

**Credibility, Civility, and the Archaeological Dig  
House in Mid-1950s Egypt**

## **Abstract**

This article argues that forms of civility governing who possessed the credibility to carry out archaeological fieldwork altered in Egypt during the post-World War II era of decolonization. Incorporating Arabic sources, the article focuses on the preparation of a dig house used during an excavation run by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities and the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania at the site of Mit Rahina, Egypt, in the mid-1950s. The study demonstrates how the colonial genealogies of such structures converged with political changes heralded by the rise of Nasser. Preparing the dig house, Euro-American archaeologists involved with the excavation had to abide by social norms practiced by the Egyptians who had recently taken charge of the Department of Antiquities. Given that these norms often perpetuated older hierarchies of race, gender, and class, however, the article questions what the end of colonialism actually meant for archaeology.

## **Keywords**

Civility, Class, Credibility, Decolonization, Dig House, Egypt, Gender, Race

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## Introduction

What I did know and what was needed, was how to wrangle with the Arabs for materials, the same technique everywhere, how to see that we got what was promised by the Antiquities Department ... how to use diplomacy when required, and all the extraneous matters which a fine Egyptologist like our Rudolf Anthes simply didn't concern himself with too seriously. But when budgets are low and must be made to stretch, it is imperative that we have management.

John Dimick (1968: 5)

In January 1955, the Board of Managers of the (then-) University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania (now the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) appointed John Dimick Project Director of the institution's forthcoming archaeological excavation at the site of Mit Rahina, located just south of Cairo, Egypt. On the recommendation of the museum's director, Froelich Rainey (1907–1992), Dimick would “handle the business management and public relations of the expedition,” which, drawing on the rhetoric of Cold War modernization programs, was to be run for the benefit of, and in collaboration with, the Egyptian Department of Antiquities (DoA).<sup>1</sup> Dimick—a former engineer for the Philips Petroleum Company of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, and one-time member of the wartime Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner to the Central Intelligence Agency—had no experience working in Egypt. But six months previously his wife, Marion Tully Dimick (1904–1981), had made a substantial financial gift to the University Museum, precipitating his involvement. Dimick began to oversee everything

from the appointment of field staff to the outfitting of Mit Rahina's dig house, giving the head of the museum's Egyptian Section, the rather more experienced Egyptologist Rudolf Anthes (1896–1985), time to get on with fieldwork.

Dimick's wish to "wrangle with the Arabs" caused difficulties with his Egyptian counterparts, however. The dig (published in Anthes, 1959 and 1965) took place in the period after Egypt's July 1952 Free Officers' coup. One event among many that shaped global 'decolonization' and the formal dismantling of European empires after World War II, the coup constituted a mutiny by army officers that led to the end of Egypt's monarchy and the last vestiges of British occupation in Egypt (the occupation's end was negotiated in 1954, but made final by the Suez conflict of 1956). It also led to the rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser and the development of a 'revolutionary' Egyptian nation-state. More particularly, the coup meant that the previously French-run DoA came under the leadership of Egyptians. Political shifts meant that the practice of managing archaeological work in Egypt had started to change.

That change did not entirely constitute 'decolonization' (a category denoting a top-down geopolitical process, not necessarily a lived experience). But it did constitute an increasing need for the Euro-Americans who had long dominated archaeology in Egypt to attend to Egyptian sensibilities as they constructed the spaces where they worked. Those archaeologists could still dig in Egypt. Now, however, their credibility was at risk if they ignored—as they so often had done—the many Egyptians with whom they worked, and whose own actions and social networks made that work possible in the first place. Egyptian archaeology was a social endeavor. But Euro-American archaeologists now needed to adapt to changing practices of civility in Egyptian archaeological work or risk losing their credibility and their ability to continue work in the country.

By examining the preparation of the dig house at Mit Rahina and the social relationships with which that process became embedded, I explain why. According to the University Museum's (rather disingenuous) promotional narrative, the dig represented unalloyed internationalism: an American archaeological institution mobilizing the expertise of its employees for the benefit of its Egyptian counterpart. But before the excavation had even begun, equipping the Mit Rahina dig house (fig. 1) meant reckoning not only with the complex colonial genealogy of such structures and their place in the archaeological field, but also with the changing political and social circumstances within which work at the site occurred and in relation to which credibility there was conferred. This process therefore came to embody the period of flux within which it took place. In this context, Dimick's boorishness was neither credible nor authoritative. Anthes' civility around members of the DoA possessed more promise, even as it meant performing racial, gender, and class hierarchies that were themselves questionable.

**[Insert Figure 1]**

As debates about the decolonization of archaeology have (slowly) gained prominence, this historical perspective on the dig house is urgent. Such debates focus on decolonizing the institutions *qua* institutions most clearly responsible for archaeology's continued power in the world: museums, university departments, and so on. But as discussions in the history of science make clear (Carruthers and Van Damme, 2017), archaeological practices are wide-ranging. And as Morgan and Eddisford (2015) note, spaces such as the dig house have long constituted meaningful locales of such practice. The dig house is an archaeological institution, too. As the formal end of colonialism arrived, how did such spaces function, how

did their history shape this process, and what relations of archaeological power and credibility did this situation constitute?

