the King, Breasted wrote of creating a cultural condominium, unconstrained by geographical considerations:

\(^{74}\) *The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo* (England, 1925), 22. This is strongly reminiscent of Napoleon’s representation of himself as Alexander, on the frontispiece of the *Description* just over a hundred years earlier.

It should be noted that its [Research Institute’s] researches would not be subject to hampering geographical or cultural restrictions. The terms of the great endowment permit the extension of its investigations to follow the lines of diffusing culture in all directions and if necessary into other continents. In future generations, therefore ... the new Cairo Egyptian Museum and its Research Institute seem destined to become a far-reaching focus of scientific research in the ancient lands of the Near East as a whole, including all the lands where the cultural ancestors of the civilized peoples of the West once had their home.\footnote{The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo (England, 1925).}

For a scientific man such as Breasted, the map and globe represented yet another kind of science – that of geography and its “prime technology of knowing, mapping.”\footnote{Thongchai Winichakul, \textit{Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation}. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, 1994). X.} In \textit{Siam Mapped}, Thongchai Winichakul addresses the map as a means of projecting control, not as a passive medium that displays objective knowledge. Winichakul writes:

In terms of most communication theories and common sense, a map is a scientific abstraction of reality. A map merely represents something that already exists objectively ‘there’. [But] this relationship was reversed. A map anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa. In other words, a map was a model for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent... It had become a real instrument to concretize projections on the earth’s surface. A map was now necessary for the new administrative mechanisms and for the troops to back up their claims... The discourse of mapping was the paradigm, which both administrative and military operations worked within and served.\footnote{See, Thongchai Winichakul, \textit{Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation} (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).}

The maps and globes in the research institute did in fact project and anticipate Breasted’s version of “spatial reality.” The wall map in the Research Institute’s library shows the ruins and
temples of ancient Egypt. But the globe in the center of the room covers a larger area. One of James Breasted’s ambitions was to establish permanent field expeditions in every important cultural region of the ancient Near East – an “empire of bases.” All data and materials thus gathered would converge “on the centralized headquarters in America” – the Oriental Institute. 79

A key requirement in the design of the museum was that it should be able to expand. In fact, Rockefeller’s main objection to the Gezira Island was that the site seemed rather small for future expansion. On the original site, Bosworth had reassured Breasted that the museum could be enlarged almost indefinitely to the West, using a ‘honeycomb principle.’ The expansion that the Breasted-Rockefeller team desired had two inter-related aspects to it; the team aimed to study all ancient civilizations of the Near East, and to extend U.S. presence throughout in these lands, through the Oriental Institute’s “outposts.”

In The Oriental Institute, published in 1933, we find a third map, which shows the ancient civilizations of the Near East and the Fertile Crescent. 80 In this map, Breasted was not paying attention to the modern nations of these lands (the map did not reflect “reality”). Rather, he was concentrating on the earlier civilizations and on the “cultural condominium” (the new “spatial reality”) that he anticipated establishing throughout the Near East, from his base in the New Egyptian Museum (Fig. 45). Taken together, these three maps underscore Breasted’s imperial ambition.

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80 Breasted claimed to have coined the term, “Fertile Crescent.”
Chapter 5
"THE OBLIGATION"

Mural in the dome of the U.S. Library of Congress, showing a politically young but scientifically advanced United States, at the head of all nations and civilizations, next to ancient Egypt, the origin of civilization (according to Breasted).
At a particularly trying stage in the New Egyptian Museum negotiations – when the Egyptian government asked the Breasted-Rockefeller team for concessions that the latter was unwilling to grant – Breasted reassured Rockefeller that a successful outcome would prove to have been worth these difficulties:

All this is a part of the price we are paying for the privilege of sharing in what I am more and more convinced is to be a powerful illustration of the new mission of America and American civilization. Here in this ancient valley where the men of the Nile first taught the world to use metals and to build sea-going ships, the wealth wrung from a new continent by these very means will return to its ancestral shores to raise a shining symbol of western enlightenment and friendship.¹

Reminding him of the originary significance of ancient Egypt, Breasted compellingly tied Rockefeller’s wealth and philanthropic obligations to his own vision of the United States’ mission. Despite encountering unexpected problems at every stage of the negotiations, Breasted remained supremely confident in this mission, of which the museum would be a “powerful illustration.” By now we know that this mission had an imperial dimension to it. And we know that on the surface, the mission was about the United States’ scientific contribution to the study of the ancient Near East: the place where science and technology first emerged. U.S. wealth – Rockefeller’s immense fortune – was acquired through science and industry. The U.S. and Rockefeller would now repay their debt to ancient Egypt; this wealth would make its way back to its “ancestral shores” in the spirit of international diplomacy and friendship. The museum was to be the medium for the translation of private U.S. wealth into a diplomatic and cultural project.

¹ Breasted to Fosdick, February 8, 1925, folder 261, box 25, series 2E, Record Group III, OMR, RAC.
Chapter 5 takes its cue from Breasted's quote and concludes this thesis with an analysis of John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s role in the conception and failure of the New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute. Breasted remains the project's key protagonist; his notion of the United States' mission and its expression through the museum is demonstrated throughout the thesis. But though he was the visible man on the ground while Rockefeller characteristically remained in the shadows, it was the latter's money that would fund the project. And although it was Fosdick who approached Breasted, we know that it was Breasted who instantly deepened and widened the scope of the project, which was originally limited to repair work on the French-built museum. What were Rockefeller's motivations? What did he expect in return for his gift? Were his concerns primarily altruistic and diplomatic? Did he himself have an imperial ambition for the United States? Did he share Breasted's vision? Or, was he following Breasted's lead? What do the answers to these questions tell us about the United States' engagement with the Near East, and their changing perception of it from an extension of Europe to perhaps a new frontier for the U.S.?

The excerpt from Breasted's letter to Rockefeller presents the U.S. mission as solely a philanthropic, scientific contribution to the Near East. This same message was presented to the Egyptians. But the larger correspondence in the archives frequently and forcefully belies this view, as do the terms and agreements and the design and site of the museum -- as we have seen. The project was driven by an imperial and Orientalist approach to Egypt. Breasted combined and resolved his imperial ambition and civilizing mission through Rockefeller's philanthropy.