Addressing these and other issues relating to the social production of knowledge, I take a methodological cue from debates within the history of science addressing how credible or authoritative scientific practice is linked to notions of civility and appropriate social behavior (Shapin, 1994). In late nineteenth-century Egypt, for instance, the word *adab* (denoting propriety or good manners) had come “to imply new norms of civility and a new kind of moral science” connected to the increasing authority of the work of educational reformers (Elshakry, 2013: 19). I show how using civility as an analytical category can also pay dividends in terms of thinking through the changing manners of archaeological work in mid-1950s Egypt. After discussing the genesis of the Mit Rahina excavations, I illustrate how Egyptian dig houses embodied particular norms of colonial social behavior, simultaneously embodying attendant social tensions. As the outfitting of the Mit Rahina dig house took place, I show how the position of the work within Egypt’s shifting political frame enflamed these tensions, threatening the authority and scientific credibility of the University Museum’s personnel. Only attending to the forms of civility practiced by the Egyptians now in charge of the DoA enabled a change in this situation (and, ironically, permitted multiple practices related to colonial-era archaeology to continue).

To show why, I read the archives of the Mit Rahina work together with Arabic press sources in order to make the excavation’s practices “transient, provisional objects of historical inquiry that themselves need to be analyzed, if not explained” (Stoler, 2009: 50). Histories of archaeology in Egypt have often been hampered by the unavailability of Arabic-language sources, most notably the archives of the DoA. As Yoav Di-Capua (2009) discusses, the politically selective curation of Egyptian state archives more generally is also problematic. Critically used, however, Egyptian press sources place the (more readily

available, but themselves historically contingent) archives of Euro-American archaeological excavations in perspective. As Laura Bier (2011: 18) notes, state control of the Egyptian press under the Free Officers occurred as early as 1954. But that same press still constituted “an important vehicle for the construction of, and contests over, the gendered meanings of Nasserist ideology” (Bier, 2011: 19). I use relevant press sources to demonstrate that social relations were critical to how the outfitting of the Mit Rahina dig house progressed. Only if those relations displayed the required form of civility would events there and at the rest of the site proceed.

### **The Mit Rahina Excavations**

The University Museum had excavated at Mit Rahina before, under the charge of the then-Curator of its Egyptian Section, Clarence Fisher (1876–1941), during and just after World War I. The dig house at the site had been built for this excavation, which took place in the period preceding Britain’s unilateral declaration of (nominal) Egyptian independence in 1922. (The declaration followed Egypt’s anti-colonial revolution of 1919, and galvanized the country’s inter- and post-war anti-colonial movement, which was directed at continuing British control of the country). The structure had also been used for a short time by the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute. Ultimately, though, the house reverted to being the property of the DoA. During the negotiation of the Mit Rahina work in 1954, the institution declared that the University Museum could, once again, make use of a section of the structure for the duration of the new excavations (Anthes, 1959: 6). The museum’s work, however, now took place in a different context to the colonial one in which Fisher had operated. Not only was Egypt changing politically, but the Cold War had helped lead to the spread of modernization programs across the decolonizing world, as the US and the Soviet

Union waged indirect conflict through the mobilization of technical experts in countries that they wished to influence (Ekbladh, 2010).

The Mit Rahina excavations, undertaken during two separate seasons in 1955 and 1956, had thus been geared toward the rhetorical tenets of the US-backed modernization projects taking place in Egypt at the time, even as the dig had no official relationship with the US government (for these projects, see Alterman, 2002; for more on the excavation's background, see Carruthers, 2017). Froelich Rainey, the University Museum's Director, was a politically well-connected consultant to the CIA, and well aware of the possibilities such projects offered for his institution as he developed the global reach of its fieldwork programs (Rainey, 1992). Under Rainey's leadership, the University Museum hoped to develop a relationship with Egypt that would lead either to the gift of antiquities excavated during the work or to other, artefactually profitable collaborative excavations elsewhere in the country. The rhetoric of modernization programs made developing this relationship appear less cynical. Following this rhetoric, the University Museum and the DoA picked Mit Rahina for excavation after (genuine) consultation together. A team from Philadelphia would excavate the site. Simultaneously, they would train members of the DoA in archaeological method. As the US government ran a project known as the Egyptian-American Rural Improvement Service, so, too, the University Museum followed such terminology and established its "Egyptian-American archaeological research program" (Carruthers, 2017: 279).

In retrospect, the work at Mit Rahina is notable, not only because it was the first example of an excavation in Egypt mobilizing modernization practice so substantively. The DoA (formerly the Egyptian Antiquities Service) had been controlled by French officials since its inception in 1858, and had anyway been subject to a long history of colonial interference (for which see Reid, 2002 and 2015). Its new Director, Mustafa Amer (1896–1973), had only taken his place at the institution in January 1953. There was, then, seemingly



little reason for the DoA to welcome the outside intervention that the Mit Rahina excavations presented. Yet the institution's relationships with foreign organizations in the pre-Suez era could be cordial, and Amer and his colleagues not only seemed to push for the collaboration to take place, but also promoted the excavation of Mit Rahina in particular.

Amer had received an MA in Geography from the University of Liverpool and, as Omnia El Shakry (2007: 68) notes, "was particularly proud of the congenial academic relations that had been established between the [then-] Egyptian [now Cairo] University and universities in Liverpool and Manchester." He also viewed work in geography (which he took to include archaeology, too), "as a prerequisite for Egypt's entry into the modern world as a producer of modern scientific knowledge." Yet there was more to the welcome given to the University Museum than one man's scientific internationalism. By having work undertaken at Mit Rahina, the DoA would benefit from the excavation of one of the many, relatively undocumented sites under its purview.

The rise of the Free Officers had heralded the implementation of long-discussed policies of land redistribution in Egypt. It also led to the land- and social-reform work with which modernization programs had been connected since their interwar origins in the Tennessee Valley Authority of the American South: Egypt's new Tahrir Province, a gigantic land reclamation and social reform project in the Western Nile Delta (El Shakry 2007: 212), was emblematic of such work. Now, places like Mit Rahina, if considered archaeologically unproductive, could be returned to agricultural use and peasant ownership, their status as 'sites' nullified. The work at Mit Rahina took place not in spite of, but because it sat at the nexus of contemporary Egyptian political and social concerns, alongside the global developments with which those concerns were connected. The dig house that John Dimick and others now sought to refurbish also stood at that crossroads, part of a long history of such fraught places.

## **Egyptian Dig Houses**

That the Mit Rahina dig house became contentious was not inevitable. As the history of such structures illustrates, however, once the house did collide with such controversy, its ability to act as a conductor was strong. Dig houses had long embodied Egypt's place in the world. Consequently, they also embodied the imperial violence and colonial tensions connected to the country. During World War I, for instance, when Egypt became a British protectorate, Anglo-German warfare boiled over in relation to the German excavation house located on the West Bank of the Nile at Luxor (ancient Thebes). The house had been standing since 1904. Yet in 1915 British military authorities in Egypt apparently ordered the structure destroyed on the pretext that "it was found by them to be the center of [an] illicit antiquities trade," not to mention "otherwise undesirable" (Gertzen, 2015: 39). Reflection on the local consequences of such extra-territorial conflict was not at the forefront of such imperial thinking. But whether physical or symbolic, such acts of colonial violence generated significant tension, while simultaneously generating implicit norms of civility.

Chicago House, the outpost of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute in the town of Luxor, was exemplary of such tension. The structure was (and still is) the second incarnation of the field base of the Oriental Institute's Epigraphic Survey in Egypt, originally erected in 1924 and re-built (and re-located) in 1935. The new Chicago House, in reality a large compound on the east bank of the Nile, was designed to be "larger, more durable, and readily secured during off-seasons" (Abt, 2011: 361). Looming by the river and above Luxor's fields (fig. 2), the monumental structure acted as a persistent reminder to Luxor's population of the global and local powers that had made the building's construction possible. Simultaneously, however, its status as 'secure' suggested that the presence of the building and its inhabitants was never quite welcomed.

**[Insert Figure 2]**

Spatial arrangements within field bases reflected such tensions further, at the same time as highlighting the way these anxieties intersected with the norms of race, gender, and class that shaped colonial archaeological civility. The camp used by Britain's Egypt Exploration Society at the site of Armant during 1928 and 1929 utilized spatial arrangements as a means to set the Europeans—and the European married couples—at the site apart from local workers. North of the tents used by the European staff on the expedition (marked with the names “Shorter,” “Pendlebury,” “Glanville,” “Emery’s” [*sic*], “Frankforts” on fig. 3) stood the “kitchen” and the tent belonging to the “servant,” who was, in various guises, a regular fixture of camp life, and whose closest European neighbors at the site comprised the two cohabiting couples. To the south, meanwhile, stood the tents occupied by the “men.” These “men” were presumably ‘Quftis,’ skilled archaeologists from the village of Quft in Middle Egypt. Quftis had established a stranglehold as roving archaeological foremen since they were originally employed by the British archaeologist Flinders Petrie in the 1890s. These ‘go-betweens’ (Schaffer et al. 2009) supervised the local forces of men, women, and children who were paid to excavate across the Middle East (Doyon, 2015; Quirke, 2010). Now, they too had to be accounted for as Armant’s field camp was organized.

**[Insert Figure 3]**

The camp’s layout reflected powerful racial mores relating to the segregation of colonizer and colonized, foreigner and local. It also elided the active role of women in fieldwork and its management. Figure 3 mentions no women by name. In her memoir of the Egypt Exploration Society’s interwar excavations at the site of Amarna, however, Mary

Chubb, the institution's Assistant Secretary, not only reveals the sheer number of different jobs that she was expected to do (typing correspondence, find registration, and first aid among them), but also the long hours involved. Still, true to colonial racial mores, Hussein Abu Bakr, the society's servant at the site, "contributed enormously to the much-needed relaxation after a long, hard day on the dig" (Chubb, 1998: 177). The Society's work at Armant appeared little different in its camp dynamics.

Servitude was not the only role played by Egyptians in such places, however. Rest houses that had belonged to the Egyptian Antiquities Service (the DoA's predecessor institution) dotted the country. Built as offices for the various Antiquities Service inspectorates (*tafātīsh*; sing. *taftīsh*), these structures also constituted homes for the local inspectors (*mufattishīn*; sing. *mufattish*) who administered archaeological sites and, occasionally, conducted excavations. Initially, these inspectors had been British and French. During the years either side of World War II, however, these official posts and the places connected to them had also exemplified the rise of Egyptians in the Antiquities Service, many of whom belonged to the 'new' *effendiyya*: broadly speaking, a group whose formal education in Egypt's developing university system helped placed them front and center in contesting what it meant to be a modern Egyptian (see e.g. Quirke, 2010: 96; Reid, 2015; Ryzova, 2014).