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I begin with a brief background of Rockefeller’s philanthropy and motivations. I then turn to his relationship with Breasted, who introduced him to Near Eastern studies. Through their museum proposal, the Breasted-Rockefeller team proposed to significantly impact Egyptian (and eventually Near Eastern) archaeology and politics. Therefore, even though the project was privately conceived and funded, the team did take the U.S. State Department into confidence; the State Department secured official introductions for Breasted’s meetings with British, French, and Egyptian officials. However, the team instructed the government to remain in the shadows, and did their best to conceal any signs of U.S. government involvement from the Egyptians. 3

Why did the U.S. government support the project? Did it use a philanthropic project to enter the imperial field in Egypt, which had thus far been dominated by Great Britain and France? Or, did the State Department allow itself to be led by the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s purpose? Did it simply fall in line behind their mission? I analyze the relationship between philanthropy and the U.S. government, as demonstrated by this case study, and will return to my earlier question of the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s imperial drive; where is it located and what does the conception and failure of the New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute reveal to us about this?

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3 Breasted to Fosdick, May 16, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis, Fosdick and Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.
Rockefeller and Philanthropy

Raymond Fosdick wrote the official biography of John D. Rockefeller Jr., which was published in 1956. Written by an intimate colleague and friend (and with Rockefeller’s consent and help) Fosdick’s book can be considered a definitive source of information on Rockefeller Jr., whom Fosdick described as a man obsessed with using his vast fortune towards the well-being of his fellow-men:

… Mr. Rockefeller emerged as a man of simplicity, modesty, instinctive courtesy, and democratic tastes. More than that, he became obsessed with the idea that the wealth which he had inherited must be employed to promote the well-being of his fellow men; and in a long lifetime he devoted himself to this purpose with constructive imagination and undiscouragable patience.

Indeed, the extent of Rockefeller’s philanthropic work is compelling in its breadth and importance. He donated money both personally and through his (and his father’s) philanthropic foundations: the Rockefeller Foundation, the General Education Board, the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial, and the Bureau of Social Hygiene etcetera. Through these organizations, he concerned himself with promotion of research in the natural sciences and medicine, social work, cultural work, and international diplomacy. The Museum of Modern Art was co-founded by his wife, Abby Rockefeller, in 1929. Rockefeller provided the land on West Fifty-Fourth Street in New York for its building. He bought and then donated the land along the East River in Manhattan to the United Nations for their headquarters. After the First World War, he funded the

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5 Ibid., 1.
restoration and rehabilitation of the Rheims Cathedral, the Château de Fontainebleau and the Château de Versailles, in France. Apart from funding the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, its field expeditions, and the failed proposal for the New Egyptian Museum, he funded the Palestine Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem. Of his contributions to international projects, Fosdick writes that Rockefeller was spurred into action by the devastation of the First World War. He was interested in using diplomatic and cultural institutions (the United Nations, museums) in “‘flagging the next war before it plunges suddenly around the curve to pile into us as it did in 1914…’” Rockefeller clearly understood the power of culture to influence international relations.

Rockefeller was also spurred into action by events closer to home, such as the Colorado mines revolt and the subsequent Ludlow Massacre in 1913, which resulted in a massive public outcry against him and threatened to irrevocably damage the family’s reputation. The Ludlow Massacre refers to the events of April 20th, 1914, when a violent confrontation between the Colorado state militia and the workers of the Rockefeller-owned Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, who were striking for better working conditions, resulted in the death of a number of workers, including two women and eleven children. The New York Times reported the Massacre as follows:

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6 Ibid.

7 Fosdick writes that after “the Ludlow massacre,” as it was called, “the name of Rockefeller was denounced from one end of the country to the other…” Twenty men, two women, and twelve children were killed as a result of this massacre, leading to major investigations into Rockefellers, Sr. and Jr., and other industrialists such as Carnegie Mellon, J. P. Morgan etc.
The Ludlow camp is a mass of charred debris, and buried beneath it is a story of horror unparalleled [sic] in the history of industrial warfare.\textsuperscript{8}

By some accounts, the blame did not rest entirely with Rockefeller Jr., but he was the face of the Rockefeller family. Recovering from this almost-damning event, Rockefeller took the advice of an associate to heart:

It seems to me you will have to lead, have to be the example, whether you will or not. Your modesty and your humility do not permit you to see this, but those who have...your life most at heart see it, and it is in the field of industry primarily that this leadership must be conspicuous. Circumstances, for which you are not responsible, have identified part of your fortune, part of your life, with Colorado...You can withdraw from that field altogether, or you can make it an object lesson to the world, but you cannot maintain an attitude of neutrality towards a single feature of it. To make it to all mankind, the expression of your industrial creed, is, I believe, the greatest service you can render to the world today...\textsuperscript{9}

The Ludlow Massacre was perhaps the most violent event with which the Rockefellers were personally associated. Mostly though, it was the idea of Rockefeller wealth that was held suspect by the U.S. public and government leading to anti-trust charges against Standard Oil, the family-owned corporation. In an effort to legitimize their wealth, and very likely as an example of what the writer Eduard C. Lindeman calls, the “beginning of a rudimentary social consciousness by the wealthy,”\textsuperscript{10} both father and son began to think of and find ways to use their excessive, surplus income. In this, they were guided by their trusted advisors such as Raymond Fosdick and

\textsuperscript{8} New York Times, April 21, 1914

\textsuperscript{9} Fosdick, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a Portrait, 159.

\textsuperscript{10} Eduard C. Lindeman, Wealth and Culture (Harcourt Brace & Company, Inc., 1936), viii.
Frederick T. Gates, and by academics and scholars in various fields in which they themselves were not experts, such as the fields of medicine, art and archaeology.

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**Breasted and Rockefeller**

Attracted as he was to the works of earlier cultures, it is quite unlikely that Mr. Rockefeller would ever have ventured as far as the vast and silent world of pyramids, temples, and ancient manuscripts had he not come to know Dr. James H. Breasted, that brilliant and engaging scholar who played so important a part in introducing America to the ancient Near East.11

(Raymond Fosdick, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a Portrait*, 1956)

Breasted introduced Rockefeller to Near Eastern archaeology, and to the significance of the ancient civilizations. Most Americans in the early twentieth century were not very aware of the modern Near East or its ancient civilizations.12 Though Rockefeller was a sophisticated, cosmopolitan man, he too was quite removed from this field. It took Breasted several years of calculated and passionate campaigning to engage Rockefeller and his philanthropic foundations in the history and study of these ancient civilizations. Part of Breasted’s strategy was to continuously and exhaustively demonstrate links between the ancient Near East and the United States, between ancient Egyptians and modern Americans:

You are today one of the great forces in making social, economic and industrial history. The very principles of justice and fair treatment which you are so admirably applying in your present day work, first grew up in

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11 Fosdick, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a Portrait*. 357.