For instance, when he excavated at the site of Helwan from the early 1940s onward, the archaeologist Zaki Yusef Saad (1901–1982) lived with his family at the site's rest house.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, he developed his scholarly reputation through the publication of the work that he did there and the field tours that he offered to prominent guests, including Jefferson Caffery, the then-US Ambassador to Egypt (Unknown, 1952). As did Saad (who would consult, as a new Director of Inspectorates, during preparations for the Mit Rahina excavations), other members of the new *effendiyya* who would go on to run the DoA also

made their careers through their work in and around such structures. It was through their work in these buildings that these archaeologist-administrators made themselves indispensable authorities to the Euro-Americans who wanted to conduct Egyptian excavations. When Bernard Bothmer (1912–1993), the Cairo Director of the American Research Center in Egypt from 1954 to 1956, first visited the country in 1950, his trip was facilitated by this network of houses and people (Bothmer, 2003). Without this succession of places to sleep, drink tea, and acquire practical assistance, Bothmer’s visit would likely not have progressed beyond Cairo and the tourist entrepôt of Luxor. Dig houses channeled *effendi* possibility, subverting the colonial social hierarchies connected to the spaces.

This situation became clearer in 1954, as the Mit Rahina work was negotiated and as changes in Egypt’s political situation (increasingly represented by government and press as ‘revolutionary’) gathered speed: that year, Nasser became Prime Minister, precipitating his rise to the presidency in 1956. During 1954, weekly illustrated magazines published in Cairo ran a number of articles featuring the country’s leading archaeologists. Their aspirational pages held up members of Egypt’s DoA as model citizens (see e.g. Unknown, 1954a), often describing them in the symbolic space of the dig house itself. For example, in July 1954, the magazine *Akhir Sa‘a* ran an article on Zakaria Goneim (1911–1959), a 1934 graduate from Cairo (then the Egyptian) University’s Institute of Archaeology. Goneim had recently offered Anthes advice on excavation workforces,<sup>3</sup> and had also just found worldwide fame when he announced the discovery of the unopened sarcophagus of the pharaoh Sekhemkhet at the site of Saqqara (Goneim, 1956). Much of the article (Muntassir, 1954) deals with what happened when Goneim discovered that the sarcophagus was empty. But the piece also details Goneim’s life and sets him up as a model intellectual in the service of his country.

**[Insert Figure 4]**

Goneim's place in the dig house was central to this representation, emphasizing the symbolic importance of the structures as the Free Officers' coup turned into a revolution. He is pictured (fig. 4) sitting in the house and reading, an erudite scholar surrounded by books and attractive, yet functional furniture. Simultaneously, though, the article hinted that Goneim was an outcast from normative representations of home life, which at the time centered around a model of "the nuclear [middle class] family with a male breadwinner" (Bier, 2011: 71). The author, Salah Muntassir, described Goneim as a man who "had not married . . . he lives alone in a small house at Saqqara . . . in the stony desert" (Muntassir, 1954: 38–39). Yet this apparent deviance (and Goneim's lack of success in discovery) was corrected by his allegiance to state and nation. After taking a cigarette from his pocket and driving off, Muntassir described Goneim's first act after not finding anything in Sekhemkhet's sarcophagus as phoning his superiors to inform them of the news. Later, Goneim describes himself as living for a previous era in order to relate to the entire world what had happened during his country's past. Alone in the dig house, the archaeologist constituted a new national model.

**[Insert Figure 5]**

An article in *al-Musawwar* in November 1954 about Ahmed Fakhry (1905–1973), another graduate from Cairo University's Institute of Archaeology, takes a similar tack. The piece describes Fakhry as living un-ostentatiously in a "*bait ṣaghīr*" (a "small house"). Yet more meaningful is the connection of this lack of ostentation to the rhetoric of nation. The article is careful to note a historical change in who inhabited the house: "before the Second World War, the German archaeological mission who worked at the pyramids lived there" (Unknown, 1954b: 28). In the past, the house was quasi-colonized territory. Yet now it was

occupied by an Egyptian scholar who had studied abroad in Berlin and Brussels but returned to work in his country (for which see Bierbrier, 2012). As was the case in ‘Western’ dig houses, the article conveniently glossed over the presence of Ahmed Fakhry’s (German) wife, despite picturing her (fig. 5). Even so, the piece’s position was clear. The dig house, like the field it was situated in, was a symbolic and politically liminal space. Foreign archaeological missions, their authority diminished, could no longer count on being able to perform the norms of civility that they had once practiced in them. As members of the University Museum’s Mit Rahina team arrived in Egypt, they began to encounter this change to their cost.

### **Taking Care: First Steps at Mit Rahina**

The dig at Mit Rahina had been arranged with care, illustrating how Egypt’s changing political situation was clear, at least to some. Rudolf Anthes had visited Egypt to negotiate the work in early 1954, talking with officials like Amer, Fakhry, Goneim, and Saad in order to make sure that the excavation could take place the following year.<sup>4</sup> It was only after Anthes had returned to Philadelphia to continue his institution’s preparations that Dimick’s involvement in the work became necessary. And unlike Dimick, Anthes had a civil, conciliatory approach to the forthcoming excavation.

In contrast to his future colleague, Anthes (for whom see O’Connor, 1985) had worked in Egypt before. He had undertaken epigraphic fieldwork for the German Egyptologist/architectural historian Ludwig Borchardt in Luxor in the late 1920s and, in the early 1930s, worked with the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute at the temple of Medinet Habu, located on Luxor’s West Bank. Anthes’ diaries suggest that he retained collegial links with certain Egyptian colleagues.<sup>5</sup> And while himself a beneficiary of the

University Museum's Cold War largesse—plucked by Rainey from having to travel between a job at the Neues Museum on the eastern side of the Berlin Wall and a home in the city's American sector—Anthes also seemed interested in undertaking a genuine collaboration in Egypt, albeit through work grounded in European practice. Negotiating the excavation, his diary emphasized that “we are speaking only of a joint work . . . not an ‘American concession.’”<sup>6</sup> Simultaneously, he noted the necessity of Egyptians “adapting themselves to the methods of European researchers.”<sup>7</sup>

Anthes, though, knew that he was working in a situation of political flux: while in Cairo negotiating the Mit Rahina work, he noted that: “the government has changed over night [*sic*]. Abd el Nasser has become Prime Minister . . .”<sup>8</sup> This political sensitivity meant that he was careful to take advice from non-Egyptian colleagues selectively. When it became clear that the dig house at Mit Rahina would be available to use, he asked his old friend Herbert Ricke (1901–1976), Director of the Schweizerisches Institut für Ägyptisches Bauforschung und Altertumskunde in Cairo, for advice. Ricke had long experience of working in the field in Egypt (including in Luxor with Anthes), and his views on the future collaboration were less than positive. Ricke was reportedly “somewhat pessimistic in regard to the ability of this people [i.e. the Egyptians] to accomplish a good job in research.”<sup>9</sup> Anthes, it seems, attempted to ignore this opinion.

Despite Ricke's casual racism, however, his list of requirements for the dig house was uncontentious: “living room. Dining room. Kitchen. Storage for food. Bed rooms . . . Dark room for the photographer. Shower if possible. Water supply? Light supply?”<sup>10</sup> Thus, after inspecting the house for the first time a couple of days later and noting the necessity of making certain structural alterations, Anthes was happy to talk to Mustafa Amer about this advice.<sup>11</sup> Amer happily referred Anthes to a local contact to view furniture and also, at one remove from the house, recommended that Anthes bring in a car from the US or hire or buy



one in Egypt.<sup>12</sup> There was little in these polite conversations that indicated contention. If anything, the suggestions made by Ricke and Amer fit well with the functional middle-class domesticism being promoted in Egypt at the time (for which see Bier, 2011), and Anthes was able to conduct civil negotiations along such lines.

Ostentation was of the past, a symbol of the pharaonic despotism and colonial-era incivility whose parameters, at the time, were being made increasingly clear. After the Free Officers' coup led to the exile of Egypt's King Faruq and (in 1953) the end of the country's monarchy, ownership of royal property reverted to the state. The government made plans to open the ex-monarch's palaces to the public (el-Gawhary, 1954: 11), an event which was accomplished by 1956. That year, during an event known as "museums week" (*'usbū' al-matāḥif*), an article in the magazine *Akhir Sa'a* described "'Sons of the Country' in the Museums and the Palaces" (Unknown 1956). In the meantime, though, royal property was used to humiliate Faruq, in addition to the opulent way of life he had come to represent. An account of the former monarch's palaces published in Cairo in 1954 discussed his rest house at the Giza pyramids, noting: "the original idea of the king was that it should be built as a temple in order that he may live in the same manner as Ancient Egyptians did." But this pharaonic lifestyle was unacceptable: "all the expenses of this rest-house ... were taken from the state budget not for the sake of the people but only for the amusement and pleasure of Farouk [*sic*]" (el-Gawhary, 1954: 117–118). It was, perhaps, best to avoid such uncivil behavior as the refurbishment of Mit Rahina's dig house took shape.

### **An Innocent Abroad?**

Such admonitions seemed to escape the attention of John Dimick. His wife, Marion Tully Dimick, was an heir to the Corning Glass fortune. In June 1954, she had gifted the University

Museum \$14,000 of Corning Glass stock, \$9000 of which was to pay for the Dimicks to travel to Egypt and enable him to further his archaeological interests there (Carruthers, 2017: 12). Their involvement added value to Rainey's conceptualization of the work. John Dimick was as much of a Cold Warrior as the University Museum's director, evidenced by his management of the restoration of the pre-Columbian Mayan site of Zaculeu, Guatemala, on behalf of the United Fruit Company. United Fruit's head, Samuel Zemurray, had been an apparent co-instigator (along with the CIA) of many pro-US coups in Latin America, including in Guatemala itself (Chapman, 2007). Discussing this history, Dimick (1968: 20) stated: "it must stand that what Zemurray wanted for himself and his company was ultimately worthwhile for the political arena in which he fought." No wonder Dimick wanted "to wrangle with the Arabs." The only opinion he seemed to trust was his own, in addition to that of individuals invested in a similar cause. Dimick's uncivil actions, however, almost destroyed the University Museum's credibility in Egypt.

The Dimicks spent some time in the country during late 1954, before his appointment as Project Director had been confirmed, and after, post-negotiations, Anthes had returned to Philadelphia. Once there, John Dimick made himself busy, meeting various members of the DoA and the foreign archaeological missions working in the country. Having visited Mit Rahina, he wrote to Rainey and Anthes to make his opinions on the dig house—and the potential of the excavation as a whole—clear.

I have been to see [Muhammed] Mahdi [the department's Chief Engineer] about the estimate [for refurbishment] and it is of no value whatsoever. It is in lump sum of five hundred pounds and consists of guesses on such items as electrical repairs, plumbing, painting, screening and windows, dark room repairs (needless), servants quarters [*sic*] repairs. In the opinion

of old heads like Ricke and some of my own native friends the money will be wasted unless overseen every moment. I do not intend harshness but am only being as factual as possible. I have been to see [the DoA's Superintendent] Mr. Hussein el Emary [*sic*] who says that he can take us to many places to buy our house furnishings and that too will be five hundred pounds. That figure I have checked and found it to be seriously low, lets [*sic*] say it will be double that. Now we have spent at least a thousand and probably fifteen hundred pounds without being assured of very much. Next I cornered Mustapha Amer and that is no easy matter these days. I tried to pin him down on names of local people who would be assigned by him to the dig and he would not pin. Here is the actual situation: there are no men in the organization who will work for long at any place other than Cairo. Things have changed radically here according to old friends of Dr. Anthes and they ask that caution be exercised in expecting the old days.<sup>13</sup>

Let alone the refurbishment of the dig house, Dimick was dismissive of the entire Mit Rahina operation, obscuring his own racial judgments behind a screen of anonymized expert advice. Noting Ricke's opinion on the work probably constituted an attempt to assuage Anthes' pride. But exactly who the "native friends" and "old friends" referenced in Dimick's letter were remained unknown, presumably intentionally so. "Being as factual as possible" at the same time as failing to reveal who, beyond himself, had enabled the constitution of such facts enabled Dimick, far from Philadelphia, to present himself as the University Museum's only credible witness to events at the site.