12 See, DeNovo, *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939*. 
the minds and hearts of men in that ancient world of the Near Orient around the eastern end of the Mediterranean. The noblest task in the study of man, is to recover the story of the human career, which culminated in the emergence of a religion of divine fatherhood and human brotherhood.\textsuperscript{13}

Here, Breasted endows Rockefeller with the qualities of social justice, industry, and economy, which were first found in the ancient Egyptians. In the process, he presented the modern inhabitants of these lands as devoid of the qualities of their ancestors: qualities that show up only later in “American civilization,”\textsuperscript{14} and American men.

Breasted, like the U.S. public, was keenly aware of Rockefeller’s devotion to philanthropy, international conflict resolution, social work, and cultural endeavors. He shrewdly tailored his correspondence with Rockefeller to appeal to these aspirations and ambitions in his patron. In writing that these qualities – social justice, morals, and religion – first grew up in ancient Egypt, he was thus able to draw Rockefeller in.

Rockefeller’s backing of the New Egyptian Museum as a private individual was essential to the team’s strategy for the project. In his letter to the King, Breasted mentioned Rockefeller’s restoration work in France to underscore the non-official, cosmopolitan, apolitical, and benevolent contributions of the donor. By doing so, he tried to disarm the Egyptians. When the project was made public, nearly as much attention was paid to the project itself and the Egyptian government’s reception of it, as to Rockefeller who had hitherto been in the background. Probably, this was the most scrutiny he had ever received over a philanthropic act. Newspapers

\textsuperscript{13} Breasted to Rockefeller, February 16, 1919, folder 812, box 112, series G, Record Group 2, OMR, RAC.

\textsuperscript{14} Breasted to Fosdick, February 8, 1925, folder 261, box 25, series 2E, Record Group III, OMR, RAC.
in the United States and in Egypt commented on his gift, and the public (both American and Egyptian) sent in their comments speculating about what it all meant.

Rockefeller’s image as a U.S. philanthropist millionaire worked to sway public opinion in his favor, for the most part. Breasted and his son, Charles, compiled newspaper clippings from Egypt, and sent them back to Rockefeller. They included only one dissenting op-ed as an example of apparently only a very small number of nationalists who were opposed to the project:

Can a wealthy Egyptian venture to make such a proposal to Greece or the Island of Sicily for instance? Or can our friends the westerners allow us to restitute all the monuments and antiquities that fill the museums of London, New York, Paris and Berlin? Those who are acquainted with real facts know how those monuments happened to be in those museums and what price was paid for them.

If this Haroun or any other thinks that by means of his money he can buy the Pyramids or Pharaoh’s obelisk, as it is possible to buy anything in his country, then let me state, by virtue of my being the humblest heir of my forefathers, that I totally refuse to sell my share. 15

The writer of the above piece, Gomas, saw the project for what it was, but most clippings (assuming they are representative of the larger newspaper stories in Egypt), gave Rockefeller the benefit of the doubt. The following clipping expresses trust in Rockefeller, but there is a discernable wariness in the text:

15 Muhammad Lutfy Gomas, Al-Ahram, Feb 24, 1926, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence A, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.
And today Mr. Rockefeller, the great millionaire of America who has so far offered 100 million pounds to the world, offers to Egypt a gift of 2 million pounds in order to start a new museum and an archeological institute.

The reason why the Egyptian government has not yet made any final decision regarding the matter is because of the terms made by the donor, as explained in our local news today. The Government is afraid lest the enterprise might add complications to the present ones caused by the capitulations and other international problems from which Egypt is suffering considerably.

But Americans are people of noble character. They respect the independence and dignity of nations. Therefore we should not be disappointed, but hope that Rockefeller will modify his conditions.  

Breasted kept a clipping from “Al Balagh”, which he described as the “most strangely anti-foreign journal in Egypt,” which nevertheless viewed the project (and Rockefeller) positively:

… Our personal belief is that Mr. Breasted’s statement, namely, that Rockefeller does not seek any material ends, is true.  

Egyptians also tried to grapple with the magnitude of the gift. The most interesting newspaper article touched on the U.S. philanthropy, and suggested “psychological impulses” for the gift:

We shall not attempt to discuss the psychological impulses that drive a man to spare a large portion of his wealth for what he thinks to be the welfare of humanity after long years of toil and hard work. The

16 Editorial, “The Egyptian Museum: Rockefeller’s Gift,” Al Ahram, February 17, 1926, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence A, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

17 Al Balagh, February 17, 1926, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence A, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.
discussion...is a question to be carefully analyzed by psychologists, not by such a paper as this. 18

The paper then goes on to write in glowing terms of U.S. philanthropy:

This habit of making donations has become a national character of the Americans. ...

What Rockefeller Junior is doing today, namely, giving Egypt ten million dollars for the purpose of establishing a museum worth of the great monuments dug out of the soil of Egypt, and building an archeological institute, is only an instance of what he and other compatriots are doing all over the world. We do not know of any country in the Old World that has not received some share of the generosity of the citizens of the New World.

... We venture to state that the recent awakening, educational, social and otherwise, in the Orient is due to the tremendous efforts of these promoters of generous ideas.

... It is a gift from a lover of science, and science has no home.

The above extract shows that Breasted’s strategy to emphasize science and philanthropy, and to underscore the fact that the gift was from the United States, was successful in some quarters.

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The New Egyptian Museum and role of the U.S. Government

The Breasted-Rockefeller team wished to present itself to Egypt’s government and public as a private group, gifting a museum to Egypt and, incidentally, displacing the British Army from its barracks – a displacement that the Egyptians strongly desired. But though the project

18 "Rockefeller’s Gift and Obstacles in the Way," in Al Mokattam, February 17, 1926.
was indeed privately conceived, it was more than just a gift. And to that end, the team did take the U.S. State Department into confidence, but dictated the terms of its involvement and the overall strategy.

The relationship between the Breasted-Rockefeller team and the State Department over this project highlights the nature of U.S. foreign policy at the time, which was primarily guided by the interests of the country’s private interest groups, rather than out of a well-formed foreign outlook.