For the future of the excavation, however, Dimick's uncivil intervention constituted potential disaster. Perhaps luckily, his credibility was never established, even if the

University Museum's director might well have taken this witness at his word. At one point, Rainey had written to Mohammed Hassan el-Zayyat (1915–1993), Cultural Attaché of the Egyptian embassy in Washington, telling him that “I think it would be an advantage to all of us to encourage” Dimick due to his “considerable wealth.”<sup>14</sup> However, Anthes—even while still in Philadelphia—intervened, reckoning that what the situation required was civility. Anthes should not be taken to be a hero. But his reading of the social niceties of the situation points to a critical understanding of just how crucial they had started to become.

Writing to Bernard Bothmer, he noted that “I am a little upset because this is not his [Dimick's] business at all. I shall see him next week and shall tell him exactly this.” Anthes also worried about Mustafa Amer's reaction to Dimick's actions: “if Amer mentions the unconsiderate [*sic*] approach which Mr. Dimick made,” Anthes wrote, “I should very much appreciate it if you would tell him that it was a misunderstanding (to put it very nicely).”<sup>15</sup> A week or so later, he again wrote to Bothmer and noted that “as I told Mr. Dimick the matter of furniture won't show up before I am in Egypt, and there is no reason to assume that I start buying furniture and then try and find people to live in [*sic*].” Anthes conceded that “I don't have any illusions, but I do know that some of our Egyptian colleagues are interested in our cooperative work, and this is the best [*sic*] at the moment.” As a precaution, though, he added: “I have decided to stay in the field . . . and not to follow the bad example given by some of our colleagues to stay in Cairo and leave the dirty work to the head ghaffir [guard] or the assistant.”<sup>16</sup> Despite a sensibility that would admit to a lack of “illusions” about Egypt, Anthes realized that behavior in the field—and around the dig house—needed to change.

Civility mattered. Arriving in Egypt in January 1955, Anthes' actions illustrate the importance of establishing that the University Museum's Egyptian collaborators believed he possessed that quality. First, Anthes dealt with Mustafa Amer. For Amer, Dimick's bluff behavior around the refurbishing of the Mit Rahina dig house had damaged the University

Museum's standing as a credible international collaborator. Writing in his diary, Anthes noted:

Mustafa [Amer] is certainly not pleased with the rearrangement in respect to the leading of the excavation. "Who, after all, is Mr. D? It was you [i.e. Anthes] with whom is made our contract, and this very much in consideration of your [Egyptian] friends."<sup>17</sup>

Two days later, Anthes, Amer, and "Mehdi" (presumably Chief Engineer Muhammed Mahdi) found themselves going through the house at Mit Rahina, deciding what needed to be done there; Dimick was not involved. "On the way back," wrote Anthes, "Mustafa Amer discusses John Dimick, whom he calls 'tactless' and 'not dependable.'"<sup>18</sup> And two days after that, Dimick admitted how his uncivil actions had damaged his credibility, telling Rainey that Anthes:

is highly respected by his old [Egyptian] chums and they thought he was being embarrassed [by me]. You may shudder somewhat when I tell you that one of them told me in confidence that they seriously considered having your [excavation] permit reviewed but decided to hear my version before doing anything.<sup>19</sup>

The question was whether the situation could be salvaged in a way that meant that the Mit Rahina excavation could get off to a settled start. Civil relations needed to be restored before excavation could take place.

### **Civility, Shopping, and Go-Betweens**

That civil start came about, not least because Anthes accepted advice from Egyptian officials in terms of outfitting the dig house, greatly improving the relationship between the University Museum and the DoA. For example, ignoring Dimick's rejection of Egyptian suggestions, Anthes worked with the departmental Superintendent, Hussein el-Emery, to buy the house's furniture. Illustrating the continued and important role of local go-betweens in Egyptian archaeological work, Anthes met with both el-Emery and a carpenter, one Hassan Eassa, in order to attend to the excavation's furnishing needs. The cost appears to have been lower than el-Emery's original estimate, and much lower still than Dimick's own guess at the figure.<sup>20</sup> El-Emery's help was not without problems (the upholsterer he employed miscalculated the cost of mattresses),<sup>21</sup> but at no point did Anthes reject his expertise, and the two seem to have developed a good working relationship.

The furnishing of the dig house relied on this continued Egyptian assistance for its success, even as more people connected to the University Museum arrived in the country. The following week, Anthes, along with his recently arrived wife, Agatha, and Henry Fischer (1923–2006), a University of Pennsylvania graduate student employed to work on the dig as an archaeological assistant, met in central Cairo with el-Emery, Eassa, and the expedition's newly employed cook, Hagg Aly Hassan Khalifah of Luxor. The six met in order to purchase various further items necessary to the running of the dig house. There was no contention about what those items should be. Performing civility, Anthes and his companions took Egyptian advice and bought “blankets and linen for the servants, and mattress covers and shower curtains.”

Gathering these and other goods—none of which, heeding the warnings surrounding King Faruq, was particularly luxurious—involved visiting various Cairene shops, including

the department store Orosdi Beck.<sup>22</sup> Cairo's department stores have, for many nostalgic commentators, become emblematic of the city's Western (and 'Westernized'), interwar elites. They are also often linked to a lost (and contested) 'golden era' of Egyptian cosmopolitanism; the establishments had close links to Cairo's Levantine and Jewish communities (Abaza, 2006: 75–77). Yet as Nancy Reynolds (2012) has suggested, the meaning of such spaces of consumption had always been much more complex, and such department stores were visited by, and part of the social world of, wider communities within Egypt. As the Anthes' and Fisher visited such spaces alongside Egyptians like Hussein el-Emery and Hagg Aly, so the process of outfitting the Mit Rahina excavation house helped not only to reproduce this complex social and commercial world, but also the agency of Egyptians within it. Doing so, the trip reflected a vision of Cairene commercial practice that was of great importance "to Egyptian public culture in the early years of the new regime" as it rebuilt the city's downtown in the wake of the Cairo fire of January 1952 (Reynolds, 2012: 199). Criticisms of Dimick seem to have been forgotten as this new social compact progressed.

In the meantime, Anthes and Agatha socialized as equals with high-ranking members of the DoA, their newfound credibility enabling the further lightening of the dig's once-heavy atmosphere. The first day of the weekend before excavation started was something of a social whirl. "Lunch with the Abu Bakr's, Agatha with the Amer's, Abu Bakr's son Aly, Zaky Nury [*sic*]," noted Anthes;<sup>23</sup> Abdel Moneim Abu Bakr (1907–1976) was Professor of Archaeology at Cairo University, while Zaki Nur was an Inspector of Antiquities. Anthes—aided by Agatha's presence—had become a civil (and hence credible) interlocutor with these high-ranking Egyptians in a way that had eluded Dimick. After lunch, visiting the now-almost-furnished dig house, Anthes heeded their suggestions: "Mustafa Amer gives the good advice to lighten the lamps at the four corners of the house and collect the scorpions beneath them;

Zaky Nury [*sic*] recommends cats (against scorpions).”<sup>24</sup> This social favor continued that Sunday, when the couple enjoyed a “pleasant lunch with the Amer’s [*sic*], together with the Abu Bakrs.”<sup>25</sup> As, later that week, Anthes set off to the house with Fischer, the work at Mit Rahina seemed set fair, even as Agatha had herself departed. The Dimicks had decided to spend the excavation season holed up in Cairo’s rather more luxurious Semiramis Hotel, commuting to the site daily.<sup>26</sup> Some people still decided to leave others to the “dirty work” of living in the dig house, as Anthes had once noted. Luckily, though, certain individuals now possessing social credibility had decided not to.

### **Sense and Sensibility**

In practice, the work at Mit Rahina was not quite so dirty as Anthes had imagined. The management of Egyptian sensibilities that allowed the dig to start did not necessarily lead to significant historical differences in the way the dig house at Mit Rahina functioned. Instead, this process produced a set of conditions that further strengthened the growing social compact between the representatives of the University Museum living at the site and the members of the upper echelons of the DoA with whom they dealt. Archaeological civility became reconstituted for a different era.

That reconstitution revolved around hired hands. As the process of managing the dig house moved forward, class and gender norms relating to such structures became reconstituted in familiar ways. Not only did Anthes employ the cook and servants mentioned during his Cairo shopping trip. He now employed a gardener to plant flowers around the dig house’s terrace, and a laundry woman to take care of the washing needs of its inhabitants.<sup>27</sup> Hiring such domestic help tied the interests of the University Museum’s personnel and members of the DoA ever closer in the way it solidified the class and gender hierarchies in



which they were all invested. Even beyond dig house norms, the process also acted to couple the house to the upper-middle-class Egyptian domesticity hinted at in articles about archaeologists like Goneim and Fakhry. Such domesticity made heavy use of domestic labor (Bier, 2011: 83), which Anthes himself had no doubt experienced during his recent social appointments.

Another sort of archaeological labor aided this process. The need to provide accommodation for Quftis meant that the Mit Rahina dig house echoed the segregated spatial patterns established at the Egypt Exploration Society's camp at Armant. Quftis had been employed on the dig since it started. But on March 24, 1955, as excavations progressed, Anthes decided to put four more Quftis on the work. Anthes' orders relating to the accommodation of these extra men illustrate how the Mit Rahina dig house was built to embody the contemporary class and racial hierarchies within which it was situated: "the mason is to work for one day in their room, which shall not be fully prepared (no windows, no door); to-morrow [*sic*] the carpenter shall prepare three beds ... one bed is here anyway."<sup>28</sup> The relative lack of facilities enjoyed by the Quftis was hard to ignore, this enabling of hierarchy strengthening the University Museum's position.

That the extra Quftis appeared at all, however, indicated certain tensions. The ancient remains located at Mit Rahina were waterlogged, and their stratigraphy was complex. Even before they attempted to 'train' any Egyptians in archaeological method (which did not happen at all during the first, 1955 season at the site), Anthes and his colleagues from the University Museum often appeared to have little idea about the material they were working with. In his field diaries, Anthes notes his debts to Ra'is Fikri, the Qufti who acted as chief foreman (*ra'īs*) at the site. He noted, for instance, how "Reis Fikry [*sic*] explains some deepenings in the limestone blocks and a hole as places for birds."<sup>29</sup> The 'experts' from the University Museum had less idea about the remains at the site than the go-betweens they

employed to supervise excavation there. Two days after Anthes decided to take on four more Quftis, he wrote that “in the evening, the Reis, Fikry [*sic*], suggests to dismiss those [laborers] who are superfluous, and he is very right.”<sup>30</sup> Fikri and his men seemed to be in a position to extract what they wanted from Anthes, the increased level of Qufti employment at Mit Rahina perhaps offsetting the unfinished nature of the dig house’s new sleeping arrangements.