The private citizens in this case – Breasted, Rockefeller and Fosdick – had a political and cultural vision worthy of governments. Most of the imperial ambition seemed to be generated by Breasted. However, in an interesting letter to Fosdick, Breasted makes an unmistakable, reference to both Fosdick and Rockefeller’s vision of the project. Breasted had met with the British Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, in London in June 1925, to discuss the project.

He wrote to Fosdick of the case he had made for Anglo-American cooperation in Egypt:

I would like to mention...one aspect of the project in which I know that you and the donor are especially interested. At Lord Balfour’s lunch I urged upon Mr Chamberlain the importance of Anglo-American cooperation in our Museum project. The control of Palestine and Mesopotamia, with its great ancient cities of Jerusalem, Babylon, and Nineveh, which have been recovered from Mohammedan rule...by a great Christian nation...all this, together with the extraordinary discovery of the Tomb of Tutenkhamon, [h]as aroused universal interest, - caught the imagination of all civilised [sic] people, and centred [sic] their thoughts on the ancient Bible Lands where civilisation was born. I urged that, just at this juncture, a combination of British influence and American resources in these ancient lands...would work far-reaching consequences among all English speaking peoples, and prove most effective in bringing

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19 See, DeNovo, American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939.
together England and America, as the people of both countries learn more and more of the results of such an informal Anglo-American alliance …

... Mr Chamberlain responded very warmly to this suggestion, and stated that, as a matter of actual experience, America and England had come nearer together in the outlying regions of the British Empire than anywhere else, and he proceeded to give a recent example in the conduct of Anglo-American interests in Siam. A combination, such as I have suggested, being completely devoid of embarrassing political entanglements, is one that offers great possibilities, and a Statesman of Mr Chamberlain’s very practical turn of mind, found the idealistic aspects of the arrangement supported by actual experience.20

Demonstrating unabashed racial and political supremacy, this statement shows that both Rockefeller and Raymond Fosdick thought of the museum as a vehicle for establishing Western control over Biblical lands, which were until then controlled by the Muslims. The concern is categorically not with the modern nations, seeking freedom and independence. The project was conceived of as a way of uniting the “Christian,” “English speaking” nations of Great Britain and the United States through a combination of British influence (Army) and American resources (Rockefeller’s money, Breasted’s scholarship, and the Arabs’ favorable view of the United States) and ensuring that these lands remained militarily and archaeologically under control of the West. Such an informal Anglo-American alliance would be less susceptible to “embarrassing political entanglements.”21

20 Breasted to Fosdick, June 23, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence A, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

21 Perhaps Breasted was referring to the pre-War Chester Project in which the United States officially supported a private U.S. bid to build railroads in the Ottoman Empire. The project was led by Admiral Colby M. Chester, who believed that there were possibilities for commercial and industrial markets for the U.S., in the Near East. Specifically, Chester was looking at the Ottoman Empire, where he planned to bid on a railway construction project just prior to the First World War. The moment was opportune. The Ottomans were wary of the European powers who were hovering above the Ottoman Empire, waiting for its imminent collapse. U.S. involvement in the area was
The absence of any mention of the French is revealing. By suggesting that the United States would uphold the archaeological end of the bargain, the Breasted-Rockefeller team proposed to take over France’s role as leader of archaeology. The British government seems to have understood this. They did not object. However, probably aware that they were compromising or violating the spirit of the Anglo-French 1904 Treaty, they declined to discuss the project with the French. Instead, they asked Breasted to do so. The British seemed to be taking advantage of the perception of the United States’ as an apolitical entity in the Near East, and perhaps they were themselves interested in removing the French from their position as head of the EAS, and weakening French authority in Egypt. Perhaps they believed an Anglo-American alliance was preferable and more advantageous than an Anglo-French alliance in the changing world. Or, perhaps they were playing the French against the Americans to temper the long established but declining power of one and the inevitable rising power of the other. In the end, the BFO went as far as to suggest to Breasted that he leave France out of all negotiations, suggesting that it would be better to present the French with a fait accompli. 22

The team’s extensive talks with the British Foreign Office in London were in contrast to their dealings with the U.S. State Department, reflecting the particular nature of U.S. foreign policy at the time. The team used the State Department only to provide an official stamp of purely humanitarian until this point, and Chester hoped to take advantage of the United States’ positive, apolitical image in the Ottoman Empire, to win this project. The U.S. State Department took the unusual move (for the time) of supporting this bid, but the bid met with an embarrassing end.

22 Breasted to Fosdick, May 16, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence A, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA. Here, the U.S. State Department’s advice to Breasted went unheeded. The Department had warned him that if the British tried to exclude the French from this decision, “it would bring about a combination of the Egyptians and the French to oppose the English and also ourselves and our project.”
approval to their project for the benefit of the British, who cared about such formality. The government’s involvement was kept confidential from the Egyptian public:

> It is true that the British lay enormous emphasis on official or unofficial influence. Official influence or pressure of any kind is for a British statesman a very different thing from a merely personal presentation, and if the weight of the U.S. Government is behind our project it will in some ways, of course, add enormously to our influence in handling the difficult Barracks question and the problem of French relations to our Museum [sic] project. On the other hand, our project derives a certain dignity and strength from the very fact that it stands on its own merits and has not become entangled in the meshes of political influence. 23

The team devised an interesting strategy. They would approach control of Egyptian archaeology from two ends. The museum was the visible offer to the Egyptian government. At the same time, Breasted was working with the State Department through his colleague George Ellery Hale, the National Academy of Sciences, and U.S. museums with a stake in the archaeological field in Egypt (such as the Metropolitan Museum), to ensure Western control of the Egyptian Antiquities Service by appealing to the British to apply pressure on the Egyptians, so that a Westerner could remain in control of the EAS. The State Department was on board with this plan, since the interests of private U.S. groups were at stake. As Hale wrote to Breasted:

> The State Department naturally wishes to base all its representations to foreign governments on the concrete American interests involved. They therefore wish to receive resolutions from the Metropolitan Museum and all other institutions and societies directly interested, pointing out the vital

23 Breasted to Fosdick, May 10, 1925, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence A, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.
importance of having a foreign scientific man serve as Director General of Antiquities instead of an Egyptian. 24

The statement is revealing because it clearly shows the unique relationship between the U.S. government’s foreign policy and “American interests,” as they were defined by U.S. scholars, institutions, and philanthropists. It shows how U.S. foreign policy in the Near East was determined by American interest groups and by changing conditions in the Near East itself. Up until the early twentieth century, the U.S. seemed disinterested in the Near East. The country’s activities were of a private nature limited to those of missionaries, colleges, some business interests, and some cultural interests (such as the beginnings of archaeological work). The State Department supported these projects but was uninterested in promoting them, or in involving itself in the political situation in the Near East. 26 It was the European century, not the American century, and the Department viewed the Near East as Europe’s domain. 27 It only demanded that its citizens and interest groups receive the same advantages that were shown to the Europeans. State Department employees in the field, however, were often not very effective in securing these interests, leading U.S. groups to turn to British officials instead, a situation that continued into 1926 with the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s close association with the British government.