Mustafa Amer, civil relations with the University Museum established, did not, however, appear to be concerned that such tensions existed. At various points during the 1955 excavation season, Amer visited Mit Rahina. During these visits, he appears to have been pleased with what he saw. Writing to Rainey after one such visit, he was complimentary about the excavation. “Their work is progressing nicely, and my last visit to the dig was the day before yesterday,” Amer wrote. “Patience is needed, and we have to bear in mind that the main object of any excavation is scientific research and study.”<sup>31</sup> Anthes and the team from the University Museum had adapted to changing norms of civility. For now, then, they enjoyed scientific credibility. (Archaeological) manners mattered.

## **Conclusion**

The outfitting of the Mit Rahina dig house represented more than the purchasing of furniture or the planting of a garden. Instead, it represented the (re-) assembly of an archaeological institution in an era of global decolonization. This reassembly did little to alter the workings of the house: in many ways, its social structures and material contents appeared barely changed from the colonial period. Yet, freighted with colonial history as archaeology in Egypt was (and loaded with revolutionary meaning as the Egyptian press suggested dig

houses were), arriving at this point meant rearranging the wider social basis on which this particular field science sat.

Reliant as they were on go-betweens like the Quftis, it had often been easy for Euro-Americans to dictate the terms of archaeological work in Egypt. Now—even making use of the globalizing rhetoric of modernization—such actions faced failure unless paying heed to changing norms of civility and credibility. In these conditions, insensitive characters like John Dimick stood little chance of success. Cautious individuals like Rudolf Anthes, sensitive to local wishes, enjoyed better luck as they set about new archaeological collaborations, gaining in credibility among their newly powerful Egyptian hosts. Continued reliance on go-betweens and Egyptian advice to help reassemble institutions like the dig house, though, made the instability of this credibility clear. Particular forms of civility had to be adhered to.

This situation raises questions in terms of discussions about decolonization and archaeology in Egypt (or elsewhere, for that matter). Ultimately, Anthes came to a compromise with men like Amer. It was not a compromise that led to a radical break in field practice. For one, while the choice of Mit Rahina as dig site was influenced by revolutionary conditions, gender, racial, and class norms visible in colonial Egyptian field camps continued, suggesting that change had its limits. How, then (if at all), did such norms continue to play out? This article provides the empirical material—and makes clear the necessary range of sources and languages—upon which comparisons with later field situations in Egypt and elsewhere need to be made. As issues of power in the making of knowledge sit centrally to debates about decolonization, the undertaking of such studies seems ever more necessary.

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- <sup>1</sup> Archives of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania (UMA): Minutes, Board of Managers, 1953–1959, January 18, 1955.
- <sup>2</sup> Pers. comm. Mona Saad, 2012.
- <sup>3</sup> UMA: Mit Rahina records (MR); Anthes' 1954 diary, April 15, 1954.
- <sup>4</sup> UMA: MR; Anthes' 1954 diary (1954 diary), entries throughout.
- <sup>5</sup> 1954 diary, April 11, 1954.
- <sup>6</sup> 1954 diary, March 24, 1954.
- <sup>7</sup> 1954 diary, April 12, 1954.
- <sup>8</sup> 1954 diary, April 18, 1954.
- <sup>9</sup> 1954 diary, April 12, 1954.
- <sup>10</sup> 1954 diary, May 8, 1954.
- <sup>11</sup> 1954 diary, May 10, 1954.
- <sup>12</sup> 1954 diary, May 15, 1954.
- <sup>13</sup> UMA: MR; Dimick to Rainey and Anthes, November 26, 1954.
- <sup>14</sup> UMA: MR; Rainey to el-Zayyat, July 10, 1954.
- <sup>15</sup> UMA: MR; Anthes to Bothmer, November 30, 1954.
- <sup>16</sup> UMA: MR; Anthes to Bothmer, December 10, 1954.
- <sup>17</sup> UMA: MR; Anthes' 1955 diary (1955 diary), January 24, 1955.
- <sup>18</sup> 1955 diary, January 26, 1955.
- <sup>19</sup> UMA: MR; Dimick to Rainey, January 30, 1955.
- <sup>20</sup> 1955 diary, January 28 and 30, 1955.
- <sup>21</sup> 1955 diary, February 6, 1955.
- <sup>22</sup> 1955 diary, February 7, 1955.
- <sup>23</sup> 1955 diary, February 11, 1955.
- <sup>24</sup> 1955 diary, February 11, 1955.
- <sup>25</sup> 1955 diary, February 13, 1955.
- <sup>26</sup> UMA: MR; Dimick to Rainey, March 8, 1955.
- <sup>27</sup> 1955 diary, March 4, 1955, notes the gardener; the entry for February 24, 1955 notes "the laundry woman."
- <sup>28</sup> 1955 diary, March 24, 1955.
- <sup>29</sup> 1955 diary, February 25, 1955.
- <sup>30</sup> 1955 diary, March 26, 1955.
- <sup>31</sup> UMA: MR; Amer to Rainey, March 30, 1955.

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