24 Hale to Breasted, May 8, 1925, folder 1925, box Correspondence between George Ellery Hale and James Henry Breasted, James Henry Breasted Papers, OIA.

26 Accordingly, it left the “Eastern Question” up to European powers (Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire).

27 See, DeNovo, American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939.
From 1900 to 1914, due to stirrings of nationalism in the Near East, the State Department encountered difficulties in ensuring that its citizens received the same concessions as the Europeans, but it adhered to its policy of non-intervention, with one exception which turned into a major fiasco and strengthened the Department’s resolve to remain in the backseat with regards to the Near East. 28 Even when the nations of the Near East called on the United States to support their cause, the latter sided with Europe, as was illustrated by Theodore Roosevelt’s support for British administration in Egypt in 1910. 29

With 1919, the U.S. of course began to engage with the Near East, but it retreated rather quickly at the end of the Paris Peace Conference. However, its brief involvement had created pro-U.S. sentiments in the Arab world, which the Breasted-Rockefeller team would try to capitalize on in the near future. In the meantime, the Department allowed itself to be led by private interest groups. But perhaps because it had already engaged with the Near East, and because it had developed imperial interests in other parts of the globe, the State Department began to show more interest in Near Eastern affairs, than it had before. With respect to archaeology, the Department seems to have used the interests of U.S. archaeological institutions to probe and gauge the Near East with private money and minimum trouble for the government.

With regards to the control of the EAS, the State Department asked U.S. museums to send resolutions to the Department, stating what they would like to accomplish. The Department suggested that museums request “foreign control” rather than “European control,” as it wished to

28 The Chester Project. See footnote 21.

29 DeNovo, American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939.
ultimately see an American in power. Accordingly, Breasted sent urgent cablegrams to all major museums asking them to write letters and most—especially those with archaeological expeditions in the Near East such as the Metropolitan Museum—complied. The Department displayed its naïveté and limited grasp on the situation, when it suggested that it might have better luck bypassing the British and speaking to the Egyptians directly. Breasted, however, was politically savvier. He had traveled extensively in the Near East and he knew that although there was good feeling towards the U.S., the country had no official power. He also knew that the British army had to be kept in the loop. Accordingly, he encouraged the State Department to cooperate with the British.

Theories of cultural imperialism work on the premise that cultural or social incentives are a more efficient, less confrontational, means of winning over a country and creating hegemony. Accordingly, empires or governments—such as the French under Napoleon—use culture as a means of gaining foothold in foreign lands. Possibly the State Department perceived the Breasted-Rockefeller museum as such a tool. But the Department did not initiate the project. Since the project was conceived entirely in the private realm and without U.S. government

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30 Hale to Breasted, May 9, 1925, folder 1925, box Correspondence between George Ellery Hale and James Henry Breasted, James Henry Breasted Papers, OIA.

The Department did realize the difficulty of this goal in light of general scholarly respect for the French, particularly Lacau's predecessor, Gaston Maspero.

31 Simultaneously, Breasted asked for introductions for the museum project. As it turns out, he did not need the introductions. In London he was able to meet the British Foreign Minister on his own account, showing how deeply he had penetrated the political scene in these countries. In Egypt, he did rely upon the American minister, for the sake of formality.

knowledge, in this instance of cultural imperialism philanthropy led the way. In a groundbreaking work on U.S. foundations, *Wealth and Culture*, Eduard C. Lindeman researched the unique culture of foundations and philanthropy in the United States. Looking at the work of foundations from 1921 to 1936 – the first major proliferation of them – he wrote of their importance in American life:

> Foundation trustees wield a power in American life, which is probably equaled only by the national government itself, and by the executives in our dominant corporations.\(^{33}\)

Lindeman focused primarily on national philanthropy and foundations, but his observations can also be used to understand the work of individual U.S. philanthropists in the international arena. Foremost is the notion that the foundation is almost more powerful than the government in determining which fields or areas of research are to be funded. We can deduce from this that the foundations – and private philanthropists – led the way in local and international missions, and that the U.S. government followed suit. In the case of the Breasted-Rockefeller team, the foundation in turn was led by a scholar.

There are probably government archives that could reveal if the State Department was merely following the Breasted-Rockefeller team or if it was using the team’s considerable power to strengthen its own position and to test the waters in the Near East. Archaeological institutions and museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Oriental Institute, and eventually the Breasted-Rockefeller project, had mobilized the U.S. State Department’s involvement in

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Egyptian archaeology. Perhaps the government began to understand archaeology as a tool with which to widen the political fissures in Egypt in 1926 for U.S. entry. Of the two international powers in Egypt, the British were in a stronger position. Their Army was stationed in Cairo. The French, meanwhile, maintained only a tenuous hold on archaeology in Egypt and on the Egyptian Antiquities Service and they were easier to dislodge from their position. The Breasted-Rockefeller team’s project was based on firming up the western control of Egyptian Antiquity, but they were also hoping to establish American dominance in the field. Much like the Egyptian nationalists themselves, the team and the State Department, which approved of removing Lacau, saw the British lack of control over archaeology as a way of making inroads into this important field. Egyptian archaeology was then an arena in which both the Egyptian nationalists and U.S. imperialists saw a chance to gain a foothold. That the project failed, demonstrated that the Egyptian government was actually quite aware of its imperial nature from the very first.
EPILOGUE

Mausoleum of Sa’d Zaghlul. Architect, Mustafa Fahmy.
By withdrawing their offer in March 1926, the Breasted-Rockefeller team did not irrevocably kill the proposal for the New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute. Two months later, the team was evaluating the proposal’s failure and tentatively considering the Egyptian government’s communiqué¹ on the project and the changes that the government said it was in the process of proposing when the gift was withdrawn.² The team decided to conceal any obvious enthusiasm for re-engaging with the Egyptian government over this project, believing that such a tactic would tip the balance in their favor. But internally they had begun weighing the Egyptian government’s terms of engagement. The team relented on some points, but could not compromise on foreign control of the antiquities. At about this time, the nationalist party defeated Ziwar Pasha’s government, and came into power. The new government apparently expressed an interest in the project,³ prompting Breasted to deem the nationalists ‘moderate,’ in a reversal of his earlier position, perfectly illustrating the idea of local “collaborators” as a changing group.⁴ Simultaneously, King Fu’ad I approached the Breasted-Rockefeller team separately through Charles Watson, the founder and president of the American University of

¹ “[Egyptian] Government Communiqué on the Rockefeller Gift to Egypt: (Translated from the French original, appearing in L’Espoir, a Cairo daily, of May 1, 1926),” May, 1926, folder 258, Box 25, Series 2E, RG 3, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller (hereafter designated OMR), RAC.

² Belknap to Breasted, May 15, 1926, Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

³ Breasted to Fosdick, June 4, 1926, Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.

Cairo. Distancing himself from the ex-Prime Minister and highlighting internal Egyptian rivalries, the King blamed the failure of the project on Ziwar Pasha.

At this point it is helpful to revisit the idea of "local collaborators." The team now considered the nationalists as collaborators, as opposed to Ziwar Pasha. This prompts us to ask why the nationalists wished to cooperate with the Breasted-Rockefeller team. Did they still hope that the United States would live up to its promise as a ‘benevolent’ power, championing nationhood for Egypt? It is certainly possible; welcoming a U.S. private interest group could perhaps turn this hope into a concrete reality. The King’s separate bid to the Breasted-Rockefeller team adds another dimension to the political situation. Why was the King interested, after his initial dismissal of the project, and why was he approaching the Breasted-Rockefeller team, independent of the nationalist government? Did he wish to gain U.S. support and backing for his position? Again, it is certainly possible. The King’s indirect approach through the American University of Cairo (another private U.S. institution in Cairo), and the nationalist party’s interest in cooperating with a ‘private’ group of individuals (as the Breasted-Rockefeller team presented themselves to be), both point to the ‘private,’ ‘cultural’ dimension of U.S. imperialism, in contrast to British and French imperialisms.

However, despite Egyptian attempts at re-engagement, and despite the Breasted-Rockefeller team’s interest in restarting the project, nothing came of it. The exact circumstances

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5 C.R. Watson to Fosdick, August 11, 1926, RAC.
regarding the final death of the project are uncertain. The main problem seems to have been the team's unwillingness to relinquish foreign control of the antiquities.\textsuperscript{6}

Probably the failure to restart the project stemmed from another development as well, for which Breasted himself was responsible. During the New Egyptian Museum negotiations – before the offer was withdrawn – Breasted visited Jerusalem, where he found another dilapidated, dark museum in desperate need of replacement.\textsuperscript{7} He wrote to Fosdick, who believed that Rockefeller might be interested. Accordingly, Breasted outlined a plan for a new museum and research institute, but on a more modest scale than the Cairo proposal. In the spring of 1927, after the New Egyptian Museum offer had been withdrawn, Rockefeller pledged $2 million for the Jerusalem project, contingent on successful negotiations with the authorities in Palestine.

Rockefeller's willingness to undertake another such project in the Near East after the fairly spectacular failure of the Egyptian project may seem surprising if it were not for the fact that the Palestinian authorities in question were actually the British, whom the Breasted-Rockefeller team did not suspect of any mischief in the Egyptian case, and with whom they could presumably work easily. The British were much more firmly in control in Palestine; not only did they control the military affairs of the country, they also controlled the domestic affairs.

Probably the more direct British control allowed for smoother negotiations, as well as a less ambitious strategy on the part of the Breasted-Rockefeller team. The museum and research


\textsuperscript{7} All facts regarding the Palestine Archaeological Museum (now Rockefeller museum) are from Jeffrey Abt's article. See, Jeffrey Abt, "Toward a Historian's Laboratory: The Breasted-Rockefeller Museum Projects in Egypt, Palestine, and America." \textit{Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt} XXXIII (1996): 173-194.
institute were combined in one building, designed by Austen St. Barbe Harrison, the British born architect of the Public Works Department in Palestine. The building's design suggested a "Romanesque sensibility" but with Arab and southern Italian influences, and was built using local Jerusalem stone (Fig. 46). Similar to the New Egyptian Museum proposal, the galleries were laid out in a chronological clock-wise manner, this time providing a survey of Near Eastern history, starting with the prehistoric age and ending with 1700 C.E.  

The Palestine Archaeological Museum featured both a museum and a research facility. The director of the British-formed Department of Antiquities was the head of the museum, but Rockefeller stipulated that an international advisory board (the Archaeological Advisory Board) be created to advise the director, in order to maintain some form of international control over the collection. The Board members would include all active, leading archaeological schools in Palestine, of which the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) was a major player. Breasted was a Trustee of the ASOR. However, it seems that the Palestinian government was not asked to hand over its antiquities to this Board for any number of years.

The lenient terms of the museum caused some concern to Rockefeller and Fosdick. They were not concerned about adequate care and protection of antiquities as might be expected if we took their commitment to science alone at face value. Rather, their concern stemmed from the politically incorrect difference in treatment of the Egyptian and Palestinian governments. Fosdick wrote to Breasted:

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8 If there is any rhetoric of appropriation of origins etc. in this layout from Breasted, I do not know. My focus has been on the New Egyptian Museum and consequently, I did not study the archives of the Palestine Archaeological Museum.
We are treating the Palestine Government far more liberally than we offered to treat the Egyptian Government. The reasons for it are obvious: we can deal with the English in Palestine where it is impossible to deal with the Egyptians in Egypt. However, if the Egyptian proposition should ever be reopened, the terms upon which Mr. Rockefeller had offered to contribute his money to Palestine, if publicly known, might seriously embarrass the situation. For that reason it would seem as if the terms ought to be presented by the English, and Mr. Rockefeller’s contribution made on the basis of those terms.

Lord Plumer (the British High Commissioner) was informed of this and, for the sake of appearances, he made the (already agreed upon) proposal to Rockefeller, who ‘accepted’ it. The museum was not completed until 1935 (due to an earthquake and political turmoil). It opened in 1938. Jordan nationalized it in 1966. After the Six Day War, it came under Israeli control. The museum is now known as the Rockefeller Museum.

The Breasted-Rockefeller team’s defeat in Cairo, but their easy passage in Jerusalem and the difference in the degree of control they asked for and received in each case further underscores the nature of this emerging U.S. imperialism. The imperial drive, as I have argued, was concentrated in a private interest group comprised of an industrialist-philanthropist-capitalist, and activated by a scholar and Orientalist. The Breasted-Rockefeller team approached political matters with a confident and ambitious mix of corporate and scholarly approach, but without any actual political experience pertinent to the complex reality of the Near East. They sought to use cultural projects for the “political ordering of space” and for creating archaeological (and as we have seen, political) “bases” throughout the Near East.9 Unlike the

9 Here we are reminded of Chalmers Johnson’s notion of the “empire of bases,” as mentioned in George Steinmetz’s article. See, George Steinmetz, “Imperialism or Colonialism? From Windhoek to Washington, By Way of Basra,” in
French, they tried to separate the control of archaeology from the Egyptian government by creating a private corporation, privately funded, located outside of Egypt and unanswerable to the country’s government. U.S. imperialism was not a continuation of Old World Empires; it adopted some concepts of Old World imperialism (particularly cultural imperialism), and grafted these onto a totally new private, corporate system.

Breasted expected to succeed by the sheer weight of Rockefeller’s money behind his project. He did not factor in the shrewdness of the British and French empires, and the strength of Egyptian nationalism and its wariness over such ‘gifts,’ no matter how much the Egyptians wanted to compromise and work with the team. Additionally, in the inter-war period, the U.S. State Department may have supported these cultural projects, but it did not have much authority. Its outlook and ambition with respect to the Near East was still rather weak and tentative. Furthermore, it had not followed through with the self-determination that Wilson championed, thereby draining some of the Muslim goodwill towards the U.S. And, in the absence of any military bases or real authority in the Near East, it made the Breasted-Rockefeller team dependent on the British, who clearly saw the team’s initial bid to move the army out of the Kasr al-Nil barracks as the usurpation that it was. Rumors in Cairo attributed the failure of the project to the British Residency. A government minister suggested as much to Breasted, who brushed it

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Breasted’s dismissal of this possibility was another in a list of failures on his part to gauge the situation correctly.

Cairo was perhaps a particularly difficult starting point. Breasted’s incorrect, yet confident, reading of the political situation handicapped the team. Breasted perceived three political players: the Egyptian nationalists, the British, and the French, but only feared a Franco-Egyptian alliance against the project and failed to see other shifting alliances. And, he failed to credit Egyptian nationalism. The team’s failure in Cairo and their success in Jerusalem demonstrates that they were really only comfortable dealing directly with the British and that the balance of power was still in the favor of the British at this stage in the inter-War period.

The successful Palestine Archaeological Museum was one of three ‘afterlifes’ or ‘epilogues’ to the New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute. In 1927, Sa’d Zaghlul, the leader of the nationalist Wafd party passed away. His mausoleum design was marked by a major debate. Should it be neo-Pharaonic or neo-Mamluk?

There was little precedence for the neo-Pharaonic in Cairo, prior to the New Egyptian Museum proposal. During Isma’il’s rule and in the subsequent colonial period, there were only three examples of a neo-Pharaonic building in Cairo: a commercial resident block, the French-built Cairo Museum, and a Jewish synagogue. In all three, Pharaonic influence was limited to

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10 Breasted to Watson, May 26, 1926, folder Cairo Museum Project – Correspondence: Curtis Fosdick Belknap, box Cairo Museum Project Correspondence A-M, Breasted Papers, OIA.
ornamental applications, as it was in the design of the New Egyptian Museum. These neo-
Pharaonic elements were a Western import: Europe and the United States appropriated the style
and then introduced it into Egypt. Breasted’s design for the proposed New Egyptian Museum
displayed the grandest use of such elements, and in 1927 just after the failure of the museum, it
was the most prominent such example.

The architect, Mustafa Fahmy, proposed two mausoleum designs: one was a neo-Mamluk
design, the other was neo-Pharaonic. Despite protests over the ‘un-Islamic’ character of the neo-
Pharaonic design, ultimately the style prevailed (Fig. 47), ushering in a brief era of neo-
Pharaonism in Egyptian architecture that lasted until 1930. Secular nationalist leaders
encouraged neo-Pharaonism in thought and architecture to unite the Copts and Muslims in the
Egyptian nationalist struggle. The style emerged as a useful, neutral and unique metaphor for
nationalism: it allowed different religious groups to unite behind it, and it allowed Egypt to
differentiate itself from Europe and from the rest of the Arab world. Though the neo-Pharaonic
won out over the neo-Mamluk in this instance, ultimately the Egyptian base was ruled by pan-
Arab sentiments, and the country returned to the neo-Mamluk.

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to enliven the façade. While the Ramses Street block bristles with Neo-Pharaonic heads and scarabs, these are
tailored to fit into a Neo-Baroque façade that pays homage to European style… In each case, where the detail is
Neo-Pharaonic, its context and the reason for its placement is classical. Even the details are modified in an almost
Piranesian manner to make them more European in character. The result? An eclectic European version of Pharaonic
decoration.”


13 Ibid.
The publicity generated by the Breasted-Rockefeller museum just prior to the mausoleum’s design strongly suggests that the latter was influenced by Bosworth’s design. So the rejection of the museum, which was an imperial project, and the appropriation of the style that it was imposing in Egypt, in the mausoleum of the nationalist leader – and through it the modern Egyptian appropriation of ancient Egypt – can be seen as a moment of nationalist triumph.

On June 18, 1953, Egypt became a republic. On November 12, 1953, the New York Times announced that hotelier Conrad Hilton had signed an agreement with Gamal Abdel Nasser, the President of Egypt, to build the first Hilton hotel in Cairo. The government agreed to provide the site. Their pick: the Kasr al-Nil, the location of the British barracks and the first choice of the failed Breasted-Rockefeller museum. Hilton hotels were conceived as “a little America.”

Conrad Hilton was honest about the profits he made, but he also believed that these hotels promoted the U.S. way of life in countries most susceptible to communism after the Second World War. The Kasr al-Nil remained the political site of choice for foreign intervention and in the end a private U.S. project was built on the site of the British colonial barracks. (Fig. 48).

The failure of the New Egyptian Museum was therefore not the end of the story for U.S. imperialism, the Breasted-Rockefeller team, Egyptian nationalism, Egypt-U.S. relations, or the site. With the Palestine Archaeological Museum, the team succeeded elsewhere but with a more moderate proposal, and the British succeeded in holding off U.S. ambitions for a while. The

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French succeeded in retaining control of the Egyptian Antiquities Service a little while longer—at least until the Nasserist revolution. Though the Egyptians lost out on a grand new museum, they managed to successfully defeat another incoming Western power in the only field they could viably contest in: Egyptian archaeology. They translated this triumph in the appropriation of the neo-Pharaonic style in their nationalist leader’s mausoleum. However, after the Second World War, the United States dominated international politics: its period of tentative engagement with Europe and the Near East was over. The United States’ ascendancy was accompanied by the end of British and French colonial empires. Reflecting these new realities, ultimately, a U.S. corporation did open its “base” in Egypt.
**Figure 1:** Kasr al-Nil Barracks, Cairo. The barracks were situated along the Nile and faced the water. The French-built Cairo Museum is in the top right of the photograph, overlooking the parade ground behind the barracks.
Figure 2: Photographing a rock stela, during the 1906-1907 Nubian-Egyptian Expedition. Photograph taken by James Breasted.
Source: The Oriental Institute Website.
Figure 3: Stereograph from *Egypt through the Stereoscope*. 
Figure 4: Stereograph from *Egypt through the Stereoscope*.
Figure 5: Exhibit B, attached to the Indenture-Agreement. The map shows the 'compromise' site on Gezira Island.
Source: Oriental Institute Archives.
Figure 6: [Frontispiece] "Suggested Entrance Portico Of The New Cairo Museum Building Facing The Nile.
Drawn by William Walcot from Designs by Welles Bosworth." Source: *The New Egyptian Museum and Research Institute at Cairo* (Proposal book - typical for all water-color plates, unless noted otherwise)
Figure 7: "General View of Suggested New Cairo Museum Buildings Seen From Across The Nile. The Museum On The Right, The Research Institute On The Left. Drawn by William Walcot from Designs by Welles Bosworth."
Figure 8: "Suggested Treatment Of Water Approach To The New Cairo Museum Buildings Seen From Mid-Nile As They Might Appear At Ceremonial Dedication. Drawn by William Walcot from Designs by Welles Bosworth."
Figure 9: "Suggested Alcove Off Main Vestibule Of The New Cairo Museum Building. Drawn by William Walcot from Designs by Welles Bosworth."
Figure 10: "Suggested Main Court In The New Cairo Museum Building Adapted For Out-of-door Exhibits Drawn by William Walcot from Designs by Welles Bosworth."
Figure 11: "Suggested Hypostyle Hall In The New Cairo Museum Building Drawn by William Walcot from Designs by Welles Bosworth."
Figure 12: "Suggested Rear Court In The New Cairo Museum Building
Drawn by William Walcot from Designs by Welles Bosworth."
Figure 13: "Suggested Interior Of Rearmost Hall In Axis Of New Cairo Museum Building, With Colossal Statues Of Amenhotep III And Queen Tiy. Drawn by William Walcot from Designs by Welles Bosworth."
Figure 14: "Suggested Plan Of New Cairo Museum Building Designed by Welles Bosworth."
Figure 15: "Suggested Sections Of New Cairo Museum Building
Drawn by William Walcot from Designs by Welles Bosworth"
Figure 16: "Suggested Interior Of An Exhibition Hall Showing High Side-lighting In The New Cairo Museum Building Drawn by William Walcot from Designs by Welles Bosworth"
Figure 17: "Suggested Facade Of New Research Institute Building
Drawn by William Walcot from Designs by Welles Bosworth"
Figure 18: "Suggested Vestibule Of The New Research Institute Building
Drawn by William Walcot from Designs by Welles Bosworth"
Figure 19: "Suggested Library In The New Research Institute Building
Drawn by William Walcot from Designs by Welles Bosworth"
Figure 20: "Suggested Plan Of The New Research Institute Building
From Designs by Welles Bosworth"
Figure 21: "The Pyramids of Gizeh At Sunset
From a Water Color by Welles Bosworth"
Figure 22: Aerial photograph showing Gezira Island
Source: Oriental Institute Archives.
Figure 23: Suggested Site Plan of the New Cairo Museum Building and Research Institute at Cairo. Probably Prepared by Welles Bosworth on the directions of Breasted. Breasted planned to insert this map in the proposal book.
Source: Oriental Institute Archives.
Figure 24: Suggested Site Plan of the New Cairo Museum Building and Research Institute at Cairo. Probably Prepared by Welles Bosworth on the directions of Breasted. This plan shows the new buildings superimposed on the barracks. It was not meant for the proposal book; it was probably used as a schematic drawing. Source: Oriental Institute Archives.
Figure 25: Bulaq Museum, courtyard. Source: Reid, *Whose Pharaohs*?
Figure 26: Mariette's arrangement of Ancient Egyptian artifacts. Source: Reid, *Whose Pharaohs*?
Figure 27: Egyptian Museum at Khedive Isma'il's Giza palace. Source: Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?*
Figure 28: British Museum.
Figure 29: French-built Egyptian Museum.
Figure 30: Egyptian Museum - Arch bracketed between two pylons.
Figure 31: Museum of Arab Art.
Figure 32: Greco-Roman Museum.
Figure 33: Coptic Museum.
Figure 34: Map of museums in Cairo. Source: Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?*
Figure 35: Sultan Hassan.

Figure 36: Sultan Hassan.

Figure 37: Muhammad 'Ali's mosque.
Figure 38: AT&T Headquarters. Source: Jarzombek, *Designing MIT: Bosworth's New Tech.*
Figure 39: MIT. Source: Jarzombek, *Designing MIT: Bosworth's New Tech.*

Figure 40: MIT. Source: Jarzombek, *Designing MIT: Bosworth's New Tech.*
Figure 41: Breasted's proposed layout / circulation. Source: By author over Proposal Book plan.
Figure 42: Parade ground near Kasr al-Nil, with French-run museum in the background.
Figure 43: Kasr al-Nil from the water.
Figure 44: Map showing the relative position of Cairo (and the New Egyptian Museum) to the ancient sites along the Nile.
Figure 45: Map showing Oriental Institute Expeditions.
Source: Breasted, *The Oriental Institute*. 
Figure 46: Palestine Archaeological Museum, Jerusalem.
Figure 47: Sa'd Zaghlul's mausoleum.
Figure 48: Nile Hilton.
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